

University of Ottawa
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M.A. Thesis

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Socratic Piety and the State

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Abstract

This goal of this thesis is to examine the connection between piety and the city-state according to the Socrates of Plato's dialogues. This thesis first sets out to understand Socrates' piety. Then, through consideration of Socrates' discussion of piety in the city-state in the *Euthyphro*, the *Apology*, the *Symposium*, and the *Republic*, this thesis sets out to outline Socrates' understanding of the role piety ought to play in the just city-state. Based on my reading of these dialogues, I argue that piety is, for Plato's Socrates, a necessary component of the just city-state.

Part I: Introduction

Socrates sets out to define piety in the *Euthyphro*, but the dialogue ends without conclusive results. Euthyphro rushes off while the dialogue is still in its early stages, well before he and Socrates have come to a clear understanding of the nature of piety. Socrates is left alone, and the reader is similarly abandoned – left to puzzle over both the meaning of piety and the reason Plato chooses to leave the term undefined. Though very little light seems to be shed on the actual *meaning* of piety in the *Euthyphro*, piety's importance is manifest. Socrates tells Euthyphro that the meaning of piety is something worth searching one's whole life to find.¹ And Socrates further claims that a proper knowledge and understanding of piety would help him to lead a better life, as well as allow him to defend himself against those who have accused him of impiety.² Euthyphro is equally aware of the importance of piety; he knows that he is breaking Ancient Athenian civic and societal norms by charging his father with murder, but he considers only the piety of his actions and the impiety of not bringing a murderer to trial (even when that murderer happens to be his father). In this way, Euthyphro's sense of piety motivates him to act in

¹ Plato. "Euthyphro" *The Dialogues of Plato*. Trans. Jowett, B. (1937) New York: Random House Inc., 15e

² *Euthyphro*, 16a

disregard of Athenian notions of justice and filial loyalty. For Euthyphro, then, piety appears to trump all other virtues. Despite the importance he gives to piety, Euthyphro remains unable to define, or even to clarify, his understanding of piety when Socrates questions him. Indeed it does not take long for him to quit the conversation altogether after becoming frustrated by Socrates' questioning, thus ending the dialogue. And we are left without clear answers as a result.

In stark contrast to the ambiguity of the *Euthyphro*, Socrates leaves us with a relatively clear definition of the virtues in the *Republic*. Yet piety is notably absent from the virtues enumerated by Socrates in the *Republic*. How should the reader interpret the absence of a definition of piety in Plato's dialogues? And why does piety fail to be included among the virtues in the *Republic*? Should it be assumed that piety is not as important a virtue as justice, for example? Or perhaps one is invited to conclude that piety is not a virtue at all? Piety, however, is not left in complete darkness in these dialogues. The careful reader will note that Socrates' questions, along with his reactions to Euthyphro's answers, prove to be a source of information in themselves – helping to guide the reader in his or her search for understanding about the nature of Socratic piety. While the discussion between Euthyphro and Socrates in the *Euthyphro* does provide significant information about Socrates' understanding of piety, important interpretative differences between scholars exist surrounding piety in Plato's dialogues. Some authors choose to highlight those aspects of Socratic thought that overlap with traditional piety, whereas others make note of the important differences between Socratic philosophy and traditional religion.³

More interesting still, some authors completely exclude any notion of a supernatural Socratic piety – arguing instead that Socrates' piety was radically civic and altogether unrelated to the gods. Often, scholars have argued that piety clearly does not possess the same importance that justice does in Plato's Socratic dialogues; in their view piety would not have been left undefined if it had been regarded as

³ The following sections will discuss these various interpretations and cite specific scholars. For now, my goal is simply to give a brief overview of the scholarly debates.

important a virtue as justice. And in the view of some scholars, a true rational philosopher should shun piety or religiosity. Many, indeed, seem to embrace Leo Strauss' view that there is an obvious great gulf between reason and revelation, and that one must necessarily choose *between* philosophy and the bible⁴. And partially for these latter reasons, piety in Plato's dialogues tends to be an issue that is often quickly brushed aside by Plato scholars (especially in political theory circles). This project is anchored in the conviction that we ought to question this overly simplistic dichotomy between philosophy and piety and that political theorists should take Socratic piety seriously as a legitimate and important subject of inquiry. In the course of the pages that follow, I will look specifically at Socrates' treatment of piety in a few important dialogues written by Plato, in an attempt to better understand Socratic piety, and in an attempt to show that it is a subject worthy of serious consideration and analysis.

To begin carving out an understanding of Socratic piety, this discussion will start with a comparison between Socrates' philosophy and the traditional piety that would have been common in Athens at the time Socrates and Plato lived. To what extent did Socrates' piety differ from the traditional conception of piety practiced in Athens at the time Socrates was alive? In the first chapter of this thesis, I will thus begin with a brief sketch of some of the important ideas and aspects central to traditional piety in Ancient Athens. I will outline some of the chief ways in which Socratic philosophy differs from, and is similar to, traditional piety in Ancient Athens. I will argue that the character Socrates in Plato's dialogues possesses a sense of piety which has some important elements in common with traditional Athenian piety.⁵

I will expand this analysis in the second chapter through a discussion of the intended goal, or object, of Socratic piety. I will argue that Socrates considers the end of piety to be, in large part, the

⁴ See Strauss, L. (1942) "What can we learn from political theory?" *The Review of Politics* (2007) **69**(4): 515-529

⁵ More on the distinction between the *historical* Socrates and the character Socrates below (in the methodology section).

attainment of virtue. I will argue that piety is one of the ways that we come to develop virtue – specifically, by seeking out the good. In this chapter, therefore, I will consider the relation between piety, virtue, and the good. I will also briefly consider the relation between piety and the other virtues. Is piety considered a virtue? Does piety hold equal standing with the other virtues in Socratic thought? I will argue that Plato considered piety to be an important virtue, although it may differ from the other virtues that Socrates enumerates in some fundamental ways. Specifically, for this discussion of piety, I will pull from Socrates' discussions in the *Euthyphro*, the *Apology*, the *Symposium*, and the *Republic*, in an attempt to establish a fairly clear (although by no means exhaustive) account of Socratic piety.

In the third and final chapter of my thesis, I will examine piety's role in the city-state. For this chapter, I keep to a close examination of the *Euthyphro* and the *Apology*, as these dialogues deal most explicitly with piety. Specifically, I seek to understand how important an aspect of the state piety is for Socrates, and the extent to which it is possible for Socratic piety to exist in the ideal city-state. Based on my reading of these two dialogues, I will argue that piety is, for Plato's Socrates, a necessary component of the just state.

Part II: A few words on method

Vlastos explains his interpretative approach to Plato's work in his 1991 book, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*.⁶ Vlastos separates the dialogues according to the period in which they were written (early, middle, late), as well as according to their format or structure (elenctic or theory based).⁷ According to Vlastos, the elenctic dialogues were largely written in Plato's early period, and would include: the *Apology*, *Charmides*, *Crito*, *Euthyphro*, *Gorgias*, *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, *Laches*, *Protagoras*, and *Republic I*.

⁶ Vlastos, G. (1991) *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*. Cambridge University Press

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 46

Vlastos bases his distinction on the observation that the Socrates of the elenctic dialogues is fundamentally different in character than the Socrates of the more heavily theory-based, later dialogues. Notably, the Socrates of the early elenctic dialogues refrains from espousing any concrete knowledge about the virtues or the nature of the soul, choosing instead to merely deconstruct the opinions of others through dialectic questioning. The Socrates of the elenctic dialogues claims ignorance on all matters relating to the soul.⁸

Vlastos further characterizes Plato's work according to its alternately "populist" and "elitist" tendencies. The Socrates of the early dialogues, for example, appears to be no more knowledgeable about the matters of the soul than are the individuals with whom he converses – making him seem quite populist and egalitarian. In contrast, Vlastos believes that the Socrates of the later dialogues takes the role of teacher and expert among less knowledgeable counterparts.⁹ The Socrates of Plato's early dialogues is hence said to be a man of the people on a quest for truth and knowledge, where the Socrates of the later dialogues possesses certain knowledge that others do not.¹⁰ As Vlastos writes, "The individual remains the same. But in different sets of dialogues he [Socrates] pursues philosophies so different that they could not have been depicted as cohabiting the same brain throughout unless it had been the brain of a schizophrenic".¹¹ More importantly for our purposes here, in the early, elenctic dialogues, Socrates conceives of piety as being a service to the gods. The gods of Socrates' later dialogues are mystical in nature, discovered through contemplation, and seem to be less committed to the propagation of virtue among citizens.¹² And Plato's later portrayal of Socrates is of a philosopher who may or may not be committed to the idea that all people are capable of acquiring virtue in like fashion.¹³ Vlastos takes the

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 48

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 48

¹⁰ A discussion about the extent to which Plato's Socrates assumes all people can be virtuous and knowledgeable will be had later in this thesis.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 46

¹² *Ibid*, p. 49

¹³ Strauss, L. (1964) "On Plato's *Republic*". in *City and Man*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, p.122

view that the Socrates depicted in Plato's early dialogues represents the historical Socrates, and that the Socrates of the later dialogues espouses views more in line with Plato's own thoughts.¹⁴

But as Zuckert points out in "The Socratic Turn", Vlastos' distinction is not without its problems.¹⁵ Specifically, Zuckert takes issue with Vlastos' "chronology of composition" and with his attempt to date the dialogues; she also questions the view that Plato's later dialogues clearly represent Plato's own views and not those of the historical Socrates. Zuckert makes the argument that Plato's use of "philosophical spokesmen" other than Socrates is evidence for the argument that the Socrates portrayed in Plato's dialogues was not meant as a mere vessel for the expression of Plato's own views.¹⁶ "Plato showed himself perfectly capable", Zuckert writes, "of using another philosophical spokesman to articulate a different philosophical position, if and when he thought it desirable".¹⁷ Zuckert makes a strong case against Vlastos' strict dichotomous split between Plato's early and late dialogues, and she gives reason for interpreting Plato's Socrates as one character, and not as two different individuals. For Zuckert, then, there is a lot more continuity in Plato's oeuvre than Vlastos is ready to admit, a view that I am quite sympathetic to (as will become clear in the following chapters).

But how could the Socrates who claimed to be ignorant on all matters concerning the soul at the time of his *Apology* share similar views with the Socrates who spoke at length and in detail about such matters to his young interlocutors in the *Republic*? In this thesis, I wish to show that Socrates' conception of piety remains relatively stable throughout Plato's dialogues despite being included among the virtues

¹⁴ Once again, this interpretative split between the more populist and modern Socrates and the more elitist and metaphysically ambitious Plato is one that can certainly be found in many scholarly discussions of Platonic philosophy, as we will see in the following pages. Vlastos is not the first nor the last to propose such a dichotomous reading.

¹⁵ Zuckert, C. (2004) "The Socratic Turn." *History of Political Thought* 15(2): 189-219

¹⁶ Zuckert, C. (1996) "Plato's Socrates by Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith: Socrates' Ancestor: An Essay on Architectural Beginnings by Indra Kagis McEwen, Review by Catherine Zuckert." *Political Theory* 24(1): 132-138, p. 137

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 137

in some and left out in others (namely, the *Republic*). I will thus call into question the strict interpretative dichotomy proposed by the likes of Vlastos. Indeed, one does not need to embrace Vlastos' strict dichotomy in order to make sense of the character Socrates in Plato's dialogues. My hope is to show that Plato's Socrates can be understood as one fairly continuous¹⁸, and consistent character throughout the dialogues. To be sure, a rigorous and conclusive discussion of continuity throughout Plato's dialogues is not within the purview of the present thesis but it is the assumption under which I am operating insofar as I pull "Socrates'" thoughts from various dialogues in an attempt to understand Socratic piety.

Thus for the purposes of this discussion, I will make reference to the Socrates that Plato presents throughout his dialogues, assuming that he intended to portray one fairly consistent philosophy when he made reference to and used this *character* in his dialogues. The Socrates I will be using in this thesis is *Plato's* Socrates, and I will make no attempt to infer anything definite about the *historical* Socrates who lived and died in Athens so many years ago. While clearly some of my observations about Athenian religious practices might have bearings on the question of who Socrates as a historical person was, the main purpose of my thesis is not to make strong claims about this historical person. Rather, my goal is to make some modest interpretative claims about the consistency of the character Socrates in Plato's work, and more specifically, about the consistency of his views on piety.

I intend to do a close, internal reading of Plato's *Euthyphro* and *Apology* because they are the Socratic dialogues that deal most specifically with the question of piety.¹⁹ While these texts will be the main focus of my project, I will also incorporate reflections on a few other dialogues – most specifically, Plato's *Symposium* and *Republic*. Obviously, a much larger project could include a close reading of more dialogues, but this is simply not possible here. This study will rest primarily on exegetical work and on a

¹⁸ I say 'fairly' because I am not denying that there are differences between a dialogue like the *Euthyphro* or the *Laches* and a more metaphysically-heavy text like the *Philebus* or the *Theatetus*.

¹⁹ The *Laws* has been left out as a subject of analysis because Socrates is not a character and this thesis deals only with piety as it is portrayed by Plato's Socrates.

close analysis of the arguments presented in these texts. In part due to space constraints and limited expertise, I will not be offering within the pages of the thesis extensive historical-contextual work (although I will briefly try to put Socratic piety in its historical context in the first chapter of this thesis). My goal is thus to examine Plato's Socrates as closely as possible in the context of the select dialogues I have chosen, and my hope is that this discussion will be a useful starting point from which to continue the discussion of piety in Plato's philosophy more comprehensively, and perhaps with more hermeneutic generosity, in the future.

CHAPTER ONE – Socrates and Piety in Ancient Greece

I. Religion and Piety in Ancient Greece

In his article “Piety, Justice, and the Unity of Virtue”, Mark McPherran argues that piety played a very central role in Ancient Greek life.²⁰ For example, McPherran writes that the meaning of piety in Ancient Greece stretched well beyond religiosity and dealings with the gods; “piety” could also be used to describe behaviour toward family members, elders, and the dead. Piety could even refer to behaviour directed toward the city or the state.²¹ Piety in Ancient Greece, then, was both religious and civic. Civic piety was based on a series of norms and mores that served to guide the individual’s actions in the state, and was regarded as fundamental to maintaining order in society.²² Religious piety in Ancient Greece played a similar role. In the same way that civic piety guided individuals in their interactions with the state, so religious piety guided individuals in their relations with the gods.²³ Religious rituals and cult practices, specifically, were dictated by religious authorities and institutions in Ancient Greece. Those wishing to honour the gods would be expected to follow fairly strict guidelines concerning the proper methods of sacrificing or making dedications to the gods. Participation in religious worship, ritual, and cult practice in Ancient Greece was regulated in much the same way as the participation of citizens in the state. This is not to say, however, that religious beliefs and ideas were identical throughout Ancient Greece. Cult rituals and practices were regulated by religious doctrine, but there is evidence that individual expressions of, and beliefs about, piety were quite varied at the time Socrates and Plato lived.

²⁰ McPherran, M. (2000) “Piety, Justice, and the Unity of Virtue.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* **38**(3): 299-328, p. 300

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 300

²² Blanchard, K. (2000) “The Enemies of Socrates: Piety and Sophism in the Socratic Drama.” *The Review of Politics* **62**(3): 421-449, p. 427

²³ McPherran, M. *op. cit*, 2000, p. 300

Philosophers, for example, often took a distinctive approach to religion and the gods in Ancient Greece. Mikalson looks at the particular approach many philosophers took to religion and piety in Ancient Greece in his *Greek Popular Religion in Greek Philosophy*.²⁴ In his view, the religion of the philosophers differed significantly from the religion of the poets and tragedians, and again from the religion practiced more commonly throughout the state. On the basis of this, Mikalson argues that religion in Ancient Greece, in order to be properly understood, must be examined in the context of the groups of people who practiced it.²⁵ In particular, it was the intersection of religion and philosophy that produced the strongest current of new and influential ideas about the gods and their relationship with humankind (with many of these important ideas found in Plato's dialogues as we will see later), and Mikalson finds this branch of religious thought particularly worth honing in on.

Generally speaking, being a pious citizen in Ancient Athens largely entailed believing in the popular and recognized gods of the time, such as Athena Polias of Athens – the goddess of wisdom, Demeter of Eleusis, Asclepius of Epidaurus, Apollo of Delphi, and Zeus – father of the gods and of men. Among the hundreds of gods worshipped in each individual Greek city state, these were the principal deities of “popular, practiced religion”.²⁶ More minor gods could be worshipped at the local level, or perhaps exclusively in one city-state and not another. All the gods of state were revered primarily through sacrifice, dedication, and prayer – and these rituals, once again, closely followed regulations outlined by religious authorities in Ancient Greece.²⁷ Most of these same gods appeared in the works of the Greek poets, albeit much altered in character and appearance. “The gods”, Mikalson writes, “took on a life of their own in Greek poetry and literature”.²⁸ This story-based side of Greek religion – this *theologia*

²⁴ Mikalson, J.. (2005) *Ancient Greek Religion*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 17

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 18

²⁷ Ogden, D. “Introduction” in Ogden, Daniel, (ed). (2007) *A Companion to Greek Religion*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd.: MA, USA., p. 9.

²⁸ Mikalson, J. *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 16

fabularis – was partially based in fantasy and imagination.²⁹ Its goal was not to enlighten, necessarily, but to entertain. Indeed, the epic poetry of Homer, Hesiod, and Euripedes painted the gods in a fairly different and more dramatic light than the traditional and popular religion of the day in Ancient Greece would have done. Unfortunately, Mikalson writes, much of what we know today of the Ancient Greek gods has been passed down to us through the great poets. As a result, modern analyses of Ancient Greek theology are often based on the gods of the poets and not the gods of the state.³⁰ For this reason the gods of state, poetry, and philosophy ought to be considered separately before being analyzed.

In this chapter, I will outline what I take to be the main elements of popular state religion in Ancient Greece in order to come to a basic understanding of traditional piety at the time Socrates and Plato lived. In the second half of this chapter, I will discuss the extent to which the Socrates of Plato's dialogues seems to have fallen in line with this traditional piety. In this chapter I hope to show that Plato's Socrates' piety has some important things in common with traditional Greek piety, despite the existence of some fundamental differences.

i) *Service to the gods in Ancient Greece: Religious Correctness and "Charis"*

Service to the gods was the most fundamental aspect of practiced religion in Ancient Greece.³¹ Giving service to the gods, if done correctly, honoured the gods. Service to the gods was based on a) religious correctness and b) proper respect. When service was given to the gods with proper respect and in the correct manner, then it was given piously. "Rendering honour to the gods", Mikalson writes, "is a fundamental concept of Greek practiced religion, and honour is what in particular the Greek gods wanted

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 16

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 18

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 29

from their human devotees.”³² Importantly, reciprocity between men and gods was central to religious belief in Athens.³³ Thus when women and men gave service and honour to the gods, it was widely believed that they could expect something good in return. The benefits to men and women came both from the performing of the service and as a result of the service performed. That is, the action of serving the gods was considered a good in itself, and both the action and the act honour the gods *and* benefit the actor. The relationship between gods and men is a “mutual exchange of pleasing favours”, and not a “commercial exchange” where favours of equal value are given and received. The favours given by men to the gods can never equal the favours given by the gods.³⁴ Nonetheless, the gods take pleasure in being honoured by men and in reciprocating and returning the favours they receive. Mikalson uses the Greek word *charis* to describe the honour-driven relationship between humans and gods. We best understand this relationship as being similar to the dynamic between a master and slave or a child and parent – but the relationship between humankind and the divine is unique and not easily related back to the relationships that exist between humans. The relationship is based on a kind of affection, but affection in relation to the gods is difficult to understand. What can be said confidently is that through *charis* and service to the gods we strengthen our connection to the divine, and the performance of cult acts both establishes and maintains this connection.³⁵

Ritual and Cult-Practice

Ritual and cult-practice were necessary elements of honouring the gods, and they were common and popular aspects of traditional religion in Ancient Greece. The gods were thought to regularly influence and intervene in human affairs, and men and women could influence the gods in turn through sacrifice,

³² *Ibid*, p. 56

³³ Bussanich, John (2013) “Socrates and Religious Experience”. In John Bussanich and Nicholas D. Smith (eds), *The Bloomsbury Companion to Socrates*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, p. 204

³⁴ Mikalson, J. op. cit., 2005, p. 41

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 41

festivals, dedications, hymns, dances, and prayer.³⁶ Festivals dedicated to honouring the gods were common in Ancient Greece, and served the dual purpose of allowing people to honour the gods as well as relax, celebrate, and enjoy themselves.³⁷ Religious festivals were also important politically as these festivals were often *panhellenic* – involving Greeks from across the different city states.³⁸ Religious festivals underscored the commonality of the religion shared between Greeks who otherwise lived in separate political regions and enclaves.³⁹ Individuals were encouraged to make journeys or pilgrimages to witness the sacred events taking place at festivals all over Greece. One of the most famous festivals in Ancient Greece was a festival devoted to the cult of goddesses Demeter and Persephone – “The Festival of the Eleusinian Mysteries”. In this festival, select participants were initiated into the sacred mysteries and truths which were supposed to have given them knowledge about, and salvation in, the afterlife. Once these individuals received the sacred information they were directed to keep it a secret; this divine knowledge was not meant to be shared with or disclosed to uninitiated others.⁴⁰ The dedication of shrines, statues, and temples created for the gods, or for a specific god in particular, were also common in Ancient Greece – although mostly among those who had the money to have them built. Dedications “bring public recognition to the dedicators, adorn the city and its sanctuaries, and become part of the ‘public good’”.⁴¹

Sacrifice was a common practice in Ancient Greece and men and women would make offerings to the gods when they wished for divine favour in return. Sacrifices were offered to the gods as a means of worshipping and honouring the specific deity or deities for whom the sacrifice was intended. Individuals could offer animals, fruits and vegetables, plants, grains, cakes, oils, wine or other valuable possessions

³⁶ McPherran, M. (1997) “Recognizing the Gods of Socrates.” In *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science* 30(4): 125-139., p. 126

³⁷ Ogden, D. *op. cit.*, 2007, p. 7

³⁸ Nightingale-Wilson, A. (2006) “The Philosopher at the Festival: Plato's Transformation of Traditional Theoria.” In *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity: Seeing the Gods*, Elsner, J. and Rutherford, I. eds., New York: Oxford University Press, p. 152

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 161

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 175

⁴¹ Mikalson, J. *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 96

to the gods. Sacrifice was the most important form of cult ritual performed to honour the gods.⁴² Sacrifice was determined by the laws, and these laws were believed to have been inspired by the gods themselves. The means by which humans came to understand the importance of, and methods for, conducting ritual and sacrifice was through divine revelation – messages from the gods received through oracles or in the form of omens and signs.⁴³ Offerings were ordinarily burnt on an altar.⁴⁴ Priests in Ancient Greece acted as religious and ceremonial authority figures, but their role in the state was fairly limited (priests did not have significant political authority, for instance).⁴⁵

While priests governed and regulated cult practice in Ancient Greece, the emphasis remained on the *individual* and his or her offering to the gods. Priests in Ancient Greece were generally tasked with the administration of “sacrifices and dedications in the ways most pleasing to the gods.”⁴⁶ An individual making a sacrifice or dedication could ask for a specific favour in return for his or her sacrifice with the hope that this favour would be granted by the gods. The favours themselves were not typically bound by any particular morality. That is, an individual could make an offering to a god requesting that the god help him or her fulfill even a personal request. This might include asking the gods to do a wrong to a person they did not like, perhaps a person who had done a wrong to them in the past.⁴⁷ Traditionally pious Athenians often believed in the power of curse, believing as well in the willingness of the gods to help them curse their enemies.⁴⁸

Moreover, we know that wealthy Athenians could afford to make lavish sacrifices to the gods on a regular basis, vying for their favour. (A very vivid and famous example of such ‘dealings’ in Plato’s

⁴² Ogden, D. *op. cit.*, 2007, p.7

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 6

⁴⁴ Mikalson, J. *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 78

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 43

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 101

⁴⁷ McPherran, M. *op.cit.*, 1997, p. 127

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.132

dialogues is found within the first few pages of the *Republic*, through the words and deeds of the old and rich metic Cephalus.)⁴⁹ Sacrifices could be made either before or after requests were made of the gods, in some cases, as a way for the individual to repay the gods for the favour given.⁵⁰ Sacrifices to the gods could be made only when the individual had sufficiently prepared for the ritual, and was physically clean and “pure”.⁵¹ The idea that the individual ought to also be pure of mind and soul was quite common among philosophers, but was not a necessary aspect of sacrifice, or of religion more generally, for most people in Ancient Greece.⁵² Thus piety through sacrifice, despite being popular in Ancient Greece, could be controversial in some circles – as these kinds of self-serving “material sacrifices” were seen by some as tantamount to the attempted bribery of the gods.⁵³ For many, sacrifice was a serious undertaking, and the gods were imagined to be persuaded to help only when the individual making the sacrifice came before the gods with a just cause and a pure spirit.⁵⁴ Philosophers in particular often took issue with the idea that sacrifice, prayer, or dedications could be used to persuade the gods to forgive injustices.⁵⁵ The connection between justice, morality, and religion will be further discussed in this chapter; after all, justice, morality, and religion were bound inseparably together for Socrates.

ii) *Divination and communication with the gods*

Divination was a major element of Greek religion.⁵⁶ Divination here refers to the communication between gods and men, a communication that most often took place in specific and specialized environments. Interactions between humans and the divine in Ancient Greece occurred through dreams,

⁴⁹ In the rest of the thesis, more will be said about Plato’s views on these ‘dealings’ with the gods.

⁵⁰ Mikalson, J. *op.cit.*, 2005, p. 56

⁵¹ Ogden, D. *op. cit.*, 2007., p. 7

⁵² Mikalson, J. *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 67

⁵³ McPherran, M. *op.cit.*, 1997, p. 129

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 131

⁵⁵ Mikalson, J. *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 59

⁵⁶ Ogden, D. *op. cit.*, 2007, p.6

visions and omens, or through communication with oracles – those men and women who served as vessels for messages from the gods. Messages from the gods were seen as blessings, and could be given in return for service done for the gods.⁵⁷ In this way, communication between gods and individuals was an integral part of the service-based *charis* relationship between gods and men, helping to foster and maintain the honour-based partnership between the divine and human-kind.⁵⁸ And divination was seen as proof of the gods’ concern for human beings – indeed, Mikalson writes that divination was regarded as “one of the clearest proofs of the gods’ concern for humans both as a group and individually”.⁵⁹ Divination frequently motivated and inspired the creation of shrines, sanctuaries, and other dedications, along with encouraging sacrifice and prayer.⁶⁰

Importantly, divination was influential not only among the masses and the devoutly-religious, but also among those intellectuals in Ancient Greece who practiced philosophy. Divination was, Mikalson writes, “widely respected” among rational and philosophical minds in the Ancient world.⁶¹ Cicero, in his “On Divination”, certainly gives credence to the view that divination was respected in Ancient Greece with his testimony that most philosophers in the “rationalistic philosophic tradition” would have held to the belief that communication between gods and men was real and important.⁶² We can also see clear evidence of the influence divination had in Ancient Greece in the dialogues of Plato. In the *Apology*, for example, Socrates makes reference to direct communication with his personal spirit, or “*daimon*”.⁶³ However, the

⁵⁷ Mikalson, J. *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 110

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 110

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 138

⁶⁰ Ogden, D. *op cit.*, 2007, p. 6

⁶¹ Mikalson, J. *op. cit.*, p. 110

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 110

⁶³ This particular form of communication between a personal spirit and an individual could have been considered controversial among the traditionally religious in Athens at the time Socrates lived. Indeed Socrates’ communications with his *daimon* formed a crucial part of the charges of impiety that were brought against him. Controversial as it may have been, there is reason to suspect that Socrates’ professed personal connection to the divine was neither the main nor the underlying reason for his persecution. This matter will be discussed at some length later in this thesis.

communication between the gods and men was never thought to occur directly – that is, without the presence of an intermediary to mediate the communication between the divine and humankind. Thus the gods would send their messages to men and women through a third party, often by way of mixed messages and signals from an oracle or through a spirit or *daimon*, who then passed the information on to the individual.⁶⁴ Much of the ritual and cult activities that were practiced in Ancient Greece were developed as a result of revelation from the gods – most notably from the god Apollo through the oracle at Delphi.⁶⁵ Thus, in this way, divination was instrumental in legitimizing the religious ritual and cult practices that traditional Greek religion was based on.

II. Socratic Piety

The historical Socrates challenged traditional ideas with his philosophy, drawing the ire of some influential Athenians as a result. Indeed, outspokenness on matters of traditional piety was probably one of the key factors that led to Socrates' charge and conviction of impiety.⁶⁶ However, as John Bussanich argues in "Socrates and Religious Experience", Socrates did not forsake the traditional religious beliefs of Ancient Athens altogether.⁶⁷ And in "Recognizing the Gods of Socrates", McPherran examines the extent to which Socrates' views on religion and piety differed from traditional views of the time. Notably, McPherran finds reason to believe that Socrates shared at least *some* of the beliefs common to many of the more conventionally pious Athenians of his day.⁶⁸ Indeed, the attentive reader of Plato will readily find references to religious festivals and cult practices in many of his dialogues – as in the *Republic*, where

⁶⁴ Ogden, D. *op. cit.*, 2007, p. 6

⁶⁵ Mikalson, J. *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 130

⁶⁶ The actual motivations behind Socrates' trial and conviction are unknown and the subject of some controversy. In the *Apology*, we read that Socrates' alleged impiety was the reason for his conviction and subsequent death sentence, and it is Socrates' self-defense against this charge that forms the basis of this dialogue.

⁶⁷ Bussanich, J. *op. cit.*, 2013, p. 201

⁶⁸ McPherran, M. *op. cit.*, 1997, p. 127

Book I opens with Socrates coming back from a traditional religious festival in Peiraeus for the Thracian goddess Bendis.⁶⁹ Socrates is said to have made the journey from Athens to Peiraeus so that he could witness the religious festival, and we are given no clear reason to doubt his authenticity on this front. Religious and cult-practices are also mentioned as elements of Socrates' ideal city later on in the same dialogue. Specifically, Socrates places sacrifice, the founding of sanctuaries, and other cult services to the gods under the purview of Apollo at Delphi.⁷⁰ Moreover, Nightingale rightly notes that Socrates regularly uses religious terminology in his description and formulation of his own philosophy – referring to the Forms as “blessed” and “divine” in the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*, comparing the philosopher's journey from the Cave to the Forms to the journey that the undead take from Hades to the gods, and evoking the example of the Eleusinian Mysteries as part of the discussion of the Forms in the *Symposium*.⁷¹ “These are but a few of the many indications”, Mikalson writes, that Plato “knew, understood, and had some sympathy with the practiced religion of [his] time”.⁷²

Moreover, as Blanchard suggests in “The Enemies of Socrates: Piety and Sophism in the Socratic Drama”, the relationship between the historical Socrates and the traditionally religious in Athenian society may not have been as tense as has often been suggested. Blanchard writes that Socrates likely never made enemies of the truly pious in Athenian society. Socrates, instead, was particularly hated by the sophists – not because he offended their piety or their morality, but because he exposed their vices or their ignorance.⁷³ Zuckert believes that Socrates' philosophy may have undermined certain aspects of traditional piety, but she correctly observes that “Athenians cared more about Socrates' effect on the next generation than they did about his piety or lack thereof”.⁷⁴ Indeed Socrates' philosophy may not have

⁶⁹ *Republic I*, 327 a-b. On these mentions, see also Nightingale-Wilson, *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 165.

⁷⁰ *Republic IV*, 427 b-c

⁷¹ Nightingale-Wilson, *op. cit.*, 2006, pp. 171, 173, 177

⁷² Mikalson, J., *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 2

⁷³ Blanchard, K., *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 425 – This idea will be further discussed in the third chapter of this thesis.

⁷⁴ Zuckert, C. *op. cit.*, 2004, p. 214

upset traditional Athenian religious piety as much as it may have been regarded as a threat to morality and state loyalty in Athens at the time. Socrates questioned the value of political wisdom, offending those who were involved in politics and thought themselves wise by “drawing a distinction between true and merely conventional political success”.⁷⁵ Socrates declared that those with political authority did not possess real wisdom, and this obviously created tension between Socrates and the political elites in Athenian society. McPherran also shares this view, arguing that even Socrates’ skepticism of the traditional religious practices in Athens would not have seemed especially controversial to the truly religious in Athens; many other Athenians would have shared his concerns (and had publicly expressed them several times – most notably concerning the use of sacrifice as a means to buy forgiveness for an unjust character).⁷⁶ Mikalson also suggests that many philosophers at the time were especially likely to have held similar misgivings about traditional religion in Ancient Greece, most notably concerning the importance of a just character for the atonement of wrongdoings.⁷⁷

Thus these references to religious practice in Ancient Greece indicate that Socrates was at base *familiar* with the popular religion of the day (and engaged in similar practices), but to what extent did Socrates subscribe to the specific tenets, beliefs, and ideas that characterized traditional religion in Ancient Greece? I begin this comparison of Socratic philosophy and Ancient Greek religion by discussing three important elements shared by both. Specifically, I will highlight some of the important similarities and differences between Socratic philosophy and traditional religion in Ancient Greece related to *i)* the commitment to the idea that the gods ought to be properly respected and honoured, *ii)* the individual’s potential for the possession of knowledge and wisdom, and *iii)* belief in the supernatural.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 448

⁷⁶ McPherran, M. *op. cit.*, 1997, p. 128

⁷⁷ Mikalson, J. *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 28

i) *Honouring the gods*

Socrates make it clear in his discussion with Euthyphro in the dialogue of the same name that he believes the gods to be perfectly good and just.⁷⁸ Thus while Socrates may have accepted sacrifice as a way of honouring the gods, he would likely not have accepted the fairly traditional view that sacrifice could in any way atone for an unjust character. But once again, we should keep in mind that in Athenian society at the time, Socrates would not have been alone in his belief that the gods were good and could not be swayed to perform immoral deeds through sacrifice as Herrmann has shown in his work.⁷⁹ These ideas about sacrifice would not have threatened morality or piety as much as they would have threatened the wealthy and powerful elites in Athenian society.

Socrates, then, emphasizes the importance of honouring the gods, but his re-conception of the gods as beings who are completely good makes it difficult for him to conceive of the gods as being influenced or honoured by material sacrifice. How then ought the gods to be honoured? As mentioned previously Socrates seems to accept, and makes regular reference to, prayer, sacrifice, and festivals as being valid methods of honouring the gods (when performed with a pure and just spirit). But Socrates chose to honour to the gods in other, less traditional, ways as well. To understand how Socrates honoured the gods, we can turn, for instance, to Socrates' claims about god and goodness in the *Euthyphro* and the *Apology*. As the gods are wholly good, Socrates reasons that they must be interested and involved in the affairs of men.⁸⁰ And insofar as they are interested and involved, they must be interested in, and for, the *good* of men. Indeed, Socrates mentions his contention that the gods are good several times in these

⁷⁸ *Euthyphro*, 14c-15a

⁷⁹ Hermann, F. "Greek Religion and Philosophy: The God of the Philosopher" As cited in Ogden, D, (ed). (2007) *A Companion to Greek Religion*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd.: MA, USA, p.387

⁸⁰ Cobb, W.S. (1989) "Plato on the Possibility of an Irreligious Morality." *Philosophy of Religion* 25: 3-12, p. 9

dialogues.⁸¹ If the gods are good, and if they want only good for human kind, the best way we can honour them is by doing the good. And this idea is cemented by Socrates' assertion in the *Euthyphro* that our role as humans is to help the gods in the attainment of their "project" (although the project itself is not explicitly named in this dialogue).⁸²

Yet since the gods are both good *and* interested in humankind, it can be inferred that the gods' overall project is the spread of goodness among humankind. "It seems reasonable" Cobb writes, "to infer that the goal the gods hope to achieve by using human beings as their servants is the spread of justice among humankind."⁸³ Vlastos, Zuckert, Brickhouse and Smith, and McPherran all echo this view. Brickhouse and Smith, for example, insist that Socrates' speech in the *Apology* was given in part to show that he engaged in his philosophical mission as a means of honouring the gods. Specifically, Socrates' message from the oracle encouraged him to believe that his engagement in philosophy was necessary in order to persuade the Athenian people that they ought to embrace virtue above all else.⁸⁴ This promotion of virtue was done as an act of service to the gods. By pushing Athenians to abandon their "pretense of wisdom" and to embrace goodness and virtue, Socrates was thus promoting the desire to know the gods. McPherran furthers this argument by writing that Socrates conceives of the gods as having "a *purpose*, a craft-like work that we assist them in, and evidently also possess a desire to help us and nurture us."⁸⁵ Similarly, Vlastos contends that "Piety is doing god's work to benefit human beings – work such as Socrates' kind of god would wish done on his behalf, in service to him."⁸⁶ Zuckert agrees that Socrates acted to honor the gods, and she writes that his philosophy was meant as a service to the divine.⁸⁷

⁸¹ McPherran, M. *op. cit.*, 1997, p. 129 – The subject of the gods' goodness in the *Apology* and the *Euthyphro* will be discussed at length in chapter three.

⁸² *Euthyphro*, 14 a-b

⁸³ Cobb, W.S. *op. cit.*, 1989, p. 9

⁸⁴ Brickhouse T.C., and Smith, N.D. *op. cit.*, 1983, p. 666

⁸⁵ McPherran, M. *op. cit.*, 1994, p. 257

⁸⁶ Vlastos, G. *op. cit.*, 1991, p. 176

⁸⁷ Zuckert, C. *op. cit.*, 2004, p. 192

Now, all this represents a fairly important departure from traditional Greek religion. For Plato's Socrates, cult-practice, dedications, and festivals are no longer regarded as sufficient means of honouring the gods. To honour the gods, individuals must also (and more importantly) strive to do all things out of goodness and must work to improve the goodness of themselves and those around them through encouraging the development of virtue. Socrates' divergence from traditional religion here is significant because it links moral virtue to religion and to the gods in a way that had seldom been seen before (something we will come back to in chapters two and three).⁸⁸ For Socrates, service to the gods required much more than the traditional ritual and cult-practice; it required a level of personal moral virtuousness. The morally virtuous individual must be *both* religiously correct and just – and this links justice and religious piety closely together.⁸⁹ This fusion of piety and justice, in turn, makes all “acts of justice or injustice also religious rights or wrongs”.⁹⁰ The practice of the virtues thus becomes a form of piety in itself (and piety as a virtue will be one of the themes of the next chapter). Put simply, my point here is that Socrates' piety is radically ethical.⁹¹

ii) *The possession of knowledge and wisdom*

I would now like to make the slightly controversial claim that both Socrates and the traditionally pious in Athens seem to have shared the belief that humans were incapable of possessing certain forms of knowledge by rational means alone. Specifically, wisdom and knowledge concerning those matters most important to human existence were thought to belong only to the gods. In this way, both Socratic philosophy and traditional piety placed important limits on the capacity of the human mind, and on

⁸⁸ Mikalson, J. *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 187

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 187

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 187

⁹¹ And insofar as Socrates' piety requires him to encourage the development of virtue in others, it is inherently political in nature. More on this will be said in the final chapter and conclusion.

human rationality and reason. Blanchard gives, as an example, the encounter between Socrates and the traditionally pious Cephalus at the beginning of the *Republic*, in his “The Enemies of Socrates: Piety and Sophism in the Socratic Drama”.⁹² Specifically, he notes that the two men are on good and friendly terms throughout their discussion. Blanchard hypothesizes that Cephalus is not offended or angered by Socrates, because the two men share a fundamentally similar worldview. Socrates obviously does not share *all* of the same traditionally religious views that Cephalus seems to subscribe to, but both men remain humble in the face of what they do not know.⁹³ Socrates, for example, openly acknowledges his ignorance and admits that he cannot claim to be as wise or as knowledgeable as the gods. This humility in the face of divine wisdom is characteristic of conventional piety, and of many traditionally religious individuals.⁹⁴ Cephalus professes a similar ignorance in his admission that he is uncertain about death and the afterlife, confessing to Socrates that he has become increasingly aware of his lack of knowledge about the nature of life and death as he has gotten older and closer to dying and these matters have become more relevant in his life.⁹⁵ Thus Blanchard argues that traditional piety and Socratic philosophy are rooted in a similar “uncertainty with regard to human powers”.⁹⁶ And in this specific way, at least, Socratic philosophy and traditional piety are not so completely at odds.⁹⁷

Along similar lines, Catherine Zuckert suggests in “The Socratic Turn” that Socrates never claimed to possess precise knowledge about the character or the nature of existence.⁹⁸ Socrates, instead, claimed ignorance. This professed lack of knowledge separated Socrates from some of the natural philosophers of

⁹² Blanchard, K. *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 425

⁹³ That being said, Socrates’ humility is slightly more noble in that it results from his belief in what he does not know, and Cephalus’ humility likely stems from his fear of death and his knowledge that he may have offended the gods in his life.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 435

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 435

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 433

⁹⁷ I here leave it open whether Cephalus truly speaks to the ‘average’ experience of traditional piety in Ancient Athens.

⁹⁸ Zuckert, C. *op. cit.*, 2004, p. 215

the day whose “materialistic cosmologies” were far-reaching enough to “cast doubt on the very existence of the gods.”⁹⁹ Socrates, in contrast, did not espouse or assert strong positive knowledge about the physical universe, nor did he put forward any definitive theories about the existence or non-existence of the gods. “In contrast to the seven sages who preceded him,” Zuckert writes, “Socrates claimed only to be a seeker of wisdom, not to be wise himself”.¹⁰⁰ Socrates further diverged from the natural philosophers who centered their philosophy on the metaphysical by focusing on matters more relevant to human life. Socratic thought was bent toward human virtue and not toward understanding the mysteries of the cosmos. This “shift” in priority was born in large part out of Socrates’ recognition of the human inability to acquire certain kinds of knowledge. Knowledge about the physical universe was neither relevant nor attainable to men and women in their daily lives, where questions of justice and morality were far more significant. As Zuckert suggests, Socrates engaged in philosophy with the people of Athens and for the good of the people of Athens.

The questions Socrates asked his interlocutors were chiefly aimed at deconstructing and unmasking untruths and inconsistencies in commonly held beliefs and opinions, and religious ideas and opinions were not exempt from Socrates’ elenctic method. But as Socrates points out in the *Apology*, and as Zuckert reiterates, Socrates’ philosophic interrogations were also done in the service of the gods in many respects.¹⁰¹ For Socrates, the act of questioning even the most sacred religious ideas was thought to improve the lives of citizens and to be a service to the gods.¹⁰²

Importantly, Socrates thought that the sustained study of human virtue could be a service to the gods in some way. The focus Socrates put onto virtue and ethics marked an important shift in Ancient Greek philosophy. And the notion that the study of human virtue could be pleasing to the gods was

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 215

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 219

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 216, see also *Apology*, 30a-c

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p. 192

significant. While Socrates turned philosophy's gaze away from the physical universe, focusing instead on matters important to men and women in their daily lives, he did not lose sight of the fact that his philosophy was done in the service of *both* the gods and men.¹⁰³

Dana Villa, in *Socratic Citizenship*, argues that there is ample evidence to suggest that despite the importance Socrates placed on the *study* of virtue, Socrates never formulated any positive or definite idea of the virtues because he believed that he did not possess the knowledge required to do so.¹⁰⁴ Socrates, Villa notes, is consistent in maintaining his ignorance concerning "the ultimate nature of the virtues and human excellence" throughout his life, and even in the face of his death.¹⁰⁵ Villa writes that according to Socrates, "In these matters—most important to human beings—real wisdom is, paradoxically, 'the property of God,' not man. No human being can claim to be wise when it comes to virtue."¹⁰⁶ For Villa, this is because the elenctic method of questioning that was so integral to Socrates' philosophy was devised primarily to allow Socrates to deconstruct false beliefs; Socrates did not espouse or assert any positive theories of truth or knowledge in his lifetime.¹⁰⁷ It was not the accumulation of true knowledge, but the destruction and dismantling of erroneous opinion that primarily characterized Socratic thought. This is evidenced, according to Villa, by the repeated admissions of ignorance Socrates makes during his trial.

Thus, Villa argues that Socratic philosophy is fundamentally negative (insofar as it rejects ideas and unearths inconsistencies), and not positive (in that it does not put forward any positive doctrine or theory of truth).¹⁰⁸ Villa's reading here appears to be consistent with Socrates' stance in the *Euthyphro*,

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 215

¹⁰⁴ Villa, D. (2001) *Socratic Citizenship*, Princeton: Princeton University Press (I note in passing that this work is heavily indebted to Arendt's reading of Socrates and Plato.)

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 3 – It is worth noting, however, that Villa's Socrates is a radical atheist (he is said to represent the birth of the 'secular conscience'). As such, we are invited to regard this epistemic humility in Socrates as partially disingenuous (i.e. that perfect wisdom may not exist in the gods either, since they (probably) do not exist).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p.18

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 18

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 50

where Socrates claims not to know what the true nature of piety is. Socrates is able to deconstruct Euthyphro's ideas about piety, distinguishing those which are rational from those which are not, but Socrates seems unable to formulate any positive ideas about piety without engaging in the elenctic questioning of another. As soon as Euthyphro quits the conversation, and the elenchus is cut short, Socrates cannot proceed any further in his quest to understand piety. If Socrates is to understand the true nature of piety, he needs Euthyphro to help him – not because Euthyphro possesses any true or very definite ideas, but because one cannot engage in the elenchus alone. And while Socrates may not come to know the *truth* about piety through his questioning – he will very likely uncover some ideas which are patently untrue or inconsistent in the process, and in this way, come at the very least to an understanding of what piety is *not*. This is a state of knowledge that seems to exist somewhere between complete understanding and complete ignorance.

Brickhouse and Smith initially find Socrates' numerous claims to ignorance to be at odds with his simultaneous claims about the nature of virtue and morality.¹⁰⁹ Even in the *Euthyphro*, when it seems as though Socrates fails to make any positive claims about the nature of piety, he seems to endorse certain arguments and ideas of Euthyphro's about piety over others.¹¹⁰ And in other dialogues (the *Symposium*, *Republic*, *Crito*, *Gorgias*, *Protagoras*, to name a few) Socrates is found speaking with authority about the virtues, despite his previous claims of ignorance concerning such matters. But Brickhouse and Smith resolve this apparent contradiction by arguing that Socrates did possess a certain amount of wisdom – enough, for example, to confidently assert that the question “what is virtue?” is “the most momentous question a man can ask”.¹¹¹ Thus Socrates certainly knew enough *to know* that the study of virtue was of paramount and unparalleled importance to the individual in his or her life. This is the reason Socrates

¹⁰⁹ Zuckert, C. *op. cit.*, 1996, p. 135

¹¹⁰ More on this in chapter three.

¹¹¹ Brickhouse, T.C., and Smith, N. D. (1983) “The Origin of Socrates' Mission.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44(4): 657-666, p. 664

encouraged the shift in philosophy, from the study of natural phenomena to the study of the way men and women ought to live – that is, to the study of ethics and virtue.

Brickhouse and Smith thus insist that Socrates did possess a very general sort of wisdom, one that allowed him to recognize the importance of virtue, along with having a rudimentary conception of the virtues themselves. To say that one is ignorant is, the authors reason, to say that one does not possess specific or certain knowledge, not necessarily to admit that one has no knowledge (however uncertain) whatsoever. Brickhouse and Smith write, “It seems decidedly more likely, therefore, that Socrates’ profession of ignorance amounts to a denial that he possesses knowledge of precisely what any specific virtue is, but not to a denial that he has some conception of it, a conception about which he may be quite confident”.¹¹²

Brickhouse and Smith’s reasoning on this point seems to make sense. Socrates’ ability to guide the elenchus and uncover errors in logic and reasoning is indeed evidence of his possession of a minimal, at the very least, understanding of the subjects he is discussing. How can one recognize poor arguments and incorrect assertions without even the most basic understanding of the subject at hand? To know that something a fellow interlocutor is arguing is wrong, one must have an idea of what is right (enough to know that what the person with whom one is arguing is saying is not it).¹¹³ Socrates may have had a very fundamental idea of the nature of virtue, without knowing the particulars – perhaps even an *intuitive* knowledge that he was not able to communicate on its own (again, a state of knowledge that exists somewhere *between* complete understanding and complete ignorance). This intuitive understanding is consistent with some of the ways in which Socrates acquired knowledge, which were often extra-

¹¹² *Ibid*, p. 662

¹¹³ One might, to be sure, recognize an inconsistent argument based solely on fallacious logic in the argument itself. But in cases where the logic is sound and the content is not, one would not be able to distinguish correct from incorrect without, at the very least, some inkling of what is true and what is not true.

rational.¹¹⁴ And Socrates' extra-rational acquisition of knowledge might partially be what led to his inability to explain and communicate such knowledge "rationally" to others.

Indeed Socrates' overall philosophy is based on the development and fostering of rational thought and inquiry, as Villa rightly points out, for the sake of virtue. But using his rationality, Socrates appears to have come to the conclusion that he possessed no real stable or definite knowledge about anything. Some of the matters about which Socrates did speak with confidence and certain knowledge, such as the goodness and justice of the gods and the importance of virtue, seem to have been acquired extra-rationally – oftentimes, through communication with the gods or their messengers. Socrates, for example, "believed in his *daimonion* and viewed it as an intermediary between himself and the gods in matters of divination."¹¹⁵ Socrates received his mission to philosophize from the gods, through communication from oracles, in dreams, and from his *daimon*, most notably.¹¹⁶ Interestingly, Mikalson notes that Socrates' personal *daimon* seems to have specifically directed him according to how *not* to act and behave – communicating with Socrates only when he was doing something he should not be, and staying silent when events were transpiring as they should.¹¹⁷

Relevant to this discussion is not so much *how* Socrates believed the gods communicated with him, but that he believed they communicated with him – and that this communication in turn motivated and inspired his actions. As Mikalson points out, Plato seems also to have been inspired by Socrates' reliance on divination, writing that it "shaped Plato's own thought on divination, Apollo, and the gods in

¹¹⁴ I have here in mind, for example, Socrates' encounters with the oracle at Delphi, his communion with his *daimonion*, and his discussion of the knowledge he received from Diotima in the *Symposium*. See also Bussanich, J. (2013) for a more complete discussion of the various ways Socrates acquired knowledge through revelation and divination. As Bussanich writes, "However mysterious it may seem to us, we must look to Socrates' exceptional intimacy with the divine as the grounds for his confidence, not simply his 'intellectualism', as is commonly supposed." p. 204

¹¹⁵ Mikalson, J. op. cit., 2000, p. 26, see also Bussanich, J. (2013) "Socrates and Religious Experience"

¹¹⁶ *Apology*, 33c, 28e

¹¹⁷ Mikalson, J. op. cit., 2000, p. 116

general, and it was a means, like myth, that allowed him to express his own belief that not *all* matters of human life can be explained solely by human reason”.¹¹⁸

iii) *Belief in the supernatural*

Insofar as Socrates believed that wisdom is not completely accessible to human kind, his philosophy could be said to be slightly similar to traditional religious piety. Yet while Socrates acknowledged his own ignorance, to what extent did he accept the idea that wisdom belongs to the gods? As mentioned previously, traditional religion in Ancient Athens was based on belief in a hierarchy of gods who lived and reigned from above. Did Socrates believe in these gods? Bussanich takes the position that many of Socrates’ ideas overlapped with traditional religion and he insists that Socrates believed in at least a few of the traditional gods of Athens.¹¹⁹ One can look to Socrates’ famous speech in the *Apology* for some evidence of Socrates’ relationship with, and belief in the reciprocity between, gods and men. In the *Apology*, Socrates speaks of a mission given to him “by the god” to engage in philosophy and educate the people of Athens about virtue and the importance of the soul.¹²⁰ While Socrates may have believed in the traditional gods *of Athens* (although he never says this explicitly in the *Apology*) and in the reciprocity between gods and men, Socrates frequently questioned the notion that sacrifice was the only way to honour or receive divine favour from the gods. Socrates’ gods could not be bought through sacrifice.¹²¹ As noted previously, this is in part because Socrates reasoned that the gods are inherently good, and thus cannot be swayed by material sacrifice.¹²² As McPherran suggests, Socrates changed the discourse around

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 137

¹¹⁹ Bussanich, J. *op. cit.*, 2013, p. 201

¹²⁰ A claim that I think one should take seriously given that there are no absolutely clear reasons not to. The passage in question is, of course, *Apology* 33c.

¹²¹ McPherran, M. *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 131 and Hermann, F. *op. cit.*, 2007, p. 387

¹²² McPherran, M. (1994) “Socrates in Teleological and Moral Theology.” *Ancient Philosophy* 14: 245-262, p. 245

the divine with his assertion that the gods were just and good, and devoid of any bad qualities.¹²³ Socrates “cleansed the Homeric deities of their unsavory moral characteristics” and this was a meaningful and significant break from tradition.¹²⁴

In contrast, Vlastos views this particular departure from traditional piety as indicative of Socrates’ outright *rejection* of the traditional gods (not of god in general, but of the gods of Athens specifically). In Vlastos’ view, the traditional gods of Ancient Greece were far too immoral to be reconciled with any kind of justice or morality.¹²⁵ Vlastos appeals to the goddess Hera’s frequent attacks against the women Zeus pursued for extra-marital affairs and the children that were born as a result as evidence of the ubiquitous immorality and wickedness of the Greek gods. What would remain of gods like Hera and Zeus

if they were required to observe the stringent norms of Socratic virtue which require every moral agent, human or divine, to act only to cause good to others, never evil, regardless of provocation? Required to meet these austere standards, the city’s gods would have become unrecognizable.¹²⁶

Vlastos believes that this aspect of Socratic piety threatened conventionally pious Athenians because it undermined so completely the notions of material sacrifice and curse that were integral to traditional piety in Athens.¹²⁷ McPherran agrees with Vlastos on this point, as he acknowledges that “this implication of Socrates’ moral theory cuts straight at the root of some of the popular traditional motivations underlying many cult practices.”¹²⁸ Mikalson also argues in his study of Greek religion and philosophy that Socrates’ views and theories attacked the “very foundations of Greek religion”.¹²⁹

¹²³ *Ibid*, p. 245

¹²⁴ Vlastos, G., *op. cit.*, 1991, p. 162

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 166

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 166

¹²⁷ Vlastos, G. 1991, as cited in McPherran, M. *op. cit.*, 1997, p. 129

¹²⁸ McPherran, M. *op. cit.*, 1997, p. 132

¹²⁹ Mikalson, J. *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 5

However, opinion among authors is divided concerning the relative importance of the supernatural in Plato's writing and in his portrayal of Socrates. Benitez, for example, makes the argument that Socrates' concept of the good cannot be separated from the idea of god, where Russell makes the case for a more secular view of a Socratic good – one that focuses on an ethical ideal over a spiritual one. This is a rift that can be found throughout the literature.¹³⁰ The secular understanding of the good appears to be a hallmark of many modern interpretations of Plato's dialogues. Russell notes that Plato's ethics have often been thought of as "too fantastic" to stay relevant and popular in modern times.¹³¹ For this reason, he looks for an alternative, rational interpretation of Plato's ideas and finds it through his analysis of Stoic philosophy. The Stoics were able to reconcile the notion of an objective ethics without invoking the spiritual, and Russell argues this is likely what Plato was trying to do as well. From a more secular perspective, he argues, we can begin to take Plato seriously. Russell writes,

Unlike some mystical, mysterious, or otherworldly notion that cannot even get on the table for our consideration, the thesis that an agent's highest good consists in the rationality with which she acts and lives is a decidedly this-worldly one that is worth our attention.¹³²

Iris Murdoch takes a similar position in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* when she argues that "the idea of a supernatural or cosmic Thou" has no place in Plato's dialogues.¹³³ And Anderson also suggests in "Socrates' Concept of Piety" that rational argument takes precedence over the gods and over the supernatural.¹³⁴ Anderson argues that Socrates "cuts the gods out of the system and perhaps most important of all, replaces them with the dialectic."¹³⁵ Similarly, Villa does away with the element of the

¹³⁰ An understanding of the Socratic concept of the Good as put forth in Plato's dialogues will be one of the main goals of the next chapter (chapter two).

¹³¹ Russell, D.C. (2004) "Virtue as 'Likeness to God' in Plato and Seneca." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42(3): 241-260, p. 241

¹³² *Ibid*, p. 260

¹³³ Murdoch, Iris. (1992) *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. London: Chatto and Windus, p. 477

¹³⁴ Anderson, D.E. (1967) "Socrates' Concept of Piety." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 5: 1-13 p. 4

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 4

supernatural altogether in his interpretation of Socrates' philosophy. Indeed, Villa argues that Socrates was one of the first thinkers in the Western world to espouse a truly "secular form of conscience".¹³⁶ He writes that Socratic philosophy is notable for its rejection of traditional religion, and for its emphasis on rationality. Villa takes the position that Socrates was not loyal to any gods at all – traditional or otherwise. Indeed, he insists in *Socratic Citizenship* that Socrates was neither a pious nor a religious man. Socrates' main loyalty was to the state, and in this he did not waver throughout his life. For all these authors then, the supernatural evidently comes second to the rational, philosophical, and the political, if it is considered at all.

Conversely, Vlastos argues that the supernatural cannot be taken out of Plato's philosophy. To cut it out, he argues, would be "surgery which kills the patient".¹³⁷ The idea of god is simply too ingrained in Platonic thought to be explained away – though Vlastos mentions that many scholars have attempted to do so out of embarrassment over Plato's acceptance of the supernatural. Vlastos argues that Plato's presentation of Socrates' beliefs leaves no doubt as to Socrates' acceptance of and reliance on supernatural, god-like figures. "He subscribes unquestioningly" Vlastos writes, "to the age-old view that side by side with the physical world accessible to our senses, there exists another, populated by mysterious beings, personal like ourselves, having the power to invade at will the causal order to which our own actions are confined, effecting in it changes of incalculable effect to cause us great benefit, or, were they to choose otherwise, total devastation and ruin."¹³⁸ McPherran agrees with this interpretation, and he writes that there is ample evidence in Socrates' testimony in the *Apology* supporting the idea that Socrates believed both in the gods and in their power and desire to influence human affairs.¹³⁹ Zuckert, similarly, makes note of the importance of the communication between humans and the divine in

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 41

¹³⁷ Vlastos, G. *op. cit.*, 1991, p. 158

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 158

¹³⁹ McPherran, M. *op. cit.*, 1997, p. 127

Socrates' philosophy. For Zuckert, Socrates' *daimon* was a spirit with the power to communicate between humans and gods.¹⁴⁰ And finally, Brickhouse and Smith also point out that Socrates' entire pursuit of philosophy was divinely inspired.¹⁴¹ Indeed, it was the Delphic Oracle that "set him on the path of divine service" in the first place.¹⁴² And Socrates' interactions, both with the Oracle and with his *daimon* or *daimonion*, led him to believe that he was called to engage in philosophy as a duty to god and for the good of the people of Athens. As mentioned previously, this is a position Socrates confirms and reiterates in the *Apology* (more on this will be said in the third chapter).

III. Socratic Piety - Conclusion

Because Socrates himself makes the claim that communication with the divine led him to practice philosophy, it seems unreasonable to doubt this account or to claim that one necessarily should doubt it. It would certainly be reasonable to assert that the divine, or the supernatural, did play a role in Socrates' philosophy. However, many of Socrates' musings on the supernatural have been explained away as the product of Socratic irony – mocking and insincere remarks about traditional religion, not honest and serious statements about Socrates' belief in the divine. But to doubt the sincerity of Socrates' claims in the *Apology* about the divine may lead one to doubt Socrates' commitment to sincerity in every respect. As Brickhouse and Smith rightly suggest, "Unless we are to disregard Plato's evident intention to reveal Socrates as a man concerned for the truth, and for encouraging the jurors to reach the correct verdict, we cannot plausibly construe these remarks as irony".¹⁴³ I will largely follow McPherran, and Brickhouse and

¹⁴⁰ Zuckert, C. *op. cit.*, 2004, p. 202

¹⁴¹ Brickhouse, T.C., and Smith N.D. *op. cit.*, 1983, p. 657

¹⁴² *Ibid*, p. 657

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 659

Smith, and take the position that Socrates' claims about having been divinely called to engage in philosophy for the good of the citizens and the gods were made sincerely.

Yet the question remains, for many: how could Socrates, a champion of rationality, logic, and philosophy, have subscribed to religious ideas about the supernatural – so many of which were based on divine revelation and extra-rational ways of knowing? Socratic philosophy depended on putting every opinion, idea, and belief – no matter how sacred – under question. How could Socrates hold beliefs in the supernatural which would prove difficult, if not impossible, to defend rationally?¹⁴⁴ Socrates' elenctic method was indeed rational in the extreme, and religious beliefs are typically seen as the opposite. Villa appeals to the example of Antigone to highlight this point. Antigone's sacrifice, he writes, was made in response to unquestioned and unquestionable religious tenets. "For Antigone", Villa writes, "there is no room for doubt nor any reason to give an account. The traditional understanding of religious law and duty commands obedience because it is immemorial".¹⁴⁵ In other words, for the traditionally pious, some ideas are too sacred to be questioned or put into doubt, according to Villa. Socratic philosophy, however, requires that *every idea be put into doubt*. Nothing is too sacred for Socrates to question in Villa's view; elenctic philosophy is based on exposing error through relentless questioning. And as Anderson notes in "Socrates' Concept of Piety", pious Athenians would not have been overly pleased by Socrates' extension of the elenchus to sacred religious beliefs.¹⁴⁶

Now, there is no doubt that Socratic piety *questions* and *challenges*. This is an important and significant divergence between Socratic piety and traditional religion in my view. Reason and rationality are fundamental elements of philosophy, and philosophy is a fundamental (if not *the* fundamental) element of Socratic piety. Philosophy and rational thought were not fundamental (or required)

¹⁴⁴ Socrates would probably have been hard-pressed to explain the trust he placed in the oracle and in his *daimonion*, for example, through rational logic alone.

¹⁴⁵ Villa, D. *op. cit.* 2001, p. 51

¹⁴⁶ Anderson, D.E. *op. cit.*, 1967, p. 4

components of traditional religion in Ancient Greece. Indeed, it is for this reason that Mikalson places so much importance on the necessity of distinguishing between the traditionally revered gods of state and the gods of the philosophers. In short, Socrates likely believed in the gods, but his gods were not the very same gods that most traditionally pious Grecians believed in. The important difference here is that for Socrates, rational thought was instrumental to his piety and to his thought about the divine.

But I believe that Villa and a few other Plato scholars have failed to appreciate how strong Socrates' twofold commitment to philosophy and piety might actually have been. Following Brickhouse and Smith's interpretation, I posit that Socratic philosophy was based in both rational *and* extra-rational ways of knowing and understanding. As noted previously, it is perhaps for this reason that Socrates was unable to communicate many of his ideas rationally, and why he claimed true wisdom belonged to the gods alone. In many ways the knowledge Socrates acquired through revelation from the Oracle or communication with the spiritual world flies in the face of any interpretation of Socratic philosophy that is ensconced too firmly in the rational (narrowly understood). Indeed, Socrates seems to have received at least some of his most important knowledge from sources that fit better with traditional religion than with traditional philosophy. Once again, this connection between Socratic philosophy and traditional religion has, in my view, been insufficiently appreciated by Plato scholars, especially those in political theory circles.

For Plato's Socrates, proper service to the gods (or, proper piety) required the cultivation of virtue and justice among one's self and among one's contemporaries. Any work that furthers the gods' cause of spreading justice and virtue among people is pious, because it honours and helps the gods with their project. The gods are wholly good and just, and individuals honour them by doing what is good. So it follows that the key to understanding Socratic piety, and the exact nature of what pious behaviour might be, lies in part in an understanding of Socrates' conception of the good. An examination of the nature of the good and its relation to piety in Socratic thought will thus be one of the subjects of the next chapter.

For the present discussion, it is enough to say that Socratic piety was based on honouring the gods through the acquisition and spreading of that which is good and virtuous, because this is what is most dear to the gods.¹⁴⁷

CHAPTER TWO – Understanding Socratic Piety

Socrates' religiosity reflected, as well as diverged from, traditional religion in Ancient Greece. Socratic piety was radical because it was based in philosophy and rationality; it was traditional because it was inspired by divine revelation. Socrates recognized the importance of knowledge from extra-rational, divine sources because he believed humans to be incapable of acquiring knowledge on their own. In this respect, Socrates' philosophy also diverged in an important way from some of the philosophers who came before him. Pre-Socratic philosophers made claims to knowledge about the heavens and the earth, based on their understanding of themselves as human beings with access to knowledge about all things.¹⁴⁸ Socrates' first admission, conversely, was to claim that he believed he knew nothing at all. But Socrates did know enough to contend that the search for the good is the most important activity men and women can participate in. Now, the good is obviously a concept that appears throughout Plato's Socratic dialogues. As noted in the first chapter of this thesis, Socrates believed the gods to be good. And the gods, being good, wish for the spread of goodness among humans.¹⁴⁹ The good, then, is what the gods possess, and what the gods wish to share with their creation. The good is *divine*.

¹⁴⁷ Mikalson, J. op. cit., 2000, p. 187

¹⁴⁸ Zuckert, C. (2009) *Plato's Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 739

¹⁴⁹ *Republic II*, 379a

In this chapter, I examine Socrates' understanding of the good, pulling from the discussions Socrates has with various interlocutors in the *Symposium*, the *Apology*, the *Protagoras*, and the *Republic*. With an understanding of the good in tow from these, and other, secondary sources, I will discuss the relation of the good to truth, virtue, and piety. My goal in this second chapter is to come to a rudimentary understanding of how all of these important ideas fit together in Socrates' philosophy. Specifically, I have dedicated this chapter to understanding the role of the good in Socratic piety. I will argue that Socratic piety is best understood as the search for the good. Armed with a more coherent understanding of Socratic piety and the good's part in it, in the third and final chapter of this thesis I will examine the role Socrates seemed to envision piety (the search for the good) playing in the state.

I) Knowledge, Truth, and Opinion in Books V-VII of the *Republic*

In Books V and VI of the *Republic*, Socrates speaks at some length about the relationship between truth, knowledge, ignorance, and opinion. Here the distinction is made between that sort of knowledge which grasps the eternal, immutable, and absolute ideas (or forms) that exist, and that which does not clearly perceive or understand these eternal ideas. The latter way of understanding is not really knowledge at all, yet neither is it complete ignorance.¹⁵⁰ Socrates refers to this state as opinion. Followers of opinion, Socrates argues, may perceive the eternal ideas in all things – but refuse to admit of the immutability and absoluteness of such ideas. The lover of opinion senses beauty, an eternal idea, and even appreciates beauty, but does not recognize beauty in its more general true and absolute state. The same is true of all the other eternal ideas. For the man or woman with opinion alone, these eternal truths are only partly seen and understood. As Glaucon explains,

¹⁵⁰ *Republic* V, 478a-c

Then those who see the many beautiful, and who yet neither see absolute beauty, nor can follow any guide who points the way thither; who see the many just, and not absolute justice, and the like, -- such persons may be said to have opinion but not knowledge?¹⁵¹

Indeed, lovers of opinion are the individuals who, Socrates argues, "... listened to sweet sounds and gazed upon fair colours, but would not tolerate the existence of absolute beauty."¹⁵² They exist in the realm of subjective and relative understanding, not the realm of absolute and immutable truth. With this sort of individual, Socrates contrasts the lover of truth and of true things. These lovers of wisdom, Socrates argues, are philosophers and *only* philosophers.¹⁵³ As Socrates tells Glaucon, "philosophers only are able to grasp the eternal and unchangeable, and those who wander in the region of the many and variable are not philosophers".¹⁵⁴ Philosophers, then, are devoted to the *truth*.

Plato's allegory of the cave in Book VII of the *Republic* further clarifies this theory of knowledge and truth. What this story of the cave also shows, however, is Socrates' belief that very few are, or will ever be, able to escape the cave and "see" the truth (as the individual who escapes the cave manages to see the sun). Only the philosophers, who love and search for the truth, are able to escape the cave and witness the truth. And the individual who has trained his or her mind to find the truth will be able to *recognize* it when he or she does see it (the individual with an untrained mind used to seeing shadows in the cave, will continue to prefer the shadows even after exposure to the truth. In Socrates' words – the light of the sun outside the cave will blind him because he has been so used to darkness).¹⁵⁵ Notably, Socrates argues that the soul must be properly aligned before the mind can be trained to accept the existence of absolute truth, and before this truth can be understood when it is seen. As Socrates tells Glaucon and Adeimantus,

¹⁵¹ *Republic V*, 479c

¹⁵² *Republic V*, 480a

¹⁵³ *Republic VI*, 484a-b

¹⁵⁴ *Republic VI*, 484a-b

¹⁵⁵ *Republic VII*, 517b-c

... the power and capacity of learning exists in the soul already; and that just as the eye was unable to turn from darkness to light without the whole body, so too the instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole soul be turned from the world of becoming into that of being, and of the brightest and best of being, or in other words, of the good.¹⁵⁶

In this passage, Socrates makes clear his belief that the soul plays a fundamental part in the individual's ability to access truth. Further, Socrates associates the world of being with the good. The world of being, or the world of eternal, immutable, and fixed things, is contrasted with the world of becoming – the domain of the unstable, ever-changing things which are constantly in flux. Socrates' ideas or forms reside in the world of being. And the brightest and best of this being is, Plato's Socrates suggests, the good itself.¹⁵⁷

Before discussing the role the soul has in directing the mind to seek out true being, it is important to briefly, and in a somewhat schematic manner, outline the relation between the terms used by Socrates – namely, *truth* and the *good*. Knowledge can be acquired only about true things, or the world of being, never about the world of becoming which is constantly in motion. The world of being is Socrates' world of immutable forms; truth resides here. Opinion, which occupies the space between being and becoming, is based on a partial observation of being but it does not grasp the nature of being and it is therefore open, and prone, to error. Similarly, human beings exist in the space between being and becoming and thus fail to understand the true nature of being. The things that exist in the world of being, then, seem to be all those things that are true (the ideas). But Socrates says that it is “the brightest and best” of being, not all being, that is *good*. We might infer from this statement that truth/being is a necessary, but not a sufficient, characteristic of the good, which also has other qualities. So we ask, what characteristics of being make being its best, and thus good? For this we need to develop our understanding of Socrates' conception of the good.

¹⁵⁶ *Republic VII*, 518c-d

¹⁵⁷ *Republic VII*, 518c

II. Love and the Good in the *Symposium*

Socrates' account of his discussion with the priestess Diotima in the *Symposium* gives us valuable insight into his understanding of the good. Consistent with Socrates' speech in the *Republic*, in the *Symposium* he tells his interlocutors that only the philosophers can come to know about the good. This is because Diotima has told Socrates that philosophers alone will seek out knowledge. The philosopher is ideally placed to desire knowledge because she both recognizes the value of knowledge and knows that she does not possess it. One who possesses knowledge is wise; the philosopher is not wise, but *desires* to be. As Socrates tells his friends –

The truth of the matter is this: No god is a philosopher or seeker after wisdom, for he is wise already; nor does any man who is wise seek after wisdom. Neither do the ignorant seek after wisdom. For herein is the evil of ignorance, that he who is neither good nor wise is nevertheless satisfied with himself: he has no desire for that of which he feels no want.¹⁵⁸

Thus, the philosopher desires wisdom. Interestingly, *Love* – which Diotima describes as a spirit– also desires to be wise. In its essence, Love, like the philosopher, wishes also to know. Love is neither god nor human, not mortal or immortal. Rather, Love occupies the space between divine and mortal – much as the philosopher exists between knowledge and ignorance.¹⁵⁹ Because Love exists between humans and gods, it acts as a sort of mediator between the divine and the mortal. “God mingles not with man;” Diotima tells Socrates, “but through Love all the intercourse and converse of god with man, whether awake or asleep, is carried on”.¹⁶⁰ Thus Love, the child of Plenty and Poverty, is neither wealthy nor poor. His desire

¹⁵⁸ *Symposium*, 204

¹⁵⁹ *Symposium*, 202

¹⁶⁰ *Symposium*, 203a

for wisdom and knowledge is based on his desire for beauty, *true* beauty, in its absolute form.¹⁶¹ “For wisdom is a most beautiful thing, and Love is of the beautiful.”¹⁶²

Once Diotima has told Socrates her story of Love, she asks Socrates an important question. To what end do we desire and pursue the beautiful? *Why* do we desire these things? Notably, Socrates is only able to make sense of the question once Diotima instructs him to replace the term “beautiful” with “good”. Socrates responds that we desire the good in order to possess it. The goal of the possession of the good is happiness. And there is no need “to ask why a man desires happiness; the answer is already final”.¹⁶³ What this tells us is, a) that beauty is, at least in part, synonymous with the good, b) that possession of the beauty/the good makes human beings happy and we desire to possess it forever, and c) that happiness is an end in its own right. Notably, Diotima adds that human beings do not desire temporary possession of the good; they desire to possess the good *forever*.¹⁶⁴ Yet for mortal creatures, destined to die, this seems impossible. What recourse, then, do mortals have if they are to possess the good forever? Diotima tells Socrates that mortal beings may generate, or give birth, in beauty as a way of possessing it eternally. As Diotima explains “to the mortal creature, generation is a sort of eternity and immortality”, and “...generation always leaves behind a new existence in place of the old”.¹⁶⁵

Not all things generated by men and women are equal, however. Those things generated by the soul far surpass any offspring the body can generate. Specifically, the products of the soul are wisdom and virtue; these are the most beautiful things a human can beget.¹⁶⁶ This is because creations of the soul are closer in nature to the idea of beauty than the creations of the body; they possess a permanence that physical human bodies do not. Things of the body grow old, decay, and die. Thus Socrates argues here

¹⁶¹ *Symposium*, 203b-c

¹⁶² *Symposium*, 204a-b

¹⁶³ *Symposium*, 205a

¹⁶⁴ *Symposium*, 206a

¹⁶⁵ *Symposium*, 207b-c

¹⁶⁶ *Symposium*, 209a

that the creations of the inventor, the poet, and the artist are more valuable and everlasting than human procreation. As Socrates tells his friends, “Who, when he thinks of Homer and Hesiod and other great poets, would not rather have their children than ordinary human ones?”¹⁶⁷ Greater still are the creations produced by the souls of philosophers. For those with a trained philosophical mind, the soul gives birth to the virtues – and virtue is divine.¹⁶⁸

In all cases where humans strive to give birth to the good – whether it be birth by the body or the soul – the impetus is love. Love, or *eros*, for the good directs our actions and motivates us to possess the everlasting good we long for. Love is instrumental in its role as a motivator to attain the good. In this way, it connects us to the good just as, in Diotima’s allegory, Love acted as the messenger between human and the divine. Love is our means of grasping and understanding the divine world of ideas. For those who do not recognize beauty in its true form, possessing eternal good is possible through falling in love and giving birth to children. For those who recognize the good in its true form, possession of the good comes through understanding and contemplating eternal things, divine things. We must therefore strive to direct our love toward the true form of the good, not merely toward impermanent approximations of the good. As Socrates recounts,

But what if man had eyes to see the true beauty – the divine beauty, I mean, pure and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality and all the colours and vanities of human life – thither looking, and holding converse with the true beauty simple and divine? Remember how in that communion only, beholding beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be enabled to bring forth, not images of beauty, but realities (for he has hold not of an image but of a reality), and bringing forth and nourishing true virtue to become the friend of God and be immortal, if mortal man may.¹⁶⁹

The good, then, can be understood as truth that exists in the world of being – although it seems that not all truth is considered good. Only those aspects of the truth that are virtuous and hence divine are good.

¹⁶⁷ *Symposium*, 209c

¹⁶⁸ *Symposium*, 212a

¹⁶⁹ *Symposium*, 212a

But now: is the good synonymous with virtue? What, exactly, is the relation between virtue and the good?

It is to this question that I now propose to turn.¹⁷⁰

III. The Good and Virtue

In the above passage from the *Symposium*, Socrates states that communion with true beauty and the divine realm will bring forth and nourish virtue.¹⁷¹ Once virtue has been cultivated, it continues to bring the individual who practices it closer to the divine. In this way, virtue acts both as a result of communion with the world of being and as a cause of our being able to access the truth – a force pulling us deeper into the world of being. We know, then, that virtue is intimately connected to the good. In the *Apology*, Socrates tells his fellow Athenians at his trial that the good comes to men and women through virtue, and that he is doing divine work by telling others about the goodness of virtue and the benefits of being virtuous. Socrates states, “I tell you that virtue is not given by money, but that from virtue comes money and every other good of man, public as well as private”.¹⁷² And Socrates draws here a fairly strong link between his account of virtue, the role of the divine, and the good, in his assertion that he

...shall repeat the same words to every one whom I meet, young and old, citizen and alien, but especially to the citizens, inasmuch as they are my brethren. For know that this is the command of God; and I believe that no greater good has ever happened to the state than my service to the God.¹⁷³

Socrates philosophizes with others about virtue because he believes that the good will benefit both individual and state. Notably, Socrates also believes that the good is divine, and that it is the divine will that he share his ideas about the good with his citizens. The good, then, like the divine, exists in the

¹⁷⁰ And once again, I readily acknowledge that I can only offer here a fairly schematic treatment of this very complex and fascinating philosophical question.

¹⁷¹ *Symposium*, 212a

¹⁷² *Apology*, 30b

¹⁷³ *Apology*, 30a

world of being and is thus eternal, absolute, and true. It corresponds almost exactly to the world of true ideas (or forms) Plato's Socrates sets up and describes in the dialogues.¹⁷⁴ We know from the *Symposium* that communion with the divine ideas (such as beauty) is desired by all men and women, and that it brings happiness. The possession of true beauty (the idea of beauty) is a good we all wish to possess forever, in some way or another. We also know that communion with the good leads to and nourishes the development of virtue, and the possession of virtue further brings about the good. But what is virtue? And how does Socrates define it?

Socrates speaks about the virtues at length in the *Republic*, where he outlines four cardinal virtues that make up the human soul. Here justice, temperance, moderation, and wisdom are outlined as the virtues – justice being the virtue that properly orders the other virtues in the city and in the soul.¹⁷⁵ When the soul and the city are well ordered, they are just. And when the soul is just, Socrates declares, it is also healthy. When the soul is unjust, it is diseased.¹⁷⁶ So the virtues, properly ordered and directed by justice, create a virtuous condition in the soul and in the state. “Then virtue is the health and beauty and well-being of the soul, and vice the disease and weakness and deformity of the same.”¹⁷⁷

For the virtues to be well-ordered they must each occupy their own space and their own role, no virtue acting in a role fit for another. As Socrates explains,

...for the just man does not permit the several elements within him to interfere with one another, or any of them to do the work of others, --he sets in order his own inner life, and is his own master and his own law, and at peace with himself; and when he has bound together the three principles within him, which may be compared to the higher, lower, and middle notes of the scale, and the intermediate intervals – when he has bound all of these together, and is no longer many, but has become one entirely temperate and perfectly adjusted nature, then he proceeds to act, if he has to act, whether in a manner of property, or in the treatment of the body, or in some affair of politics or private business; always thinking and calling that which preserves and co-operates with this harmonious condition, just and good action, and the knowledge which

¹⁷⁴ Although likely does not line up exactly. It seems as though all things which are good are also true, but not all things that are true are also good.

¹⁷⁵ *Republic IV*, 441d

¹⁷⁶ *Republic IV*, 444c

¹⁷⁷ *Republic IV*, 445

presides over it, wisdom, and that which at any time impairs this condition, he will call unjust action, and the opinion which presides over it ignorance.¹⁷⁸

Thus the soul in its harmonious condition or state is necessarily presided over or ruled by wisdom; wisdom is always the head of the virtuous soul. And when wisdom is chief in the soul, that soul is just. Moors, in “Justice and Philosophy in Plato’s *Republic*, the Nature of a Definition”, also maintains that wisdom is divine, and that the part of our human soul that is wise is also the part of us that is divine.¹⁷⁹ Phrased slightly differently, one could claim that the divine lives in us as *wisdom*. For humans then, achieving the proper ordering of the soul, with wisdom in charge, is the “... greatest necessity during life, to be pursued to the exclusion of all else if such be required”.¹⁸⁰

We know that for Plato, an individual can only be virtuous if he or she has cultivated and developed a properly ordered soul.¹⁸¹ For Moors, what is key to emphasize here is that virtue is not (chiefly) about action, but rather, it is about the underlying state of the soul that motivates action.¹⁸² Thus, an individual may perform a virtuous action without being virtuous – it is not the action that determines the state or condition (and this clearly is pertinent for our purposes here). The virtuous action must be motivated by the virtuous soul if it is to be truly virtuous; and similarly, a pious action must be motivated by a pious soul if it is to be truly pious. All actions carried out by the individual with the properly ordered soul will be just, because the individual whose soul is properly ordered is virtuous (and hence also just).¹⁸³ But these *actions* are still the direct result of the virtue (i.e. the soul’s virtuous state) the individual already possesses by nature of his or her correctly-aligned soul (as explained in the *Republic* Book IV). As a result

¹⁷⁸ *Republic IV*, 443d

¹⁷⁹ Moors, K. (1984) “Justice and Philosophy in Plato’s *Republic*: the Nature of a Definition.” *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 12(2 & 3): 193-224, p. 194

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 208

¹⁸¹ *Republic IV*, 443d

¹⁸² *Ibid*, p. 208

¹⁸³ *Republic IV*, 444c

of this, and as Moors rightly reasons, actions can never be the *cause* of virtue in the soul, they are only ever the reflection of the soul's virtuous state.¹⁸⁴ And in the properly-ordered soul, wisdom reigns.¹⁸⁵

IV. The Virtues and Wisdom

Then how, exactly, does wisdom relate to virtue as a whole? In Plato scholarship, there is a fair amount of contention over what, specifically, the virtues *are*. In the *Republic*, for example, the cardinal virtues are listed, and piety is not included among them. However, in the *Protagoras*, Socrates does include piety in his description of the virtues.¹⁸⁶ And we know that the central question of the *Euthyphro* is the meaning of piety; in this case, Socrates and Euthyphro attempt to understand the nature of piety through its relation to justice (and justice is presented to us as a known virtue). Still, Socrates' seemingly divergent definitions of the virtues have created some confusion and created division among Plato scholars and in the literature on Socratic thought. Notably, in Socrates' presentation of the virtues as unified in the *Protagoras*, he seems to argue convincingly that the virtues are actually all the same. In this dialogue, Socrates asks Protagoras, "Are wisdom and temperance and courage and justice and holiness five names of the same thing?"¹⁸⁷ Protagoras responds that courage seems to differ from the rest of the virtues in a way that cannot make it the same as the others. Socrates, however, proceeds to show that courage cannot be virtuous without wisdom. The individual who fears everything is cowardly, the individual who fears nothing is foolish – but the individual with the wisdom to know what is and is not worth fearing can be said to possess the virtue of courage. Thus without the wisdom to *know*, courage

¹⁸⁴ Moors, K. *op. cit.*, 1984, p. 212

¹⁸⁵ *Republic IV*, 443d

¹⁸⁶ Zuckert, C. *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 751 See *Protagoras* 349b

¹⁸⁷ *Protagoras*, 349b

does not exist as a virtue.¹⁸⁸ All the virtues are similarly linked to wisdom, because they all similarly require certain knowledge of the truth.

In his conversation with Euthyphro, Socrates appears to take the position that piety is only one part or aspect of justice.¹⁸⁹ This assertion, if true, would mean that it is possible to conceive of something that is just but not pious, and therefore necessarily implies that justice and piety are not the same. If this is the case, either the virtues are not the same (they do not all end in wisdom), or piety is not one of the virtues. This seems to be a clear instance of Socrates' seeming self-contradiction in the dialogues. First, piety is not consistently presented as a virtue throughout the dialogues – and its status as a virtue is often questioned as a result. Second, the question of what virtue *is* – is it one thing, or many – is left without answer. Before proceeding with our discussion of virtue, the divine, and the good, it is necessary to understand, then, what virtue involves (is piety one of the virtues?) and the extent to which virtue is composed of various different elements, or whether it has one consistent definition.

i) Piety as a Virtue

If piety is the work men and women do in the service of the gods to help men and women acquire virtue, is piety itself one of the virtues? That is, are those actions and behaviours we perform in an attempt to help others understand virtue and become virtuous among the virtues themselves? Socrates seems to include piety among the virtues in the *Euthyphro* – although he suggests that piety may not be a virtue like the others. Socrates draws specific attention to the relation between piety and justice. The discussion ends before Socrates and Euthyphro come to a definitive conclusion about the status of piety in relation to the virtues, but there is evidence in some of Plato's dialogues and in the secondary literature to support

¹⁸⁸ *Protagoras*, 350c

¹⁸⁹ *Euthyphro*, 11d-12c

the idea that Socrates did consider piety to be among the virtues – a view that I wish to take seriously and will consider closely in what follows.

In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates asks Euthyphro to consider the relation between piety and justice. Are justice and piety the same? Or is piety only one aspect of justice? Socrates asks Euthyphro, “And is, then, all which is just pious? Or, is that which is pious all just, but that which is just, only in part and not all, pious?”¹⁹⁰ Euthyphro puts forward the claim that piety is a part of justice, and Socrates seems to agree with his assertion.¹⁹¹ Thus the dialogue moves into a discussion about what, exactly, piety is through an attempt to understand where and how it fits in as part of justice. However, the question of piety’s status as a virtue is not explicitly discussed in this dialogue. Thus the reader is left questioning whether piety is a virtue at all. If piety is a part of the larger category of justice and justice is a virtue, can piety be a virtue in its own right?

Vlastos, in “The Unity of Virtues in the *Protagoras*”, includes piety as one of the virtues in his discussion.¹⁹² Vlastos notes that in the *Protagoras* the question Socrates puts to Protagoras is whether the virtues – piety, justice, temperance, courage, and wisdom – are all names for the same thing.¹⁹³ Because piety is listed alongside the other virtues in the *Protagoras*, Vlastos treats piety as a virtue in his study of the dialogue. Similarly Hartman, in her study of the virtues in the *Protagoras*, includes piety among the virtues.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ *Euthyphro*, 12a

¹⁹¹ Although, there is contention over whether or not Socrates did agree with Euthyphro’s claim here. Socrates leaves his views on the relation between Piety and Justice somewhat ambiguous in the *Euthyphro*.

¹⁹² Vlastos, G. (1972) “The Unity of the Virtues in the *Protagoras*.” *Review of Metaphysics* 25(3): 415-458

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 418

¹⁹⁴ Hartman, M. (1982) “How the inadequate models for virtue in the *Protagoras* illuminate Socrates’ view of the unity of the virtues.” *Apeiron* 18(2): 110-117, p. 116. Hartman supports the unity of the virtues hypothesis in this article – this hypothesis will be further discussed in chapter three.

For McPherran, it is also evident that piety is a virtue.¹⁹⁵ In “Piety, Justice, and the Unity of Virtue” McPherran suggests that the “only or most important good is virtue”. Piety is indeed the means by which humans achieve virtue, but it is also *a virtue in itself*. He writes, “it is likely that the only or most important component of the gods’ chief product is virtue; and hence, *our* primary service to the gods – the one we are best situated and suited to perform – is to help produce virtue *via* the protection and improvement of the human mind/soul.”¹⁹⁶ Insofar as piety leads to the acquisition of virtue, it is virtuous in itself. However, McPherran also highlights the difference between piety and the other virtues. This difference is alluded to in the *Euthyphro*, with Socrates’ assertion that we cannot improve or benefit the gods through piety.¹⁹⁷ Justice, for example, improves those toward whom it is directed. Piety is directed toward the gods, but it does not *improve* them in the same way. In this way piety differs fundamentally from the other virtues outlined in Plato’s dialogues.¹⁹⁸ Indeed, this difference in quality between piety and the other virtues may be one of the reasons behind its being left out of Plato’s discussion of the virtues in the *Republic*.¹⁹⁹ This idea, if accepted, that the virtues may differ in part (or in some aspects) while remaining fundamentally the same as a whole, has important potential consequences – as it could allow us to understand Plato’s portrayal (through Socrates) of the virtues as consistent throughout the dialogues.

ii) *The unity of the virtues*

McPherran attempts to resolve this problem of the unity/separation of the virtues by arguing that virtuous actions are separate from the virtuous condition.²⁰⁰ The individual who *is* virtuous is necessarily wise – this is the state of the individual’s soul. But the *actions* flowing from the virtuous individual’s inner

¹⁹⁵ McPherran, M., *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 302

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 302 see also *Republic* Book IV

¹⁹⁷ *Euthyphro*, 13a-c

¹⁹⁸ McPherran, M. *op. cit.*, 2000, p.308

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 315

²⁰⁰ McPherran, M. *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 313

state are virtuous in distinctly different ways. That is, we can categorize actions according to their various ends and the various results that these actions effect and achieve. Pious actions stem, in great part, from inner wisdom (which is virtue) but have as their end the service of the gods. Conversely, just actions have as their goal the improvement of human life and affairs between individuals. While both actions stem from the same psychic state, they affect different populations in different ways (for example, justice improves and piety serves).²⁰¹ Moors also separates virtuous actions from the virtuous condition (virtuous mental state), as noted above, in his argument that virtuous actions are separate from, and do not determine, an individual's virtuousness. This differentiation made by several scholars between virtuous psychic states and virtuous actions is useful because it helps us better understand how the virtues can be the same (in their underlying mental state) and different (how they are manifested as actions in any number of different contexts) and thus, it helps us tie Socrates' overall philosophy of virtue in Plato's dialogues together.

iii) Wisdom and rationality

McPherran's conception of virtue as knowledge or wisdom (the possession of knowledge) is of course in line with the position taken by many other contemporary Plato scholars, and is a position that I find especially convincing. Moors argues, for instance, that the part of our soul that is wise is also the part of our soul that is divine, and wisdom is the ultimate good insofar as it is akin to the divine²⁰² (Moors understands the good as intelligible order, or the "form-ness" of being). As discussed previously, the intelligible ideas and forms are the only possible subjects of knowledge, or things we can *know*, because they are the only things that are true and absolute in the universe. The individual who knows and

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 313

²⁰² Moors, *op. cit.*, 1984, p. 194

understands the intelligible ideas, and hence the truth, would be wise. All this is, of course, very vividly illustrated by Socrates' account of the just soul as being *properly ordered* and therefore virtuous in the *Republic*.

Russell makes the connection between virtue and knowledge even stronger than Moors with his argument defining *virtue as rationality*. For Russell, virtue is the *rational* ordering of the soul which leads to happiness, self-mastery, and knowledge.²⁰³ God (the divine) is the rationality which similarly orders the universe.²⁰⁴ Virtue, then, is rationality because it puts irrational, inchoate matter into rational order. This ordering is good insofar as it brings "unlimited, inchoate matter into proper condition" – in this case Russell is referring both to the rationality which brought the universe into its ordered existence and the ordering of the "desires, emotions, feelings, and pleasures" that are characteristic of the soul.²⁰⁵ Thus the good, as Russell conceives of it, is rationality – and rationality is divine. Specifically, rationality according to Russell is likeness to God; and rationality orders the soul to become virtuous in the same way that it orders the universe. Here virtue is the end, and rationality or rational thought is the process needed to achieve that end. Rationality is good because it is divine and because it leads to the acquisition of true knowledge (the forms) which are divine themselves (which is what I have tried to suggest so far in this chapter).

In conclusion, a) if Socrates' contention in the *Protagoras* that the virtues are all wisdom (the unity of the virtues hypothesis) is true (which I suggested it is), then virtue *is* wisdom, b) rationality is good insofar as it helps us to achieve wisdom/virtue, and c) wisdom, also understood as the possession of knowledge, is good because it is divine. I think it is crucial to note, as McPherran does, that wisdom is not necessarily equal to or the *same* as the good. Wisdom, specifically, is the knowledge that brings about the

²⁰³ Russell, D.C. *op. cit.*, 2004, p. 243

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 242

²⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 247

good; it is the knowledge of goodness and how to produce it.²⁰⁶ And as Zuckert reminds us, our goal as humans is not just to acquire some knowledge of the truth, but obviously to ask *why* it is good. Specifically, “We have to ask not only what the beautiful is, but ultimately why it is also good”.²⁰⁷ Just as all that is true is not necessarily good, knowledge of the truth is not necessarily good. I argue here that there seems to be one last step that needs to be taken between possessing knowledge of the truth and the attainment of the good.

Specifically, wisdom seems to be the “last step” or the *bridge* between knowledge and the good, because wisdom directs knowledge toward the attainment of the good. As Socrates points out in the *Symposium*, we move toward the good by transitioning to a love of being and a love of the ideas. As we increase our knowledge of truth and start to commune with the eternal ideas, (the process described by Diotima to Socrates in Plato’s *Symposium*), (211a-c) we begin to “...love the beauty of soul in any given individual without regard to the body, but also to nurture and care for that soul, begetting virtues in that soul by conversing with it”.²⁰⁸ The final state of being wise comes when we are finally able to “...contemplate the beautiful in itself, which never fades or changes”, and presumably, to recognize the value and goodness of the eternal idea of beauty.²⁰⁹ Wisdom is, perhaps, best understood as the state of knowledge and of proper discernment – one can know what is true and judge it for its value and goodness.

Yet wisdom is still not a state of complete possession of knowledge. As humans, our knowledge is only ever partial and incomplete; pure and complete knowledge of all things in existence is the domain of the gods alone.²¹⁰ But as Zuckert explains, “We could not learn to speak or count if we did not have *some perception* of purely intelligible forms of being”.²¹¹ We are also capable of understanding that the

²⁰⁶ McPherran, M. *op cit.*, 2000, p. 314

²⁰⁷ Zuckert, C. *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 419

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 297

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 297

²¹⁰ *Symposium*, 204

²¹¹ Zuckert,, p. 834 (my italics).

intelligible is good and the unintelligible is bad. Thus our incomplete knowledge of the purely intelligible does form our sensible experience as humans; and despite never knowing the truth in full, we are still very capable of improving our “understanding of what is truly noble and good”.²¹² There is immense value simply in the attempt to possess knowledge of the truth. Zuckert writes, “We may never be able to understand, much less give order to the universe, but we can learn what we mortals most want and seek knowledge of that”.²¹³

This is very crucial for the account of Socratic piety that I wish to propose in this thesis (and that I will further explain in the next chapter). Indeed, it is the understanding of the knowledge we most *need* to pursue as humans that is crucial to our development of virtue and wisdom and to our recognition of the good. The first thing we learn about ourselves as humans when we begin down the path of trying to know, is that we know very little. This was what Socrates discovered when he began his philosophical journey, and when he began asking others about their assumed knowledge. The knowledge Socrates gained through this experience was knowledge of the human incapability of knowing anything at all, and our subsequent reliance as mortals on the divine. Insofar as we know anything at all, however incompletely, we are likening ourselves to the divine. And the ability to discern the good and the divine from that which is not is wisdom (or virtue) – as in the case of the courageous man who correctly discerns what is necessary to fear and what is not. We achieve both knowledge and wisdom (virtue) through recognition first that we as humans are not capable of possessing knowledge on our own, and second through acceptance that the only knowledge we *can* possess comes through communing with the divine – through the grace of the gods. In this way, the acquisition of knowledge is a process of seeking to know, or be *like*, the divine.

²¹² *Ibid*, p. 837

²¹³ *Ibid*, p. 862

V) The Good and Likeness to God

Russell acknowledges that Socrates refers to the good as being “likeness to god” but does not necessarily concede that this means that the good must be tied to the metaphysical idea of god in any meaningful way. Russell’s central argument is that god (the divine) be understood as synonymous with rationality in Plato. This means we can understand Plato’s Socrates’ arguments for the goodness of the divine as arguments for the goodness of rationality. Russell places Plato (and Socrates) in line with the Stoics in this way, as they similarly based their philosophy on the primacy of reason. Reason, Russell argues, is the “cause of everything”.²¹⁴ Imagining good as reason allows us to consider the good as being “valuable for its own sake” and not merely valuable for its connection to the divine (an entity which has assumed and presumably unexplained value).²¹⁵

Benitez, in “The Good or the Demiurge: Causation and the Unity of God in Plato”, further asserts that the good is reason.²¹⁶ And according to Benitez, the good can be understood as divine or at the very least, it can be understood as *a replacement for the divine*. Because the good is reason, it is thus “...to be seen as [the] efficient cause of the good things in the universe”.²¹⁷ In this case, the good is a first cause – taking on the role traditionally ascribed to the gods. And for Benitez, there can only ever be one first cause in the universe. Simply put, there is according to him not enough room in the universe for a good *and* a god.²¹⁸ Quite similarly, in *Plato’s Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues* Zuckert takes the position that the good is not god. However Zuckert does not maintain, as Benitez does, that the good is a first cause, or a maker or creator of things. For Zuckert, the good is a “necessary condition for knowledge and

²¹⁴ Russell, D.C. *op. cit.*, 2004, p. 247

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 260 - i.e. The divine is good because it is divine and it is divine because it is good.

²¹⁶ Benitez, E.E. (1995) “The Good or the Demiurge: Causation and the Unity of God in Plato.” *Apeiron* 28(2): 113-140, p. 137

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 118

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 118

being, although it itself is neither”.²¹⁹ Thus the good is neither a first cause nor is it an end destination. The divine, then, is the first cause of all things, and our goal as humans is to connect with it.

But here, in this connection with the good, the role of awe (and perhaps even a kind of worship?) is key. For instance, as Plato notes in a few of his dialogues and most famously in his *Theatetus*, wonder is “where philosophy begins and nowhere else”.²²⁰ And it does seem to be reasonable to suggest that we have here yet another connection between the philosophical experience of wonder and religious experience: in the experience of wonder and silent reverence. As both Paul Gooch (1996)²²¹ and Nightingale have emphasized in their respective work on Plato, “The philosopher who gazes upon the Forms contemplates divinity, an act replete with wonder and reverence”.²²² In our human attempt to possess some share of what is good forever, it is necessary for us to connect to and grasp some aspect of the eternal – be it eternity through the forms or through the gods.²²³ And in both cases, the significance of (silent) adoration and of awe cannot be underestimated in my view.²²⁴

In short, I have emphasized the fact that the eternal forms or ideas are fundamental to Socrates’ philosophy and that his account of the good and of the contemplative life underscore his belief in a realm of existence that is intelligible, unchanging, and true.²²⁵ These truths need not manifest themselves as the traditional metaphysical god or gods of popular religion, but in their absoluteness and immortality, they seem to possess deity-like attributes. Our desire as humans is to possess some share of these god-like characteristics ourselves, and we do this through recognition of and communion with these eternal forms.

²¹⁹ Zuckert, C. *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 358

²²⁰ *Theatetus*, 155d

²²¹ See Paul Gooch (1996) in his *Reflections on Jesus and Socrates, Word and Silence* New Haven: Yale University Press,

²²² Nightingale-Wilson, *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 169

²²³ *Symposium*, 208

²²⁴ I am not denying here that Socratic dialectic is chiefly tied to speech, to verbal exchange, but I think that one should not overlook the importance of quiet reflection and wonder. See Paul Gooch on this.

²²⁵ Zuckert, C. *op.cit.*, 2009, p. 416 see also *Symposium*, 479-480

What is interesting to note here is that despite the differing views interpreters take on whether Socrates was a deeply secular philosopher or not, most authors agree on the fairly evident notion that virtue is intimately connected to knowledge and reason, and that reason specifically is instrumental in bringing about the good.²²⁶ Reason, in this case, is perhaps best understood as the mental process or consistent system of thinking one must follow in order to acquire knowledge (i.e. understanding through logical reasoning, etc.) Reason is the trademark of philosophy, and philosophy, I have suggested (with others), presents itself as the surest pathway toward the attainment of the good and, what is more, the divine.

VI) Philosophy as Piety in the Search for the Good

In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates and Euthyphro search for the meaning of piety. The two fail to agree on an exact definition of the term, but they do seem to come to the consensus that piety is an important form of attention paid to the gods.²²⁷ And as Rabinowitz notes in “Platonic Piety: An Essay Toward the Solution of an Enigma”, without a firm definition of piety to work with following the conversation between Socrates and Euthyphro, we are left having to be satisfied with the descriptions of piety that end up appearing to satisfy to both men – or at least those descriptions of piety that escape Socrates’ criticism.²²⁸ To this end, piety defined as “the art ancillary to the performance of the gods’ chief function” presents itself as “the one definition in the entire dialogue that gets off scot free at Socrates’ hands”.²²⁹ Piety is said to be akin to the relationship between master and servant.²³⁰ The servant assists the master in his

²²⁶ Villa, D. *op. cit.*, 2001, p. 2

²²⁷ *Euthyphro*, 12d, 13c. See also Gooch (1996) on the importance of attention in philosophy and piety.

²²⁸ Rabinowitz, G.W. (1958) “Platonic Piety: An Essay toward the Solution of an Enigma.” 3(2): 108-120, p. 115

²²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 115

²³⁰ *Euthyphro*, 13c-d

task, but the servant cannot benefit his master as an equal. As humans and mortals, we cannot benefit or improve the gods, who are perfect and cannot be improved, but we can assist them in the same way the servant assists his master.²³¹ McPherran writes, “Obviously, then, since mere mortals cannot benefit gods in these ways, the virtue of piety cannot be a therapy of the gods”.²³² Rather, we *help* the gods in their task. McPherran thus concludes that “piety is that part of justice that is a service of humans to gods, assisting the gods in their task to produce their most beautiful product”.²³³ The connection between piety and justice is drawn throughout the *Euthyphro*, but never explicitly defined.²³⁴ But it seems reasonable to assert, as we noted in the first chapter, that piety might partially entail assisting the gods in their work of spreading wisdom (virtue) and the good among humankind.

Now, we know that the only way for humans to acquire wisdom or virtue is through the practice of philosophy according to Plato²³⁵, and this is because the soul properly orders itself through philosophy. The properly ordered soul cultivates wisdom, and it does this through rational thought. Specifically, it is the practice of questioning ideas and beliefs, the *dialectic*, which leads to the discovery of the truth and to the eventual attainment of the good. Insofar as philosophy (the dialectic) brings the good to humankind, philosophy and the dialectic are *divine*.²³⁶ Philosophy acts as a sort of bridge between mortal and immortal life – a role similar to the role given to *eros* by the priestess Diotima in the *Symposium*.²³⁷ When our *eros* is directed toward the truth, we desire to engage in the dialectic because the dialectic is

²³¹ McPherran, M. *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 302 see also *Euthyphro* 13c-d

²³² *Ibid*, p. 302

²³³ *Ibid*, p. 303

²³⁴ The relation between piety and justice will be further discussed in the third and final chapter.

²³⁵ On this, there is a great scholarly consensus obviously. See for instance Moors, *op. cit.*, 1984, p. 209, Zuckert (2009), p.743.

²³⁶ Anderson, D.E. *op. cit.*, 1967, p. 9 see also *Apology*, 29c-30b

²³⁷ *Symposium*, 202

the tool we need to uncover as much of the truth as we can as humans and mortals, and thus improve the condition of our souls.²³⁸

The chief means by which philosophy takes care of the soul is by improving the consistency of our accounts of morality and of judgement, and by deflating human hubris by undermining human presumptions to divine knowledge. Villa echoes this point, with his assertion that the goal of Socrates' philosophy was the "moral-improvement" of those who practiced and engaged in it.²³⁹ The means by which Socratic philosophy improves the moral condition is, for Villa, through awakening the individual's intellectual self. Once the individual begins to think about the beliefs he holds to be true, he can progress toward attaining moral integrity in his thoughts and deeds.²⁴⁰ As Zuckert writes of the individuals who engage in philosophy, "By examining their own opinions, discovering where their opinions contradicted each other or their own experience and desires, and then modifying their views accordingly, Socrates found that mortal human beings could move closer to something like knowledge".²⁴¹ And it is in that role that philosophy can help us admit the limits of our intellectual powers and thus, in turn, make us appreciate the help that the divine can play in our quest for wisdom.

So in short, I have suggested, with Zuckert and McPherran, that knowledge of our human limitations and of the truth (inasmuch as we can understand it) makes us virtuous because it deflates our hubris and nourishes a certain respect and wonder for the divine (through our knowledge that we cannot know what the gods know). It can also make us more virtuous by making our beliefs consistent with one another, and with our actions. When we get closer to a coherent and complete account of the nature of virtue, we come to understand just how the soul ought to be taken care of, and we can consistently know the right ways in which to think and behave. And McPherran is right to conclude that "*our* primary service

²³⁸ McPherran, M. *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 303 see also *Apology*, 32 and 38

²³⁹ Villa, D. *op. cit.*, 2001, p. 50

²⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 2001, p. 4

²⁴¹ Zuckert, C. *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 836 see also *Apology* 21c-d

to the gods – the one we are best situated and suited to perform is to help produce virtue *via* the protection and improvement of the human mind/soul.”²⁴² Philosophy is the chief way we can connect ourselves to the divine, and is thus the chief route to achieving the good, as Socrates suggests in the *Apology* for instance.²⁴³ *Virtue is the good specific to humankind*; and the pursuit of virtue through philosophy is an expression of piety; this is how we do the gods’ work. In short, genuine piety is philosophy and philosophy (chiefly through dialectic) is what brings about goodness (in the self and in others).

Zuckert rightly notes that, for Socrates, the highest calling in human life is the fostering and development of virtue in the souls of others.²⁴⁴ Indeed, the meaning of virtue can be found in the interaction of the purely sensible and the purely intelligible, and the ways in which the purely intelligible ideas, or forms, come to shape physical existence is through the virtues and virtuous action. Like other Plato scholars, Zuckert emphasizes the fact that Socrates tried to communicate his philosophy by his own example, through his deeds, his way of living and interacting with the world and with others.²⁴⁵ “The ‘philosophy’ he practiced”, Zuckert writes, “constituted a way of life he tried to communicate to others, more than a specific set of doctrines or arguments”.²⁴⁶ Interestingly Leo Strauss, in *The City and Man*, defines virtue as knowledge as well – although he avoids tying virtue or knowledge together with the gods or with piety.²⁴⁷ For Strauss, Platonic philosophy has *replaced* traditional piety – philosophy is *not* piety.²⁴⁸ Strauss does contend, however, that philosophy is concerned with the “complete good”.²⁴⁹

Despite viewing Socrates as a deeply secular philosopher, Strauss seems to agree with the notion shared by other interpreters of Plato that virtue is akin to the good, and that *engaging in philosophy can*

²⁴² McPherran, M. *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 303

²⁴³ *Apology*, 29c-30c

²⁴⁴ Zuckert, C. *op.cit*, 2004, p. 205

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 219

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 217

²⁴⁷ Strauss, L. *op. cit.*, 1964, p. 72

²⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 65

²⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 113

*lead to the good.*²⁵⁰ Indeed, this appears to be the end goal toward which all Socratic philosophy is directed. But one thing is missing in Strauss' account. As I have suggested in this chapter (and as will become clearer in the next), what Strauss fails to appreciate is that Socratic piety is also helpful for leading us (and others around us to the good). And it is for this reason that Plato considered piety to be of great significance for the city.

CHAPTER THREE – Socratic Piety in the City-State

As I noted in the introduction, the notion that piety is important enough to be thought of as a virtue, or indeed that the concept holds any meaningful weight in Socrates' philosophy at all, is a position seldom taken in scholarly discussions of Socratic thought. Indeed, Marlo Lewis is just one among the many who have insisted that the entire point of the *Euthyphro* is to demonstrate that piety is *not* a virtue.²⁵¹ This particular stance is not so difficult to understand in light of Euthyphro's explanation of piety: his poor articulation of the concept does not make piety seem virtuous. Euthyphro's understanding of piety is

²⁵⁰ Villa, D. *op. cit.*, 2001, p. 2 see also *Apology*, 30a-b

²⁵¹ Lewis, M. (1985) "An Interpretation of Plato's *Euthyphro*", in. *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 13: 33-65, p. 34. His entire piece is dedicated to understanding Socrates' discussion of piety in the *Euthyphro*.

exceedingly rigid and traditional, and quite unreflective. But as outlined in the first chapter of this thesis, a more philosophical account and practice of piety did exist alongside traditional religion in Ancient Greece. And the traditional piety espoused by Euthyphro in the dialogue of the same name does not reflect what seemed to be Socrates' own understanding of piety.

In this third, and final, chapter I will look closely at piety in the city as portrayed in the *Euthyphro* and the *Apology*. How does Euthyphro understand piety in relation to justice, and in relation to civil society in general? And how does Socrates' famous speech in the *Apology* help us understand his attitude toward piety in the city-state? In this chapter, I will rely on both the *Apology* and the *Euthyphro*, which deal specifically with piety and impiety, in an attempt to ascertain Socrates' attitudes about traditional piety and about the role of piety in the city. More importantly, I will ask: what is Socrates' own positive philosophy of piety in the state, and how important is piety in Socrates' ideal state?

Building on the previous chapter, I will argue in the following pages that piety is a fundamental part of the ideal city insofar as it: a) leads to the recognition of one's own individual limitations (through inspiring the acknowledgement of human limitations generally); and b) is necessary to the development of all the virtues. Because piety is a necessary element of the development of virtue, and because the good city-state can only exist when the citizens in it are virtuous, piety plays a necessary and fundamental role in Socrates' ideal state.

With this conclusion in mind, the third section of this chapter will consider the potential reasons behind Plato's decision *not* to include piety among the cardinal virtues enumerated as integral to the ideal state in the *Republic*. Does piety's omission from this dialogue (the dialogue that appears to deal most closely with Plato's account of the good city-state) override my hypothesis that piety is a necessary and important element of the ideal state? That is, why does justice figure so strongly in Socrates' discussion of the ideal state in the *Republic*, while piety gets nary a mention?

I. Piety and Justice in the *Euthyphro*

The discussion of piety's intersection with justice in the *Euthyphro* is a useful starting point toward understanding the role that piety played in the city-state in Ancient Athens. Euthyphro claims to know what piety is and to be religious himself, yet he is flouting conventional Athenian standards of piety and justice by bringing his own father to court for murder. Is Euthyphro placing justice before piety by ensuring that his father be suitably punished for his crime? Socrates presses Euthyphro for his thoughts on justice and piety in this dialogue in the hopes that the two men will come away from the discussion with a better understanding of these important concepts. Because justice deals with relationships between individuals, it takes a central position in discussions about the state and the ordering of people within it (we do know that justice is at the heart of the discussion of the kallipolis in the *Republic*, for example). So the *Euthyphro's* simultaneous treatment of piety and justice sheds important light on the place piety has in the city-state. If piety is a part of the larger category of justice and justice is a fundamental characteristic of a properly ordered state, for example, then piety must have a significant place in the properly ordered state as well. While it is clear that Euthyphro's definitions of piety and justice are not the same as those Socrates holds for himself, these definitions might be helpful for understanding the prevailing notions of justice and piety at the time in Athens. And as a result, through Socrates' reaction to Euthyphro's views, we might be able to get closer to Socrates' own ideas about piety in Ancient Athens as well.

The discussion in the *Euthyphro* is said to occur before Socrates is set to defend himself against the accusations of impiety that have been leveled against him, and for which he is facing a death sentence, in Athenian court. Euthyphro and Socrates meet by chance on the porch of the King Archon – the chief judge of Athens. Euthyphro is there because he wishes to see his father prosecuted for the murder of a

field labourer who had been working for his family.²⁵² Socrates is shocked to hear that Euthyphro wishes to prosecute his own father – prosecution of one’s close family is understood as impious in Athenian society. Socrates assumes that Euthyphro must be very sure of himself and of his piousness if he is bringing these serious charges to court; thus after Euthyphro tells Socrates about the accusation he is bringing against his father, Socrates asks: “... is your knowledge of religion and of things pious and impious so very exact, that, supposing the circumstances to be as you state them, you are not afraid lest you too may be doing an impious thing in bringing an action against your father?”²⁵³ In response, Euthyphro argues that he feels he knows enough about the nature of piety and impiety to be able to confidently and accurately understand which actions are properly pious and which are not. Specifically, he argues that his decision to prosecute his father is valid and pious because murder ought to be punished regardless of who committed it. Euthyphro is thus presented to us as a man with a fair amount of hubris, and this is contrasted throughout the dialogue with Socrates’ thoughtful humility.

Socrates asks Euthyphro to help him understand the nature of piety and of impiety in particular, as this is the charge that has been leveled against him, and Socrates suggests that any knowledge Euthyphro can give him about piety could potentially help him in his case. Euthyphro responds that piety is precisely what he is doing – prosecuting a man who is guilty of murder – fitting the punishment to the crime regardless of that man’s relation to himself.²⁵⁴ This definition of Euthyphro’s seems to muddle justice and piety. Bringing a person to justice for a crime committed is pious, and failing to do so is impious.²⁵⁵ But Euthyphro goes on to say that impiety is also a crime worthy of punishment itself.²⁵⁶ Euthyphro’s confusion about justice is further demonstrated by his recounting of Zeus’ murder of his father, the Titan Cronos. “For do not men regard Zeus as the best and most righteous of the gods? –and

²⁵² *Euthyphro*, 4

²⁵³ *Euthyphro*, 4d

²⁵⁴ *Euthyphro*, 5d-6a

²⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 5d

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 6a

yet they admit that he bound his father (Cronos) because he wickedly devoured his sons, and that he too had punished his father (Uranus) for a similar reason, in a nameless manner.”²⁵⁷ Euthyphro seems to reason here that what the gods do is pious, and if pious, also just – in this way, melding the two virtues into one.

Socrates is quick to respond that he does not subscribe to these tales of the gods, noting that his unwillingness to believe in the popular traditional stories may be part of what has gotten him charged with impiety.²⁵⁸ Here, Socrates makes specific reference to the stories propagated by the poets about the gods – the stories that see the gods fighting and warring with one another and with their creation. Euthyphro contends, in response, that he believes all of these stories of the gods to be true, along with “things more wonderful still, of which the world is in ignorance”.²⁵⁹ However Socrates continues to press Euthyphro for a clear definition of piety. Specifically, Socrates requests a definition that reflects the “nature of the idea” and “the general idea which makes all pious things to be pious”. What is it about Euthyphro’s decision to prosecute his father, or Zeus’ decision to murder his father, that is pious? Is a thing pious because the gods do it? Or is it pious for some other reason? “Do you not recollect” Socrates asks Euthyphro, “that there was one idea which made the impious impious, and the pious pious?”²⁶⁰

Socrates here asks Euthyphro to identify that strain of piousness that exists in all pious acts, and is missing from impious ones. To this Euthyphro responds simply that piety is “that which is dear to the gods, and impiety is that which is not dear to them”.²⁶¹ Socrates finds a flaw in this definition of Euthyphro’s as well however, noting that Euthyphro’s gods seem to disagree about what is dear to them and what is not. If the gods agreed on all things, why would they quarrel so frequently and so violently?

²⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 6a

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 6a

²⁵⁹ *Euthyphro*, 6b

²⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 6d

²⁶¹ *Ibid*, 6d

Indeed the gods, Socrates responds, “...have differences of opinion, as you say, about good and evil, just an unjust, honourable and dishonourable: there would have been no quarrels among them, if there had been no such differences – would there now?”²⁶² Because the gods seem to hold different ideas about those things that are dear, there can be no understanding of piety as that which is “dear to the gods” since the gods share no consensus on what is dear to them. How then can the gods be united in holding that Euthyphro’s conduct in charging his father with murder is pious? The gods are every bit as likely to disagree over what is pious as they are to disagree over anything else. Even if Euthyphro could show beyond a doubt that the gods agree that his actions against his father are pious, how does this help Socrates understand the larger idea of piety? Here Socrates reiterates his insistence that Euthyphro show him something consistent about the *nature* of piety that holds true in all cases. This is Socrates’ attempt to once again separate the idea of piety from its specific incarnations, and to help Euthyphro understand the difference between the idea behind the concept and its manifestations in daily life. In short, the idea must be separated from the action.

In order to advance their conversation, Socrates considers the position that the gods may agree on some things despite their numerous differences – assuming that those things they agree ought to be held dear are pious, and those things they agree ought to be disliked are impious. Socrates appears to do this to show Euthyphro that even when the gods are agreed about what is dear to them, we are still unable to know why the gods agree to hold these things dear. As Socrates explains, “The point which I should first wish to understand is whether the pious or holy is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved of the gods”.²⁶³

That is, does the idea of holiness or piety precede the gods – or do the gods precede the idea? Do the gods choose what to love, and thus the object of their affection becomes pious? Or, is the pious

²⁶² *Ibid*, 7d

²⁶³ *Euthyphro*, 10a

already pious and the gods love it because it is so? Euthyphro struggles to understand Socrates' meaning here, and is unable to answer the question on his own. Interestingly, Socrates succeeds in pushing the discussion forward by suggesting to Euthyphro that the pious is loved because it is pious, its being loved is not what makes it pious. Its essence precedes the action of its being loved. As Socrates elaborates, "I mean to say that the holy has been acknowledged by us to be loved of God because it is holy, not to be holy because it is loved".²⁶⁴ Thus that which is loved is loved because it has a quality – an inherent goodness – which makes it deserving of love, "neither does it suffer because it is in a state of suffering, but it is in a state of suffering because it suffers".²⁶⁵ The pious (the holy) is "of a kind to be loved".²⁶⁶ Therefore, Euthyphro is merely stating an attribute of the pious when he declares that it is loved by the gods – and his definition of piety is not a real definition at all. The question Socrates wishes to answer is *why* the pious is of a kind to be loved; this would give us, he thinks, a definition of the concept. Again, we see Socrates ask Euthyphro to consider the idea of piety, or holiness, and again, Euthyphro fails to understand Socrates' meaning.

Probably in part as a result of Euthyphro's consistent failure to understand Socrates' meaning, Socrates decides to present his idea in another light. This time, Socrates asks Euthyphro to consider piety as it relates to justice. As Socrates tells Euthyphro, "I will myself endeavour to show you how you might instruct me in the nature of piety; and I hope that you will not grudge me your labour. Tell me, then, - Is not that which is pious necessarily just?"²⁶⁷ Euthyphro readily agrees that all which is pious is also just. Following this, Socrates continues by asking Euthyphro "And is, then, all which is just pious? or, is that which is pious all just, but that which is just, only in part and not all, pious?"²⁶⁸ Socrates here seems to

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 10c

²⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 10b

²⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 11a

²⁶⁷ *Euthyphro*, 11d

²⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 12a

embrace the view that the pious is only a *part* of the just in his question to Euthyphro, although this is left in some ambiguity.²⁶⁹

When Euthyphro fails to understand (yet again) Socrates' question, Socrates attempts to clarify his statement about the relation between justice and piety by giving Euthyphro examples of analogous relations between different concepts. Socrates' efforts to better explain the partial/whole relation between piety and justice (piety is a part of the greater whole of justice) suggest that this is the position Socrates espouses concerning the relationship between piety and justice. What is clearer however is that Socrates is convinced that Euthyphro has something to gain by understanding piety as an aspect of the larger category of justice. And Socrates appears to believe that piety is one element of justice when he says, "That was the sort of question which I meant to raise when I asked whether the just is always the pious, or the pious always the just; and whether there may not be justice where there is not piety; for justice is the more extended notion of which piety is only a part. Do you dissent?"²⁷⁰

Euthyphro agrees that piety is a part of justice, and Socrates then suggests that they seek to uncover what part of justice piety is. Euthyphro responds that "Piety, or holiness, Socrates, appears to me to be that part of justice which attends to the gods, as there is the other part of justice which attends to men."²⁷¹ Importantly, this definition of Euthyphro's is accepted and uncontested by Socrates. Socrates does, however, ask that Euthyphro elaborate on the kind of attention the pious give to the gods, in order that both men may come to an understanding of the exact nature of piety. Attention given to the gods by men and women, for example, cannot do for the gods what it may do for other men and women, or for

²⁶⁹ Whether or not this statement indicates Socrates' positive belief that piety is one part of justice has been a subject of some controversy in the literature (see for instance Cobb 1989). If piety is not identical to justice, but is instead only a part, can the virtues be identical? What, then, does this say about the theory of the unity of the virtues put forward by Socrates in the *Protagoras*? McPherran (2000) outlines this debate quite well in his "Piety, Justice, and the Unity of Virtue" – and he makes the argument that Socrates' assertion that piety is one aspect of justice can co-exist logically alongside Socrates' position in the *Protagoras* that the virtues are one and the same.

²⁷⁰ *Euthyphro*, 12c

²⁷¹ *Ibid*, 12d

animals and things. Namely, the attention we give to the gods does not improve them. Men and women might attend to the gods, but it can only be the kind of attention that serves and never that which improves. To this end, humans attend to the gods in much the same way that a servant attends to a master – we do the gods’ work to enable them to achieve their desired goal. But what is the gods’ work? And what is their desired end? Socrates asks Euthyphro to tell him “about the art which ministers to the gods: what work does that help to accomplish? For you must surely know if, as you say, you are of all men living the one who is best instructed in religion.”²⁷²

But here, again, Euthyphro does not understand Socrates’ meaning. Rather than admitting that he does not understand, Euthyphro shirks Socrates’ question, responding that the gods’ works are “many and fair” while failing to specify what the nature of these works are. When Euthyphro is once again pressed by Socrates to elaborate, he responds that the relationship between the gods and humankind is transactional – much like a business relationship between people. Men and women attend to the gods in ways that please them – for piety is nothing to the gods “but tributes of honour; and I was just now saying, what pleases them”.²⁷³ Socrates asks Euthyphro if this means that humans act only to give pleasure to the gods but not to benefit them in any way or offer them anything that helps them with their work. Here Euthyphro’s responses become particularly muddled, contradictory, and unclear – and he promptly leaves the discussion with the excuse that he is “in a hurry, and must go now”.²⁷⁴ Thus, the conversation comes to a close and Socrates laments the fact that the two men did not reach a consensus about the nature of piety.

i) *Piety and the city in the Euthyphro*

²⁷² *Ibid*, 13c

²⁷³ *Euthyphro*, 15a

²⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 15d

The discussion of piety in the *Euthyphro* obviously says a lot about Euthyphro's particular understanding of piety (more than about Socrates' at least). Euthyphro justifies the piousness of his decision to charge his father with murder by pointing out that Zeus murdered his father when his father wronged him. There is no reasoning or reliance on principle or morality behind his justification here – his argument is based simply on his belief that the gods punished members of their families when they felt they deserved punishment. Ostensibly, Euthyphro believes Zeus punished his father for an injustice committed, and therefore that this punishment was both just and deserved. But when he is pressed to define justice, Euthyphro is equally as stumped as he was when he was asked to define piety. Importantly, Euthyphro's view of the gods as beings who murder their fathers and fight amongst one another does not align with Socrates' view of the gods as just and good. (Note here that justice for Euthyphro is manifested primarily in the actions, the deeds of the gods.)

Thus for Euthyphro whatever the gods do is both just and pious by the sheer fact of their doing it, but it has no *reason* (apart from the fact that the gods do it) for being so. Piety is whatever is loved by the gods, but it is not in itself deserving of love. Nor is justice just because it is just in its *essence* – it is just simply because the gods do it, because the gods support it, or because the gods love it. Justice and piety do not precede the gods; the gods precede these concepts and determine them based on what they do and what they like. For Euthyphro, then, there is no necessary connection between the just and the pious apart from what the gods do and love. Phrased differently, there is no way for humans to understand what is just or pious aside from what the gods do – and their actions appear, in many cases, to be arbitrary. As McPherran rightly observes, however, for Socrates the greatest significance is placed on the mental state that underlies the action itself – an unjust person can perform a just act, but the action alone does not make him just.²⁷⁵ What we just saw is that the mental state underlying a deed does not appear to be

²⁷⁵ McPherran, M. *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 311. See also *Republic* IV 441-442 for a discussion of virtue (justice) as a state of the soul.

important to Euthyphro, who does not mention the existence of any consistent mental state behind the actions he describes the gods engaging in. Indeed, when pressed to identify anything that is consistent about or descriptive of piety or justice, Euthyphro fails. For Socrates, the internal difference behind a just or pious action exists even in the soul – the individual with the properly-aligned soul can only truly be said to be just.

The gods that Euthyphro describes to Socrates align with the gods that Mikalson describes as the traditional gods of cult/state and the gods of the poets, in that they are not just themselves nor are they overly concerned with justice among humankind.²⁷⁶ One could easily see these gods of Euthyphro's being swayed to excuse unjust behaviour by bribes and tributes of honour offered to them by the rich and powerful. Indeed, as Mikalson notes, the popular gods of the time had no great concern for justice among humans: "the gods of practiced religion were concerned with human justice only so far as their own prerogatives were threatened".²⁷⁷ As such, "crimes such as theft, embezzlement, assault, rape, and so forth did not concern these gods unless the crime included some act of 'impiety.'"²⁷⁸

Euthyphro appears to subscribe to this fairly common and traditional account of the gods when he asserts that piety is based on tributes of honour and doing what pleases the gods, and that the relationship between gods and men operates like a business relationship between people.²⁷⁹ For Euthyphro, failing to please the gods – by failing to adequately honour them or imitate their behaviour – is considered impious in a way that committing crimes against men and women is not. As Cobb suggests, in Euthyphro's mind, the justness of the act seems not to matter so long as the act is pious, and the act is pious if the gods have done it themselves or if the gods are said to condone it.²⁸⁰ As such, Euthyphro can

²⁷⁶ I have indicated that in my chapter one.

²⁷⁷ Mikalson, J. *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 204

²⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 204

²⁷⁹ *Euthyphro*, 15-16

²⁸⁰ Cobb, W. *op. cit.*, 1989, p. 7

gain no insight into piety from Socrates' appeal to justice, because Euthyphro's gods are not just themselves, nor does piety have any meaningful connection to justice for them. For Socrates one cannot be pious without being just as well – the two virtues are inextricable.²⁸¹

In the *Apology*, Socrates gives a defense of his own piety, and in this dialogue we see a piety that places the virtues (justice among them) above all things. Conversely, Euthyphro seems to view neither piety nor justice as virtues – that is, as manifestations of the good that have value in and of themselves. We know from Socrates' discussion of the virtues in the *Republic* (as outlined in the previous chapter of this thesis) that justice acts as a mediating virtue – the virtue, as Moors explains, “which identifies the correct application of the other virtues”.²⁸² The mediating, organizational role justice has in relation to the other virtues may be one of the reasons behind Socrates' decision to employ it both in the *Euthyphro* and in the *Republic* as a tool to make the other virtues more understandable. Certainly, Socrates appears to have tried bringing justice into the conversation when Euthyphro was having trouble understanding his questions, seemingly as a way to make it easier for Euthyphro to define and explain piety (naturally a more abstract and thus difficult concept to understand because it deals with the intangible and the supernatural). And because piety is something like justice, a sort of justice that is specifically directed toward the gods, relating it to justice makes the concept easier to recognize.²⁸³

It is clear that Euthyphro possesses no real understanding of justice – and so is at a loss to understand piety as an extension of justice, or as an idea that is similar to justice. Indeed, gods that murder and fight, and that care little (if at all) for the well-being of their creation are *not* just. As a result, Euthyphro fails to understand justice-as-virtue in the same way Socrates does. Indeed, the philosophic concept of *virtue*, generally, appears to elude Euthyphro entirely. Socrates elaborates on the virtues in the *Apology*,

²⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 4

²⁸² Moors, K. *op. cit.*, 1984, p. 209

²⁸³ Vlastos, G. *op. cit.*, 1972, p. 421

and his famous speech is a natural segue from his discussion on piety with Euthyphro. In the *Apology*, we see firsthand how justice and piety relate, as they are both played out in Socrates' life in his defense on trial against charges of impiety.

II. Piety in the *Apology*

Socrates' speech in the *Apology* directly follows his discussion with Euthyphro on the porch of the King Archon. Socrates' urgency in wanting to understand the meaning of piety is a result of the impending trial against him, where his fellow Athenians are charging him with impiety and with corrupting the youth. Socrates begins by telling the court that he will speak to them in his "accustomed manner" – without care for rhetoric or fancy prose style.²⁸⁴ "Never mind the manner, which may or may not be good;" Socrates tells the court, "but think only of the truth of my words, and give heed to that: let the speaker speak truly and the judge decide justly".²⁸⁵ By saying this, Socrates hopes to persuade his audience that he may convince them of his innocence in as just a process as possible – based on what he is saying rather than how he is saying it. This separates Socrates from the sophists and great orators and politicians who were popular at the time (but one could also argue that there is a bit of false modesty and irony here).

Following this disclaimer of sorts about the manner in which he would like to give his defense, Socrates chooses to address each accusation in turn, beginning with the accusation that he is a philosopher who speculates about the heavens and the earth, and "who made the worse appear the better cause".²⁸⁶ Here, the accusation leveled against Socrates is meant to portray him as a natural philosopher – arguing against the traditional religious ordering of the heavens and the earth, and arguing against the existence of the gods. As Socrates argues, however, he has "nothing to do with physical

²⁸⁴ *Apology*, 17d

²⁸⁵ *Apology*, 18a

²⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 18b

speculations”, and therefore this accusation against him is unfounded.²⁸⁷ Second, Socrates wishes to defend himself against the accusation that he is a teacher and a sophist who takes money from those he instructs. Socrates declares that he cannot charge money to teach, because he himself knows nothing worth teaching.

How did Socrates come to develop such a terrible reputation among Athenians? Socrates declares here that his “evil fame” has come as a result of “a certain sort of wisdom which I possess”.²⁸⁸ This wisdom is the knowledge given to him by the Oracle at Delphi, who declared that “there was no man wiser” than Socrates.²⁸⁹ Socrates is baffled by this because he knows that he is not wise – but he also tells his accusers that as this declaration comes from a god, he knows it is not a lie. For a god “cannot lie; that would be against his nature” (a belief that, I note, is consistent with the portraits of the gods offered in the *Republic* (see for instance Book I, 382a-383a)).²⁹⁰ Because Socrates knows that he knows nothing, and because he believes in the truth of the Oracle’s message, he sets out to uncover the meaning behind this “riddle” told to him by the Oracle. He explains to his accusers that his quest to understand the Oracle’s meaning motivated him to speak with those individuals considered wisest in society. Socrates states that he first spoke with an eminent politician, and found that while the politician thought himself wise, Socrates did not. As Socrates tells the court,

When I began to talk with him, I could not help thinking that he was not really wise, although he was thought wise by many, and still wiser by himself; and thereupon I tried to explain to him that he thought himself wise, but was not really wise; and the consequence was that he hated me, and his enmity was shared by several who were present and heard me.²⁹¹

²⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 19c

²⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 20b

²⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 21a

²⁹⁰ *Apology*, 21b

²⁹¹ *Ibid*, 21c

Despite the hostility of this reaction from the politician and from others who were subject and witness to Socrates' questioning, Socrates declares that he continued questioning those around him – particularly those who thought themselves wise. As he tells his accusers, “Then I went to one man after another, being not unconscious of the enmity which I provoked, and I lamented and feared this: But necessity was laid upon me, - the word of God, I thought, ought to be considered first”.²⁹² Socrates tells his audience that he was aware of the enemies he was creating, but he was willing to place the command of god before anything else. Socrates thus recounts how he continued his mission to seek out wisdom by next approaching the philosophers, then the poets, then the artisans in the community – none of whom were able to convince him that they possessed any real wisdom, yet all thinking they were wise. Socrates tells how he realized from this search that only god is wise²⁹³, and that true wisdom does not exist among men.²⁹⁴ Socrates' reputation among Athenians is a result of his questioning the wise and discounting their claims to wisdom as well as a result of those (the young in particular, who were impressed by Socrates) who chose to imitate his style of questioning and continued to find for themselves that many who claimed to be wise were not. Often humiliated by Socrates' exposure of their ignorance, those who Socrates has questioned,

...in order that they may not appear to be at a loss, they repeat the ready-made charges which are used against all philosophers about teaching things up in the clouds and under the earth, and having no gods, and making the worse appear the better cause; for they do not like to confess that their pretence of knowledge has been detected.²⁹⁵

Socrates, then, holds that these charges have been brought against him spuriously by those who have been wounded by his mission to find true wisdom among men – a mission given to him by god, no less. What is being labeled “impiety” is, in fact, just the opposite. Socrates is on a mission to do what he

²⁹² *Ibid*, 21d

²⁹³ Once again, this is a view consistent with the accounts of wisdom and of the gods presented in the *Republic*.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 23a

²⁹⁵ *Apology*, 23c-d

believes the god has asked of him – leaving him with “no time to give to any public matter of interest or to any concern of my own, but I am in utter poverty by reason of my devotion to the god”.²⁹⁶ No political or public matter (at least, ‘political’ here understood in the narrow, more traditional sense of the term)²⁹⁷ is of more importance than this divine quest; indeed, Socrates even lives in poverty as a result of it.

Socrates next defends himself against the accusation brought upon him by Meletus, who charges Socrates as being a “doer of evil, who corrupts the youth; and who does not believe in the gods of the state, but has other new divinities of his own”.²⁹⁸ For his defense, Socrates engages Meletus and asks him to better outline his accusations against Socrates. Meletus recants his original position under questioning, and reclaims that Socrates does not create new divinities, but instead corrupts the young by teaching them to forsake the gods altogether. Socrates takes issue with Meletus’ waffling on the charges he is bringing against Socrates – for how can Socrates be both atheist and, at the same time, worshipping new gods? How can Socrates believe in demi-gods without also believing in gods? Socrates claims, in his defense, that Meletus’ charges have been fabricated as a way to charge Socrates with something when he has done nothing, and his accusations are nonsense. As such, Socrates tells his audience that he will not deign to defend or excuse himself too ardently from these charges. Socrates knows that what really angers his accusers is his practice of philosophy in Athens and the extent to which he has questioned the wisdom, and exposed the ignorance, of many powerful Athenians. For this, Socrates refuses to apologize.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 23b

²⁹⁷ Indeed, as I will indicate later in this chapter, Socrates’ devotion to soul-craft (to his own soul and that of others) is, in important respects, to be considered a highly public, political matter. It may not entail serving on juries or on the Council (which, we should note, Socrates *has* done), but it is still in my view an act of citizenship. Undoubtedly, both the historical Socrates and Plato’s Socrates did challenge the *traditional* conception of the term ‘public’ and ‘political’; they both sought to redefine citizenship in terms of education and soul-craft. And it is precisely because piety is said to play a role in this soul-craft that I argue in my thesis that it is of great significance for the city.

²⁹⁸ *Apology*, 24b

Certainly, Socrates argues, he will never express regret over having philosophized in the manner which he did. And Socrates here tells his accusers that if they give him the chance to be pardoned provided he agrees to stop practicing philosophy, he will decline. For “I shall obey God rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy”.²⁹⁹ Socrates explains that he views his role as important in the *polis* because he draws attention to the importance of wisdom and truth over “money and honour and reputation” – those false idols worshiped too often in the state of Athens.³⁰⁰ Socrates, in contrast, has been trying to tell his fellow citizens about the importance of virtue and the improvement of the soul. This task of enlightening those he comes into contact with is especially important in the case of his fellow Athenians, “inasmuch as they are my brethren”.³⁰¹ Socrates’ philosophy, he explains, is fundamental to the proper working of the state. “For know that this is the command of God; and I believe that no greater good has ever happened in the state than my service to the God.”³⁰² In short, there are good reasons to believe that Socrates regards his philosophizing to be of paramount political, as well as religious, importance.

Socrates tells his accusers that if they choose to punish him for his philosophy, they will not be harming Socrates as much as they will be injuring themselves. Punishing Socrates for doing what is god’s will is akin to acting against god, and this is grave. Importantly, Socrates here states that he believes he has been “given to the state by God”.³⁰³ “I am that gadfly which God has attached to the state, and all day long and in all places am always fastening upon you, arousing and persuading and reproaching you.”³⁰⁴

²⁹⁹ *Apology*, 29c

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 29d

³⁰¹ *Ibid*, 30a

³⁰² *Ibid*, 30a

³⁰³ *Apology*, 31a. Naturally, one could suggest that we cannot take Socrates at his word here, that perhaps Socrates uses these terms simply because this is the way one would have been expected to speak to a jury at the time. But I have suggested at various points in the thesis that assuming that Socrates may not be completely insincere in the *Apology* when he mentions the gods and his piety does not do violence to so much more that we are invited to take seriously about Socrates, in other dialogues of Plato.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 31a

The proof of Socrates accepting this mission for no other reason than it was given to him by god is evidenced, he declares, by his lack of remuneration of any kind for the work he has done with the people of Athens. Indeed, he has lived his life in poverty in order to carry out this philosophic mission he has been given.³⁰⁵ If his accusers choose to put him to death for his mission, they will be robbing themselves of this “gadfly” that has been sent to waken them from their sleep – “and then you would sleep on for the remainder of your lives” Socrates cautions his audience, “unless God in his care of you sent you another gadfly.”³⁰⁶

Socrates’ poverty is a necessary component of his philosophy because, he argues, he has been divinely instructed to stay out of political life. The divine voice that Socrates refers to as his *daimonion* forbade him from participating in public life, and with good reason – as Socrates tells his accusers that he could have effected no positive change,

for the truth is, that no man who goes to war with you or any other multitude, honestly striving against the many lawless and unrighteous deeds which are done in a state, will save his life; he who will fight for the right, if he would live even for a brief space, must have a private station and not a public one.³⁰⁷

Because Socrates refuses to alter his message according to the whims of the masses, he believes he would not have lasted long in a public role before invariably offending his fellow Athenians and being punished or killed. Indeed, the current charges being laid against him are proof of this. Socrates tells his audience that he would not have survived as long as he has if he had “led a public life” putting justice and virtue ahead of all other things at the same time. Here Socrates gives important insight into the role he feels his philosophy plays in the city, and he suggests that philosophy can perhaps affect the most change

³⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 31b

³⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 31b

³⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 31d-32a

when it is carried out privately rather than publicly.³⁰⁸ Now that Socrates is facing death as a result of his philosophy, he refuses to pander to the emotions of his audience in an attempt to save his life. On the contrary, Socrates tells the court that he will present his case in as reasonable and dignified a manner as possible. There is no piety, Socrates argues, in trying to convince the judge of your case by engendering pity in others. Before ending his defense, Socrates once again re-affirms his belief in the gods, “and in a sense higher than that in which any of my accusers believe in them”.³⁰⁹

After Socrates’ defense the dialogue breaks, and we learn that time has elapsed and that Socrates has been found guilty of the charges set out against him, with death being proposed as the penalty. Socrates laments this finding, but does not attempt to change it. Socrates tells the court that he has lived honourably, with no care for “wealth, and family interests, and military offices, and speaking in the assembly, and magistracies, and plots, and parties”. Indeed, Socrates declares, he was “really too honest a man to be a politician and live”.³¹⁰ Thus, Socrates once again affirms his decision to pursue his philosophy in private conversation with others, in such a way as to “do the greatest good privately to *every one of you*”.³¹¹ And through private conversation (which, we can gather from the latest comment, are considered to be numerous), Socrates argues that he tried to tell his fellow citizens about the due they owe to the city-state; to tell them that each individual ought to put their own private interests behind those of the state and to care for their soul, all for the good of the city.

Socrates accepts his death penalty because he sees no reason to believe that there is any evil in death. A death sentence is preferable to Socrates over a punishment that would have him stop practicing philosophy – this would be a certain evil, where death is uncertain and unknown. “The difficulty, my

³⁰⁸ *Apology*, 32d. One could also consider several passages from the *Republic* and from the *Gorgias* to comfort this position. In fact, numerous Plato dialogues dramatize this very thing – with Plato’s Socrates speaking to a fairly small group of people in the private homes of important Athenians.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 35c-d

³¹⁰ *Apology*, 36b

³¹¹ *Ibid*, 36c; my italics

friends,” he tells the court, “is not to avoid death, but to avoid unrighteousness”.³¹² Socrates is comforted as well by the fact that his *daimonion* has made no sign of opposition to any of the events transpiring – this is a sign that things are proceeding as they ought to, and for the overall good.³¹³ As Socrates explains at the end of his speech, the *daimonion*’s silence in this case is “an intimation that what has happened to me is a good, and that those of us who think that death is an evil are in error. For the customary sign would surely have opposed me had I been going to evil and not to good”.³¹⁴

i) *Piety and the State in the Apology*

The importance of justice, both specifically for Socrates in his trial and generally as an attribute of gods and men, is a recurrent theme of Socrates’ speech in the *Apology*. We noted above that Socrates begins his defense by telling the court that he endeavours to speak as plainly as possible so as not to overshadow the truth of his case with rhetoric and fancy prose-style. In this way Socrates entreats his judges to decide his fate justly and based on the merits of his case, and those who are listening to value the truth and not the style of his speech.³¹⁵ That Socrates hopes for a just verdict above all else is evidenced by his decision to give his defense in as plain a manner as possible rather than stir the emotions of the judges through an impassioned, pitiful plea for his life – even if this is likely to win him his freedom.³¹⁶

More important still is Socrates’ contention in the *Apology* that the gods themselves are just. Justice is a virtue among men and women because the gods value justice. Socrates, for example, believes in the truth of the message given to him by the oracle at Delphi because, as he tells the court, it is against

³¹² *Ibid*, 39b

³¹³ *Ibid*, 40b-c

³¹⁴ *Ibid*, 40b-c

³¹⁵ *Apology*, 18a

³¹⁶ *Ibid*, 35c

the gods' nature to lie.³¹⁷ Men and women, therefore, ought to value justice (along with the other virtues) for the same reasons the gods do. Insofar as any man or woman is able to foster the development of justice in their nature they are becoming like to the gods, and in this way become dear to the gods.³¹⁸ The gods value the virtues because they are good and worthy of being valued, and when an individual does the same he too is recognizing the good inherent in these virtues.³¹⁹

As noted in chapter one, the justness of Socrates' gods is a significant deviation from the traditional understanding of the gods of state and cult, and from the gods of the poets. Indeed, this may be a reason behind Socrates' declaration that his belief in the gods is "in a sense higher than that in which any of my accusers believe in them".³²⁰ The gods are loved because worthy of love – they are not loved because they have power or strength or wealth. Socrates declares numerous times in his defense that he has chosen not to value power and wealth, and that the gods do not value them either. Because Socrates' gods value justice, human justness wins favour with the gods in a way it would not have before in traditional religion, and in a way it did not for Euthyphro.

When the gods are just (as they are not for Euthyphro), a man or woman *needs* to be just in order to please the gods. The concern the gods have for justice among men and women turns naturally into concern for the state (the state being, after all, the structure that governs individual lives), and for the justness of the state. Socrates tells the court that he has been sent by god to cleanse the city-state of its reliance on "money and honour and reputation".³²¹ He has been given to Athens as a gadfly, sent to pique men and women into questioning existing attitudes about honour and virtue and wisdom. Socrates does this through the dialectic – through questioning and challenging existing power structures and those who

³¹⁷ *Ibid*, 21b

³¹⁸ Mikalson, J. *op.cit.*, 2005, p. 197

³¹⁹ *Apology*, 30a-b, see also *Protagoras*, 313a-b

³²⁰ *Apology*, 35c-d

³²¹ *Apology*, 29d

maintain them. Thus the work the gods wish to see done is the propagation of virtue (justice) and wisdom in the city-state, and philosophy (through Socrates), is the chosen means. As noted in chapter two, Socrates' brand of philosophy has as its goal the attainment of wisdom (virtue), and while humankind may never be fully capable of possessing wisdom, the attempted attainment of it through the practice of philosophy properly aligns the soul toward the good. The development of virtue in the individual souls of the citizenry, then, appears to be a necessary condition of justice in the state – as sending Socrates to encourage the development of virtue among citizens is the gods' chosen means of achieving their end. Socrates tells the court in his defense that if they choose to kill him or send him away, they will be disobeying the gods, and the gods may not send another like him to help the state again.³²²

Socrates appears to accept this mission to act as a gadfly in the state in part precisely *because* it has been given to him by god. The legitimacy of the task indeed could be said to be bolstered by the mere fact that it is god-given. And Socrates' reliance on the gods, in particular on his personal *daimonion*, for guidance in his actions vis-à-vis the state is another recurring theme in his speech to the court in the *Apology*. This is important, because Socrates' avowed motivation to act to help the state does not seem to be presented in the *Apology* as inspired out of his own concern for the happiness of the people or the success of Athens, but because he has been told by the god that this is what he ought to be doing. Socrates' commitment to this cause and to the god's orders is so complete that he has lived a life of poverty as a result, and is willing to go to his death before he is willing to stop pursuing his philosophic mission. Socrates incites the wrath of many powerful elites in Athens through his elenctic questioning, but he refuses to abandon philosophy.³²³

And if undermining the assumed wisdom of the state's highest and most respected officials undermines the legitimacy of the state of Athens, Socrates seems not to mind. As Blanchard suggests,

³²² *Ibid*, 31a-c

³²³ *Apology*, 21d

Socrates is “either unaware of or indifferent to the effect that his investigations will have on families and cities. His preference for clarity over consensus thus threatens to undermine the very foundations of political life”.³²⁴ Socrates has indeed made many powerful enemies as a result of his philosophy – and his boldness in questioning Athenian elites is not abated by fear of punishment –as Socrates tells the court that he would rather die than stop philosophizing. But this does not mean that Socrates disagrees with the idea of the state, generally, or that he was even a threat to Athens in reality. Socrates, for example, does not defy the laws of the city-state of Athens even though he may disagree with them.³²⁵ He goes willingly to his death when his judges vote in favour of his execution.³²⁶ Further, Socrates tells his judges that he believes he has been sent by god to *help* the city-state – to teach Athenians about true wisdom and virtue. Importantly, however, wisdom and virtue do not exist in the minds of men and women – they exist only with the divine. Thus if any man or woman wishes to follow Socrates’ philosophy they must necessarily renounce (or at the very least, strenuously challenge) their existing knowledge – an extreme act of humility that is likely to be unattractive to most – in particular, those who enjoy positions of power in the city-state. This is a fundamental element of Socrates’ piety, and of his philosophy generally. The emphasis in the Socratic dialectic is on asking questions and seeking knowledge – not on making strong, definite claims and believing oneself to be wise. Indeed, we know that the Socratic approach to gaining knowledge and wisdom is in first admitting that you have none.

Yet Socrates appears to believe that this philosophic mindset need not be anathema to a well-ordered state; in fact it appears that he thinks it can exist inside a state where the development of virtue is encouraged and contemplation and philosophy are celebrated. This is evidenced by Socrates’ admission that the god has sent him to help the city-state, not destroy it.³²⁷ Socrates’ mission to foster and cultivate

³²⁴ Blanchard, K. *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 423

³²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 424. See also *Apology*, 41

³²⁶ *Apology*, 41-42, see also *Crito* and *Phaedo* (here Socrates willingly submits to the death sentence the city-state has imposed on him).

³²⁷ *Apology*, 31a-c

the development of justice (and of virtue, generally) in the souls of individuals will ostensibly help improve the state overall – and he tells the court that this is the reason why the god has sent him to them. Insofar, then, as the gods care about human justice, they also care about justice in the city-state, and Socrates reminds Athenians of this in his speech. As Zuckert notes, the message that Socrates tries to deliver is that “the goal of the city (or political action) is to make citizens virtuous so that they can live together happily, and that no one is or can be truly virtuous without choosing to be so”.³²⁸ Thus, the foundation of the just state can only be achieved through the pursuit of wisdom.³²⁹ In this way, Socratic piety – what we hope to have established in the previous chapter as the cultivation through philosophy of virtue (wisdom) in the soul – is necessary to the development of the just state.

However, it is Socrates’ insistence that even the most powerful of individuals in Athens ought to renounce all claims to human wisdom as a first step to becoming truly virtuous and wise that proves controversial and so deeply upsetting to his fellow Athenians, and that eventually costs Socrates his life. His presentation of a philosophical piety that asks questions and challenges all previously held beliefs is obviously unpopular in a political regime that was anchored in solid and traditional foundations. Socrates’ exposure of the ignorance and inconsistency that existed in these traditions and at the highest echelons of power in Athens infuriated those who wished to see the city-state unchanged (a point that is often forgotten by interpreters of Plato’s work that only see in him a disturbing conservatism). As Blanchard points out – and Socrates himself tells the court in his defense – it is not Socrates’ treatment of the gods that has enraged and offended Athenians, rather it is his perceived attack on the city-state of Athens that gets him killed.³³⁰

³²⁸ Zuckert, C. *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 833

³²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 364

³³⁰ Blanchard, K. *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 425

ii) *Piety – A virtue in the Republic?*

Thus far we have attempted to show that Socrates encouraged piety among citizens in order to foster individual virtue in the soul as well as in the city-state. The state, we have argued, cannot be properly just if its citizens do not value justice (or virtue, more generally). Yet if piety is a necessary component of the just state, why has Socrates left it out of his discussion of the ideal state in the *Republic*? Piety's absence from the *Republic*, however, is understandable when one assumes that the virtues are all true (which is the position I have taken in this thesis – as discussed in chapter two, I have argued that all the virtues are wisdom and wisdom is the good). Minor differences between mental states and actions characterize the virtues, but do not relevantly or significantly separate them in my view, for the virtues represent the same psychic state with different real-world manifestations.³³¹ Piety and its specific behaviours and actions – because entirely focused on the divine – do not necessarily or always come into play in a discussion about virtue as it manifests itself between individuals in the state.

The difference between piety and justice is alluded to in the *Euthyphro*, with Socrates' assertion that we cannot improve or benefit the gods through piety. Justice, for example, improves those toward whom it is directed. And as we noted previously, piety is directed toward the gods, but it does not improve them. In this way piety differs fundamentally from the other virtues outlined in Plato's dialogues.³³² Indeed, this difference in quality between piety and the other virtues may be one of the many reasons behind its being left out of Plato's discussion of the virtues in the *Republic*.³³³

In *The City and Man*, Strauss takes the position that Plato intends the *Republic* to be a dialogue in part concerned with enumerating the virtues of the state.³³⁴ Justice is the central virtue of the *Republic*

³³¹ McPherran, M. *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 305

³³² *Ibid*, p. 308

³³³ *Ibid*, p. 315

³³⁴ Strauss, L. *op. cit.*, 1964, p. 92

because it is the virtue most closely related and relevant to the state.³³⁵ But, as Strauss points out, the parallel Socrates draws between the virtues in the soul and the virtues in the state does not always hold.³³⁶ Moors further contends that the analogy between the city and the soul in the *Republic* does not stand.³³⁷ He argues that Socrates' main objective was to demonstrate the value of the virtue of justice *in the soul*. Justice in the state is impossible and cannot ever exist – a position similar to that of Strauss.³³⁸ As Moors explains, "The truest conception of justice, which Glaucon and Adeimantus have demanded, concerns the soul and the conduct of individual life; it does not proceed from a primary concern with politics, collectively held opinion, and the world of appearance".³³⁹ This is because the state is not an eternal idea or being, but it is a concept that exists solely in the world of appearance – it is changing and becoming. In contrast, the virtues are purely intelligible ideas that do not change.

For this reason, both Strauss and Moors argue that Socrates' "City in Speech" was not meant to exist or to be realized in the world. Socrates' greatest concern was with the soul. And as Zuckert points out, Socrates felt he was not wise enough to explain the virtues as they exist in the soul; it was necessary for him in his relative ignorance to depend on relating the ethereal virtues to concrete examples from the world of appearance. Socrates has difficulty drawing the likeness between conventional justice and true justice "because of the inability to equate precisely conventional standards to philosophic standards".³⁴⁰ As we have seen from our earlier discussion of knowledge, virtue, and wisdom, no mortal may ever fully possess these things; we as humans are virtuous insofar as we engage in the search for the truth.³⁴¹ Therefore, it seems likely that Socrates sought virtue (in this case, justice) in the state in the *Republic* because justice is easily explained in the state. Justice in the state is easier to explain and find than justice

³³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 106

³³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 109

³³⁷ Moors, K. *op.cit.*, 1984, p. 193

³³⁸ *Ibid*. p. 193

³³⁹ *Ibid*. p. 202

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 213

³⁴¹ Zuckert, C. *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 21 & p.829

(or any of the other incarnations of virtue) in the soul, because the state is much bigger than the individual soul – but also because the state exists in the world of becoming and is thus easier to understand, and for men and women to possess knowledge about. The state is becoming because it exists, lives, and grows in the world we live in.

It is possible, then, that justice is an easier virtue for Socrates to attempt to define than piety, because justice can be explained through the tangible and understandable concept of the city. Piety, as a purely intelligible idea, is not so easily mapped out in the world we live in. This may also partially be the reason behind the different formats of the Socratic dialogues. In those dialogues which Strauss refers to as “*aporetic*” or elenctic, Socrates does not define the virtues because he does not possess the wisdom needed to articulate concepts that exist only in being – that are not touched in some way by the world of becoming.³⁴² Dialogues that are said to be more “dogmatic” or theory laden, such as the *Republic*, put forward concrete ideas of the virtues that can be explained through already existing concepts with which ordinary individuals are familiar according to Strauss. But in the case of piety, there may not have been enough “significant ground upon which to effect the equation”, or upon which to build a definition.³⁴³ The state, and all political life generally, is founded on opinion and is not akin to justice in the soul as a result. Justice as it exists in the soul is “predicated upon truth and admits of no external appearance”.³⁴⁴ As such, justice in the soul might never be explained or grasped by men and women – this is a realm of knowledge that exists only with the gods.

Thus it is perhaps this fundamental difference between piety and justice that explains why Socrates explains one but not the other. Once again, the difference here is the connection of justice to the world of appearance and the difficulty in relating piety to the world of appearance. This does not

³⁴² Strauss, L., *op. cit.*, 1964, p. 105

³⁴³ Moors, K. *op. cit.*, 1984, p. 214

³⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 222

automatically make piety any less of a virtue than justice, however. Indeed, Socrates may have omitted piety from his discussion of the virtues in the *Republic* partially because it was not relevant to the model of the state he was using to help him define (political) justice. Virtue does not manifest itself in the state in the same way as it manifests itself in more religious contexts. The overarching mental (or psychic) state of virtue is the same in all cases, but virtue looks different in the city-state (that is, it manifests itself through different actions) and virtue as it manifests itself in the relationship between gods and mortals may not relate to a discussion of virtue (justice) in the state. As Hartman suggests in her work, virtue is one entity, and “its multiplicity is explained by the different directions in which it points”.³⁴⁵ To this point, it is interesting to note, with Zuckert, that Socrates includes moderation as a virtue in the *Republic* but leaves it out in his speech to the court in the *Apology*. Moderation, in this context of Socrates’ defense against charges of atheism, was probably not relevant to his discussion of virtue in the *Apology*. Again, virtue understood generally as wisdom seems to manifest itself differently in different contexts and situations.

McPherran, in describing the unity of the virtues hypothesis, likens virtue as a whole to a skill that can be used in various ways. In this case, McPherran compares virtue to drawing. The ability to draw, generally, allows one to draw landscapes, portraits, or blueprints – each type of drawing is different, but all are produced by the same underlying *skill*.³⁴⁶ The ability to draw is what gives one the ability to draw portraits or to make blueprints, and the drawings that are made are manifestations of the skill being applied to different ends.³⁴⁷ In the same way, virtue in the state could be said to manifest itself differently than virtue in a more religious context (for example, in the context of Socrates’ defense against the charge of impiety). In this case the absence of piety from the *Republic* may only be evidence of that specific

³⁴⁵ Hartman, M. *op. cit.*, 1982, p.116

³⁴⁶ Here McPherran seems to be expanding on the model Hartman outlines in her discussion of the unity of the virtues – virtue as a single entity that expresses itself as a multiplicity when used in varying contexts and situations.

³⁴⁷ McPherran, M. *op cit.*, 2000, p.314

manifestation of virtue (virtue that is directed toward the divine) not relating clearly to a discussion about justice in the state, and is thus not evidence enough for us to ignore piety as a virtue that is important in the human soul, or even in the city more generally.³⁴⁸

III. Socratic Piety and the State – Conclusion

How important a role, then, does piety have in the state? As discussed in the first chapter, Plato's Socrates may not have lived a life as at odds with traditional piety as some of his accusers suggested. Socrates, for example, believed in the importance of honouring the gods – this he did mostly through the practice of philosophy and through his search for the good – not through the traditional means of cult-practice. Nonetheless, we get a clear sense from Plato's dialogues that this character called Socrates placed some value on honouring the gods. Indeed, Socrates appears to have counted the divine (and the reverence and wonder for things that I have described as divine) as an important element in his overall

³⁴⁸ In particular, piety has an important role in the state insofar as it cultivates the appropriate mindset needed to engage in philosophy as a search for the good in the first place.

philosophy. He communicated with the divine, received (and heeded) instruction from the divine, and defended his belief in the divine on trial. And, as noted in chapter one, Socrates believed that the gods were the only beings in full possession of true wisdom. As humans, we can seek divine wisdom and in so doing, virtuously align our souls; but we can never possess wisdom as fully and as clearly as the gods do. That is, we can move toward it, but not possess it. As Zuckert rightly observes, “We may never be able to obtain knowledge, properly speaking, but we can learn something about *the limitations of our power and consequently, how we should restrict our ambitions to command others* – much less to conquer the world, or to remake it entirely—by seeking knowledge.”³⁴⁹ The first step taken as a pious individual, then, is the recognition of the superiority of the divine and of our need as mortals to try and become more like the divine—to engage in soul-craft and to become good, as much as it is humanly possible.³⁵⁰

Socratic piety is a necessary aspect of the just state and of healthy politics in part because it does just this – it dissolves the human pretense to wisdom by engendering awareness of our inferiority to the divine. Phrased differently, it deflates our hubris and invites us to pursue with genuine wonder and humility our search for knowledge. Indeed, I have suggested that it is this relationship to the divine that inspires the individual to pursue knowledge and wisdom instead of assuming he or she is already in possession of it. And I have also indicated that this more humble epistemic posture is also an important requirement for improving the souls of those around us. This is certainly what Socrates considered to be the appropriate intellectual posture needed to successfully engage in philosophy (and in responsible citizenship). Socrates tells the court at his trial that he believes he knows nothing at all – and that this awareness of his own ignorance is what has made him the wisest among men in the eyes of the gods (a message given to him by the Oracle at Delphi). Because Socrates believes he is in a state of complete

³⁴⁹ Zuckert, C. *op.cit.*, 2009, p. 861

³⁵⁰ I am indebted to Russell (2004) for this idea – “virtue as likeness to God” is the theme (and title) of his work on virtue in Plato’s dialogues.

ignorance, he feels motivated to try and acquire knowledge about those things which are important insofar as he is able to, as a mortal. As outlined in chapter one, some of Socrates' knowledge comes to him extra-rationally (not through his reasoning alone, but through revelation from the gods), but Socrates engages enthusiastically in philosophy and dialectic as well, and so believes that men and women can acquire *some* knowledge as a result (here, in the latter case, via reason alone).

Now, it is the combination of Socrates' pious belief in the gods and his use of reason and philosophy that makes his particular brand of piety so unique and so worthy of study for us today. Socrates' combination of the rational and the extra-rational (that which exists outside of human reasoning and cannot be understood using human reasoning alone) is extraordinary in itself because it lends itself to a more thoughtful, and less dogmatic, religiosity. It is thus of great spiritual and ethical contemporary relevance in my view. But Socratic piety is also of supreme importance for reflections on things more specifically *political*, because Socratic piety participates in the cultivation of virtue in the souls of those who practice it, and thus could be said to contribute to the justness of our cities by developing justice in the souls of citizens. Indeed, I have suggested that justice, being that branch of wisdom that relates to other humans and to the governance of humans, is cultivated in part through piety.

But if piety aligns so naturally with life in the state, why does god command Socrates not to mix philosophy with public life, or with politics (or at least, with politics traditionally understood)? Socrates makes several references in his speech to his decision to forego life in the public sphere, and he notes specifically that this decision was made as a result of his communion with the god (in this case, through his personal *daimonion*).³⁵¹ This decision to avoid traditional politics is important because, as Socrates tells

³⁵¹ *Apology*, 31d

the court, had he chosen to share his dialectic with the masses in a political forum, his life likely would not have lasted as long as it has.³⁵²

For Socrates, then, philosophy is most likely to effect change in Athens when it is undertaken on a smaller scale, in the homes of those who wish to listen and engage in conversation. As we learn from most of Plato's dialogues, Socrates almost exclusively held his discussions in small groups and not in public forums. One could suggest that the structure of Socrates' elenctic questioning is most effective when used in conversation with no more than a few people, for this is the type of setting that allows for meaningful exchange and trust. All this underscores an important point – namely, that Socrates' philosophy was practiced *with others* in conversation; it was not Socrates contemplating ideas alone. Thus while Socrates' philosophy may not have been entirely public, it was not altogether *private* either.

And more significantly, Socrates' philosophy was certainly political. Socrates does not detach himself "from his city – and, indeed, from the entire human world" in order to enter "a sphere that is impersonal, disinterested, and objective".³⁵³ On the contrary, by Socrates' own admission, it is through practicing philosophy that he feels he is best able to help the state. I would like to suggest that Socrates' philosophy and Socratic piety are both, always, political and always concerned—concerned with *this* world, anchored and always returning to the (imperfect) world of human affairs. Socrates is clear when he speaks to the court: the god has sent him to help the state of Athens. Socrates' philosophy is not only political in its object; it is also political (and certainly not 'antisocial') in its procedures and ways of manifesting itself in the city: it is dependent on others (on exchange between citizens) to come into being.³⁵⁴ While the citizens themselves may never be capable of becoming perfectly just (for as I have

³⁵² *Apology*, 32d

³⁵³ Nightingale, W.S. *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 164

³⁵⁴ Vlastos, Gregory (1969) "Justice and Psychic Harmony in the Republic" *The Journal of Philosophy* 66(16): 505-521, p. 512

insisted earlier, only the gods are completely just), men and women can improve their understanding of the good and of the virtues, and this is what piety (through philosophy) encourages among humankind.³⁵⁵

As such, philosophy is obviously important in the just state; and here the link between philosophy and the state does not appear to be as fraught with some tension as so many have imagined it to be (Strauss, Blanchard, etc.) The philosopher may not be successful as a politician or as a 'good citizen' as traditionally understood by Athenians. But as Edward Andrew rightly notes in *Descent to the Cave*, the philosopher does not work alone and he is certainly not self-sufficient. Dialogue is a necessary component of his craft.³⁵⁶ Andrew argues that it is best to envision the philosopher as a teacher of sorts, motivated by his love of wisdom and truth.³⁵⁷ Indeed, as expressed by Socrates in the *Symposium*, the philosopher needs to "reproduce" his ideas in others, and for the philosopher, this reproduction comes about by "spreading one's ideas through teaching".³⁵⁸ As a teacher of virtue, then, the philosopher is the best-placed citizen to help others understand the importance of justice in the state *and in individual lives*.

In this thesis, I have attempted to shed a bit of light on Socratic piety generally, but also on its relevance to the state and to how piety contributes to making the state just, in particular. I consider this to be an important issue for the study of Plato both because it appears to have raised great discomfort (and thus scholarly neglect) and because another look at the relationship between philosophy and piety could have wider implications for our understanding of Socratic and Platonic political philosophy. On the subject of the virtues, the discussion of piety is a complex and significant one because piety is sometimes included by Socrates as being among the virtues and it is sometimes left out. As already noted, it is worth mentioning that the virtue of "moderation" (included in the *Republic*) is left out of Socrates' discussion of the virtues in the *Apology*, where piety *is* included. For those who subscribe to the unity of the virtues

³⁵⁵ Zuckert, C. *op.cit.*, 2009, p. 837

³⁵⁶ Edward A. (1983). "Descent to the Cave." *The Review of Politics*, p. 514

³⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 514

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 528

hypothesis, this could point toward the interchangeableness of the virtues (because they are all, in fact, wisdom).

Indeed, piety's inclusion in the *Protagoras* and its exclusion from the *Republic* is one of the many inconsistencies that have led scholars to assume that the Socrates of the earlier dialogues differs fundamentally from the Socrates of Plato's later dialogues. The weakening of this strict dichotomy (one that still informs a large part of on the secondary literature on Plato's oeuvre) could be useful in viewing Plato's Socrates as a character who was fairly consistent not only about the virtues, but by extension, about the role the virtues play *in the state* as well.

Moreover, in this thesis I have tried (implicitly, at least) to call into question the idea that there is a great, irredeemable "tension" between the city and the philosopher.³⁵⁹ Dana Villa, for instance, builds on both Strauss and Arendt's well-known perspectives on the conflict between the city and the philosopher in his *"The Philosopher versus the Citizen: Arendt, Strauss, and Socrates"*. Here Villa notes that both Arendt and Strauss understand the 'true' Platonic philosopher as wanting, primarily, to *recoil* from public life and engagement.³⁶⁰ The nature of philosophy is private and contemplative, and "[s]uch activity," is viewed by both Arendt and Strauss, as standing "in the sharpest opposition to the active pursuit of glory or greatness in the political realm".³⁶¹ Indeed for these thinkers, philosophy is said to require "a withdrawal from the world of appearances" entirely.³⁶²

However, partially in light of Socrates' strong conviction that he has been asked by the god to do philosophy in order to help the city-state of Athens, I have argued that Socrates was not as averse to politics as Strauss and Arendt have suggested (although he was obviously very critical of the existing

³⁵⁹ Blanchard, *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 424

³⁶⁰ Villa, D. (1998) "The Philosopher versus the Citizen: Arendt, Strauss, and Socrates" in *Political Theory*, 26(2): 147-172, p. 156

³⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 156

³⁶² *Ibid*, p. 156

regime in Athens). While Socrates tells the court in the *Apology* that he does not (because he was told by the god that he *should* not) participate in politics or public life, he is nevertheless convinced that by engaging individual citizens in dialectic, the *polis* (including its politics, its laws, its institutions—not simply its souls) can be improved. Once again, Socrates' philosophy may have chiefly been conducted in private, but it was meant to affect both public and private spheres.

I have also taken the stance that the individual virtues themselves are all a part of wisdom (which is, really, at the end of the day, the only virtue). That is, all of the virtues *are* wisdom – aspects of wisdom that are expressed by individuals differently in the world depending on who they are used by and what they are used for. All the virtues, then, exist as the same *mental state*. According to this view, all of the virtues in their mental-states are of identical importance. The manifestations of virtue (carried out as actions in the world) relate to different real-life contexts and situations, some which may be more important than others, but because the mental state is the same, all the virtues are of identical importance. As part of the discussion in the second chapter of this thesis, I made the argument that piety is a sort of philosophy that concerns itself specifically with the search for the good and with the acquisition of virtue (which is wisdom). While I did not discuss the merits of the argument for the unity of the virtues in great depth (this topic is a thesis in itself), the position I have taken in this thesis is, if accepted as coherent and reasonable, instrumental in accepting the unity of the virtues hypothesis. Importantly, when the virtues are understood as one (wisdom) acting on different objects in different ways (mental state vs. physical state), it becomes possible to accept that Plato's Socrates could have failed to specifically include piety in his list of virtues in one discussion while still considering piety to be a necessary and fundamental component of virtue, generally. In short, accepting the unity of the virtues is a step toward seeing the *Euthyphro*, the *Protagoras*, and the *Republic* (indeed, all (or at least most) of the dialogues) as representing the thought of one person or character – in this case, *Plato's* Socrates.

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