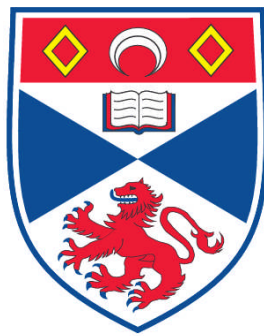


PLATO'S UNDERSTANDING OF PIETY

David John Abraham

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Plato's Understanding of **Piety**

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Abstract

The *Euthyphro* portrays Plato's mentor, Socrates, asking the question, "what is piety"? In the *Apology* Socrates defends himself from charges of impiety and suggests an answer to this question. Plato amplifies this answer in the *Republic* and the *Laws*. As he refines his understanding of piety, he criticizes traditional understanding of divinity. In the *Republic* he argues that the traditional divinities are morally inadequate; in the *Laws* he argues that they are theologically inadequate. The philosophic work Plato accomplishes in these dialogues, as well as the *Timaeus*, suggests a definitive answer to the *Euthyphro*'s question. Ultimately, this answer requires further analysis. An appendix is supplied at the end of this essay with a collection of all the formal arguments and stipulated definitions referred to in the body of the text.

Introduction

This dissertation will explore Plato's (428/427BC-348/347BC) notion of piety. It will argue that Plato developed a rational theology and an alternative notion of piety against the traditional understanding of the divine and, consequently, the pious. He did so partly in response to what he perceived as the deleterious influence of traditional religion. Traditional religious practices and stories, to Plato, actually fostered a vicious rather than ideal character. In these stories, epitomized by the works of the poets Homer and Hesiod, gods behave shamefully. They rape, kidnap, commit adultery, and fight feuds. Tradition had posited numerous willful gods under the at-times precarious rule of Zeus. Within this context, traditional piety was proper comportment at religious functions. It was important, because the gods were powerful

but uncaring and unpredictable forces. They required placation, but even proper behavior guaranteed little.¹

In contrast, Plato articulates a harmonious cosmos ruled by cooperative governing gods and created by a supreme god, the Demiurge. Plato replaces what he saw as gluttonous, pleasure-seeking, unjust gods, with abstemious, non-material, and unchanging divinities. Consequently, the philosophic life, rather than the active life, which mimics the scheming of the traditional divinities, becomes ideal. These gods provide a starkly different moral example, although it remains open whether or not they provide a coherent alternative.

To Plato, these stories seemed to foster a poor character that, perhaps, even informed the non-religious characters of his day. Such vicious characters, according to Plato, articulated in turn blasphemous and atheistic doctrines. For Plato, these characters and stories had thrown society into a moral crisis, making the meaning of moral terms nebulous. Traditional divinities controlled the forces of nature. Any “blasphemous” new doctrine would thereby attempt to give a competing metaphysics. For these two reasons, Plato’s rational theology becomes a project with important and at times mutually supporting metaphysical and ethical ramifications.

This thesis will attempt, so far as possible, to stay within the pages of Plato’s collected works. It will not attempt to argue whether or not Plato’s concerns about tradition’s influence on society were justified, although it would be odd if so astute a thinker as Plato were to be misled entirely on his society’s particular challenges. It is enough, for this thesis’ purpose, to understand what Plato saw and thought. This thesis will provide, when necessary, the minimum historical context needed to coherently analyze Plato’s ideas. In these situations, the author will appeal to recognized authorities in classical history, rather than attempt to enter that field himself. The main dialogues that this thesis will analyze will be the *Euthyphro*, the *Apology*, the *Republic*, the *Laws*, and the *Timaeus*. Ancillary dialogues include the *Phaedrus*, the *Gorgias*, the *Theaetetus*, and the *Phaedo*. In part one this thesis will present the Socratic questions about the gods and piety that appear in the *Euthyphro* and the *Apology*. In part two it will

¹ Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 268-276.

analyze Plato's prospective answers to these puzzles in three sections. First, it will analyze the *Republic's* criticism of traditional gods as morally inadequate beings. Then, it will discuss the *Laws'* more explicitly metaphysical treatment of the gods. Finally, it will attempt to show how the preceding discussion clarifies aspects of Platonic piety, using the *Timaeus* particularly. Plato ultimately created a complex rational theology. In the final analysis, however, Platonic piety may suggest two distinct views of piety. They may be irreconcilable. The thesis ends by suggesting the questions that need to be answered in order to provide the fullest possible account.

Part One: Socratic Questions **in the Early Dialogues**

I. The Euthyphro

The *Euthyphro* meditates on the problems confronting piety, belief about the divine, and the practice of worship. The dialogue begins when Socrates meets Euthyphro, a young priest. Both are going to court: Socrates, to answer charges of impiety brought by the young Meletus; Euthyphro, motivated by piety, to prosecute his father for murder. The case of Euthyphro's father is ambiguous, and his family believes the prosecution impious.²

Both Meletus and Euthyphro are young and confident in their knowledge.³ After a flattering, conjectural description of Meletus, Socrates concludes that he will become "a source of great blessings for the city." Euthyphro disagrees. Rather than a threat, Socrates is the "very heart of the city."⁴ Prior to philosophical engagement, Plato has communicated the problem with which the *Euthyphro* concerns itself by confronting the reader with two examples of disagreement about the application of moral terms. Disagreement about the divine nature and the character of the pious man causes each: Euthyphro against his father and Euthyphro/Socrates against Meletus.

These disagreements extend a problem treated in tragic dramas popular in fifth-century Athens. For example, Sophocles' *Antigone* presents Antigone with a dilemma between divine law, her duty to bury her brother (=x), and civic law, her duty to obey the city's laws (=y). In Antigone's case no

² *Euthyphro*, 4a. All citations from Plato refer to the translations from Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John M Copper and DS Hutchinson (Indianapolis, Indiana and Cambridge, England: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

³ *Euthyphro*, 2c-3a and 4e-5a.

⁴ *Euthyphro*, 2c-3a.

conceptual confusion exists. She simply recognized a moral duty to do $x \cdot y$, where if x , then $\sim y$ and vice versa.

Euthyphro's situation, however, exposes a conceptual confusion. He acts in manner a , based on his understanding of the criteria for piety itself, A . Problematically, others would do $\sim a$, *ceteris paribus*, and believe themselves likewise justified by A . Euthyphro and his family disagree on piety's content. One unambiguous criterion, A , did not happen to conflict with another such standard, A_1 . In such cases the moral disagreement resolves itself by clarifying the relationship between A and A_1 . In *Antigone* the prophet Teiresias reminds Creon that religious obligations precede civic ones. But since the content of A itself causes the *Euthyphro*'s dilemma, one of two conclusions can be drawn. (i) One of the interlocutors is confused about or ignorant of A . (ii) A is artificial. If (ii), then piety's ambiguity arises from mankind's vagaries rather than his inadequate understanding. A would not thereby reference moral reality.

Euthyphro believes (i): he claims an expertise in piety's natural standard of which others are ignorant. Socrates asks him to define the form of piety. Euthyphro responds by justifying his decision to prosecute his father, (A_1):

(1_{A1}) "Zeus is the best and most just of the gods."

(2_{A1}) Zeus "bound his father because he [committed an injustice]."

(Obs1_{A1}) Euthyphro's father committed an injustice.

\therefore (3_{A1}) Euthyphro ought to prosecute his own father for his injustice.⁵

In response Socrates insists on the form or model of piety rather than an example of pious action.⁶ Euthyphro does not object to Socrates' insistence, but one may object on his behalf. One can correctly, even expertly, predicate a term without knowing a formal definition that explains every predication. Within practical morality, a list of examples and maxims may prove more useful than metaethical knowledge of the form or definition of piety. Insisting on a definition may only cause moral confusion.

⁵ *Euthyphro*, 5d-6e

⁶ *Euthyphro*, 6c-d.

This objection assumes a coherent moral framework, which Plato's proposed scenario lacks. Euthyphro's case involves a normative ethical claim, *which action exemplifies "A," a or ~a?* The answer to Euthyphro's question presumes agreement on the prior, metaethical question, which he lacks. Such agreement need not be philosophical; it can be primitive. But without it, any list of examples is abortive, because the community disagrees on what exemplifies A.⁷ Hence, Socrates asks a relevant question: what is A?

But agreement on the correct predication of *pious* is impossible between interlocutors that disagree on the form of piety and examples of pious action. Plato must provide a framework of agreement within the dialogue. Consequently Euthyphro's argument, (A1) depends upon two additional premises with which Socrates agrees:

(4_{A1}) One ought to strive to imitate the gods.

(5_{A1}) The gods, being good and just, exemplify the moral criterion.

(4_{A1}) was not self-evident. Nevertheless, Socrates and Euthyphro assume *piety* means *godlikeness*.⁸ The godly individual reflects the divine's characteristics, and (A1) presumes the morality of these characteristics. The "ought" in (3_{A1}) has its normative value from the belief that the good man imitates the gods. Hence, one can question neither Zeus' example, i.e. (4_{A1}), nor his morality, i.e. (5_{A1}), without endangering (A1)'s conclusions. Euthyphro claims that his interlocutor "[contradicts himself] in what [he says] about the gods and [Euthyphro's actions]."⁹ This observation works only if the interlocutor agrees that continuity ought to hold between the gods' actions and man's.

Initially, Socrates only questions (2_{A1}) the instance of godly action. The assertion of (2_{A1}), an episode in Hesiod's *Theogony*, assumes the conclusion that Euthyphro wants to defend. Other stories emphasize the sanctity of one's parents and cast Zeus as a morally ambiguous figure. Socrates' skepticism of (2_{A1}) and other stories of "war among the gods" implies his belief that agreement on (1_{A1}), (4_{A1}), and (5_{A1})—what man claims to believe about divinity—makes problematic the specific stories he tells about

⁷ *Euthyphro*, 4e-5a.

⁸ *Euthyphro*, 5c-d.

⁹ *Euthyphro*, 6a.

the gods.¹⁰ Since these stories about divinity become premises in practical reasoning about moral action, the problem of a rational theology has ethical implications.

Euthyphro defines piety as

(6_{A1}) “An action or man dear to the gods is pious, but an action or a man hated by the gods is impious.”¹¹

In response, Socrates argues that only moral disagreement could cause the violent conflict which (2_{A1}) exemplifies. Disputes concerning the greater and the lesser, the larger and the smaller, or the heavier and lighter, resolve themselves by referring to the proper criterion—weighing, measuring, etc. The disputes in which the criterion requires normative judgments cause enmity: the “just and the unjust, the beautiful and the ugly, the good and the bad.”¹² Different gods have different attitudes toward these concepts. Piety becomes relative to a certain god and time.¹³ Any action *x* is potentially both pious and impious.

If moral language be founded on divine approbation, it is meaningless unless the “gods are of one mind.”¹⁴ It could still be the case, Euthyphro objects, that a particular action does nonetheless happen to have the favor of all the gods. The metaethical chaos of (6_{A1})—each god potentially having his own standard of piety—does not necessarily apply to every conceivable situation. Euthyphro attempts to justify his own action as an unambiguous instance of piety by stating that his case satisfies this stringent criterion:

(6_{A1}') “on this subject no god would differ from one another, that whoever has killed anyone unjustly should pay the penalty.”¹⁵

But (6_{A1}'), rather than a demonstration of Euthyphro's situation as an unambiguous instance of piety, is a truism. If gods, like mortals, fight over the just and the unjust, etc, then, “they disagree as to who the wrongdoer is, what he did, and when.” But payment of the penalty follows analytically from the concept

¹⁰ *Euthyphro*, 6.

¹¹ *Euthyphro*, 7a.

¹² *Euthyphro*, 7c-d.

¹³ *Euthyphro*, 7b-8e.

¹⁴ Mark McPherran, “Socrates and Plato,” in *The History of Western Philosophy*, Vol. 1 (Acumen Publishing, 2009), 59.

¹⁵ *Euthyphro*, 8b.

of injustice: “[n]o one,” Socrates states, “among gods or men [would venture] to say that the wrongdoer must not be punished.”¹⁶ Therefore, (6_{A1}) cannot determine the gods’ attitude toward any particular action. It involves moreover an equivocation. In the former half of the premise, “on this subject no god would differ from one another,” the antecedent of *this* refers to Euthyphro’s byzantine situation. In the latter half of the premise, *this subject* becomes the subsequent of the truism, “that whoever has killed anyone unjustly should pay the penalty.” Socrates insists on Euthyphro understanding the complexity of his situation:

Socrates: Come now, my dear Euthyphro, tell me, too, that I may become wiser, what proof have you that all the gods consider that a man to have been killed unjustly who became a murderer while in your service was bound by the master of his victim, and died in his bonds before the one who bound him found out from the seers what was to be done with him, and that it is right for a son to denounce and to prosecute his father on behalf of such a man.¹⁷

Restating Euthyphro’s situation highlights its contingency. This saps Euthyphro’s attempt in (6_{A1}) to portray his situation as unambiguous. It furthermore shows that the discussion has digressed. Socrates had originally asked about the nature of piety, but Euthyphro answered a question about whether or not his own action sufficed as an instance of the standard.

Since Socrates wants Euthyphro to define *piety*, he concedes that Euthyphro’s situation is an instance of piety and suggests a plausible modification of (6_{A1}). Before analyzing this new definition, consider a consequence of Socrates’ concession. Socrates accepts the general authoritarian normative ethic that grounds Euthyphro’s argument. Prior to refocusing the discussion on metaethical grounds, Socrates says “[c]ome, try to show me a clear sign that all the gods definitely believe this action to be right. If you can give me adequate proof of this, I shall never cease to extol your wisdom.” In other words, Socrates accepts the claim implicit in (4_{A1}) and (5_{A1}): demonstrating that “no god would differ from one another” on a subject provides logically sufficient grounds for deciding its morality. The gods’ exemplification of the moral criterion signifies that their belief in an action’s rectitude logically entails its rectitude. The gods’ approbation of an action and the rectitude of that action are necessary: Euthyphro

¹⁶ *Euthyphro*, 8c-e.

¹⁷ *Euthyphro*, 9a-b.

held that if his action be moral, then those who disagree with him have wrong “ideas of the divine attitude to piety and impiety.”¹⁸ Were an oracle to give a moral command, both Euthyphro and Socrates would believe that men have a moral obligation to obey that command.

In this light (7_{A1}) may be unnecessarily modest, because it only asserts a conditional, $P \rightarrow G$, rather than a biconditional, $P \equiv G$:

(7_{A1}) “the pious (=P) is what all the gods love (=G), and the opposite, what all the gods hate, is the impious.”¹⁹

Based on what Socrates has already conceded to Euthyphro, (7_{A1}) provides a logically sufficient criterion for deciding an action’s piety. But Socrates does not want just any definition of piety in terms of a necessary logical relationship $x \equiv y$. To understand x in terms of y only helps pick out x if one recognizes y . By definition Socrates has made clear that he means something that will allow him to “look upon [piety] and, using it as a model,” to identify particulars as either pious or impious.²⁰ He needs a definition that will add to his knowledge. The logical relationship expressed in (7_{A1}) may be at once universally true and a tautology. This would not answer Socrates’ question. All bachelors may be single men, but this does not help one “pick out” a bachelor unless one understands *single men*. To say that x is pious if and only if the gods love it, does not help anyone if the conditions governing the gods’ love are not known. To avoid equivocation, let (7_{A1}) be a characteristic of piety, and let (7_{A1}*) be the “form” or definition of piety.

(7_{A1}*) “the pious is(=) what all the gods love, and the opposite, what all the gods hate, is the impious.”

The thesis happily avoids undesirable conclusions that (6_{A1})’s failure suggests: (i) certain gods know the moral and pious but reject it; (ii) certain gods are ignorant of the criterion that decides the moral and pious; and (iii) no criterion exists. Option (i) would posit evil gods; (ii) would posit gods that fail to have the knowledge Euthyphro himself claims; and (iii) would strip Euthyphro’s prosecution of its morality.

¹⁸ *Euthyphro*, 4e.

¹⁹ *Euthyphro*, 9e.

²⁰ *Euthyphro*, 6e3-6.

Despite these advantages, the premise fails. Before analyzing Socrates' argument contra (7_{A1}^*) , Euthyphro's proposition needs clarification. (7_{A1}^*) uses the ambiguous term *love*. Love can be firstly either mutable or immutable. Secondly, it can be (i) irrational, (ii) subrational or (iii) rational. *Subrational* denotes that which is intelligible but not rational—i.e. desires and pleasures such as tradition's gods have for or derive from the burning fat of sacrificial worship. Let the superscript ^M stand for mutable options and the superscript ^I stand for immutable ones. To Plato (iii)^M may have seemed a contradiction in terms, because changing one's mind suggests unreasonableness. To Euthyphro's traditionalism, (ii)^M may have appeared attractive; since the Greek gods of tradition possessed changing, anthropomorphic, subrational desires. Nevertheless, Euthyphro must reject all mutable options, because he believes his actions timelessly moral. Euthyphro has already addressed the first problem unique to polytheism with (7_{A1}^*) : with the plurality of divinities arises the problem that they may conflict. Since the Greek divinities existed in time, it remains a real possibility that they could change their minds. Euthyphro has not stipulated that all gods love the same things: only that the pious is that loved by all the gods. If just one god changes his mind, then some action becomes non-pious.

Hence, by (7_{A1}^*) Euthyphro means one of the following:

(7_{A1}^{*M}) the pious is what the gods love and the impious is(=) what the gods hate, both at time t in world w but not necessarily at t_I in world w .

(7_{A1}^{*I}) the pious is what the gods love, and the impious is(=) what the gods hate, in world w for all times but not necessarily at world w_I for all times.

Euthyphro doubtless means (7_{A1}^{*I}) , since it rules out (i)^M, (ii)^M, and (iii)^M. To conclude (7_{A1}^{*I}) , however, Euthyphro needs a reason why all the gods love the pious despite being able to change their minds. That reason could be (1) something intrinsic to the pious and moral reality that is such as to be loved by all who know it. Or, (2) some aspect of the divine nature makes the gods favor certain actions. Finally, (3) the gods could have arbitrarily stipulated the piety of certain actions. It may appear that Socrates argues for (1) over (2) or (3). He does not. If anything, he assumes (2) or (3). His argument shows that (7_{A1}^{*I}) implicates how one views the divine nature.

Socrates begins his argument by asking Euthyphro if the pious is “being loved by the gods because it is pious” or if it is “pious because it is being loved by the gods.” Euthyphro fails to understand and asks for clarification. The distinction Socrates draws may confound Euthyphro, but it seems clear to modern readers. Is the pious intrinsically good such as that it by its very nature demands love? If so, then goodness and the pious are independent of the gods. Or, does that which is pious receive its nature from an external source—chiefly, the gods’ affection for it? This reading misleads. It glosses over the great pains Socrates takes in making his initial question clear to Euthyphro. It must furthermore posit that Socrates has changed the question from (1) *what is the form/definition of piety* to (2) *is piety metaphysically independent of or metaphysically dependent on divine favor*. Perhaps Socrates does change subjects; since the latter question arises from consideration of (7_{A1})’s possible implications. If he does, however, a third question ought to be answered: (3) *what does piety’s metaphysical independence from or dependence on divine favor reveal about its definition?* Socrates’ argument only addresses the first question.

Understanding this question at the heart of the *Euthyphro* will involve minute analysis. It is, however, important. Scholars often view this argument as a critique of metaethical voluntarism, the broad set of theses that claim that moral terms derive their extensions with reference to the divine nature or will. But this dissertation asserts that in several ways, Socrates assumes this position. To understand Socrates’ argument, one must begin with the distinctions that it takes as premises.²¹

Socrates makes two distinctions to explain his question’s intent to Euthyphro:

(D1_{A1}) “we speak of something carried and something carrying, of something led and something leading, of something seen and something seeing.”²²

(D1_{A1}) is a straightforward grammatical distinction. In each pair of words the first is in the passive participle and the second, the active participle. The former implies action being done to it; the latter

²¹ I am much influenced in this complex argument by Marc Cohen, “Socrates on the Definition of Piety, *Euthyphro*: 10A-11B,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 9 (1971). I have, however, modified his argument slightly. See especially 5-8.

²² *Euthyphro*, 10a.

implies something doing the action. The second distinction is more difficult, since it relies on distinguishing the passive participle with a grammatical form not present in English, the inflected third person singular passive. “[I]f anything is being changed or is being affected in anyway, it is not being changed because it is something changed, but rather it is something changed because it is being changed.”

In other words

(D2_{AI}^α) an *x*-ed thing is something *x*-ed because it is being *x*-ed. (**T**ue)

(D2_{AI}^β) an *x*-ed thing is being *x*-ed because it is something *x*-ed.²³ (**F**alse)

(D2_{AI}^β) does not appear as naturally and obviously false as Euthyphro affirms in the dialogue.

Furthermore, it may appear as if Socrates forgets (D1_{AI}). To clarify (D2_{AI}) and make sense of (D1_{AI})’s role in the argument, convert (D2_{AI}) to the more natural active tense. This allows (D1_{AI}) to be read into (D2_{AI}). Since (D2_{AI})’s passive tense, i.e. *it is x-ed*, implies an agent, i.e. *it is x-ed (by someone or something)*, it is logically equivalent to *someone or something x-es it*. Hence,

(D2_{AI}^{α*}) an *x*-ed thing is something *x*-ed because something or someone *x*-s it. **T**

(D2_{AI}^{β*}) someone or something *x*-s an *x*-ed thing because it is something *x*-ed. **F**

Taking one of Socrates’ examples, (D2_{AI}^{α*}) becomes

(D2_{AI}^{α*1}) a carried thing is something carried because something or someone carries it. **T**

(D2_{AI}^{α*1}) is naturally true only if Socrates means that someone carrying *xyz* gives a logically sufficient reason to apply the terms *something carried* or *carried thing* to *xyz*. Hence,

(D2_{AI}^{α*2}) From someone *x*-ing *y*, it logically follows that *x-d thing* can be applied to *y*. **T**

Turning to (D2_{AI}^{β*1}), which Socrates denies:

(D2_{AI}^{β*1}) Someone or something carries a carried thing because it is something carried.

F

The falseness of this premise follows only if *because* is read differently from (D2_{AI}^{α*1}). Socrates and Euthyphro believe that (D2_{AI}^{β*1}) tries to give a sufficient reason why someone or something carries a thing. By *sufficient reason* is meant an intelligible answer to the question *why are you carrying y*? To

²³ *Euthyphro*, 10b-c. Marc Cohen, 5-7.

answer this question as $(D2_{AI}^{\beta*1})$ does—with *because it is something carried*—rejects the attempt to understand why the agent carries y . It does not purport to express, as $(D2_{AI}^{\alpha})$ does, a logical and tautological relationship. Rather, $(D2_{AI}^{\beta*1})$ tries and fails to express the intentions of a rational agent. Hence let $(D2_{AI}^{\beta*1})$ be

$(D2_{AI}^{\beta*2})$ The reason z x -s y is because y is something x -ed. **F**

After making these distinctions,²⁴ Socrates asks “is $[y]$ being loved because $[y]$ is pious, or for some other reason?” Euthyphro avers that

$(7i_{AI})$ The pious is being loved by the gods because it is pious. **T**

By $(D2_{AI})$ this is equivalent to

$(7i_{AI}^*)$ The gods love the pious because it is pious. **T**

Therefore,

$(7i_{AI}^*1)$ The reason the gods love the pious is because it is pious. **T**

Socrates believes that $(7i_{AI}^*)$ implies

$(7ii_{AI})$ The pious is not pious because it is being loved. **T**

Therefore,

$(7ii_{AI}^*)$ The pious is not pious because the gods love it. **T**

Does *because* in $(7ii_{AI}^*)$ refer to logical sufficiency or rational motivation?²⁵ When Socrates contradistinguishes $(7i_{AI})$ and $(7ii_{AI})$ he says “[t]he pious is being loved for this reason, that is it pious but it is not pious because it is being loved.” Where $(7i_{AI}^*1)$ gives the reason why the gods love the pious, $(7ii_{AI}^*)$ clarifies why they do not:

$(7ii_{AI}^*1)$ The reason the gods love the pious is not because they love it. **T**

Next, Socrates introduces the term *god-loved* and makes two further distinctions. First,

$(7iii_{AI})$ The god-loved is god-loved, because it is being loved by the gods.

²⁴ Marc Cohen, 3-8.

²⁵ The question and distinction was suggested by Marc Cohen, especially 8-11, however the answer proffered in this essay differs from Cohen’s own. The ultimate conclusions are, however, comparable.

Note the similarity between (7iii_{A1}) and (D2_{A1}^a). Socrates is again making a point about the sufficient logical conditions for applying a term. Hence,

(7iii_{A1}*1) From the gods' loving y, it logically follows that *god-loved* can be applied to y.

T

Socrates' next distinction is

(7iv_{A1}) The god-loved is not being loved because it is god-loved. **T**

Since this premise parallels (D2_{A1}^β),

(7iv_{A1}*1) The reason the gods love y is not because y is god-loved. **T**

Socrates and Euthyphro have now agreed to four premises, repeated below:

(7i_{A1}*1) The reason the gods love the pious is because it is pious. **T**

(7ii_{A1}*1) The reason the gods love the pious is not because they love it. **T**

(7iii_{A1}*1) From the gods' loving y, it logically follows that *god-loved* can be applied to y.

T

(7iv_{A1}*1) The reason the gods love y is not because y is god-loved. **T**

By (7_{A1}*¹) the pious is(=) the god-loved. But, as Socrates points out, the above premises do not bear out this relationship. Substituting *god-loved* for *pious* makes true statements false. By substitution (7_{A1}*1) becomes

(7_{A1}*1)' The reason the gods love the god-loved is due to the fact that it is god-loved. **F**

This recalls (D2_{A1}^β*1)'s attempt to make an action intelligible with reference to the performance of the action itself, which rejects the initial attempt to make the action intelligible.

To best appreciate Socrates' argument, one must first understand its limitations.²⁶ It emphatically does not demonstrate that the class of pious things differs from the class of god-loved things. Sentences of the type *p because q* are not extensional. While *Socrates* is coextensive with *husband of Xanthippe*, substituting the latter for the former does not result in a true statement in every context. Consider *he spoke to him because he was Socrates* and *he spoke to him because he was the husband of Xanthippe*. Socrates

²⁶ Marc Cohen, 9.

recognizes this point and accepts (7_{AI}) as a true characteristic: “[Euthyphro] told me an affect or quality of [piety], that the pious has the quality of being loved by all the gods.”²⁷ The term *god-loved* does not necessarily define the term *pious*, even if they are necessarily equivalent in extension.

What does this argument prove? Any satisfactory answer to this question will explain Euthyphro’s assertion of $(7_{AI} * 1)$, which undermines $(7_{AI} *^I)$. Reconsider the types of love to which $(7_{AI} *^I)$ lends itself: (i)^I immutably irrational, (ii)^I immutably subrational, (iii)^I immutably rational. With the assertion of $(7_{AI} * 1)$, Euthyphro means to remove (i)^I from consideration. Consider a parallel situation. Assume that Denis is beloved if and only if Sara loves him.²⁸ Sara in fact does love him. One could still ask Sara *why do you love Denis?* She could either reply *because I love him* or *because he is Denis*. The former, while possible, rejects a critical assumption of the question—that Sara is a rational subject capable of giving her love intelligibly. The latter need not mean that Denis is such that anyone would love him. It only entails that Denis has some further characteristics, intrinsic to his being Denis, that meet Sara’s criterion for loving. Therefore, if Sara be rational or subrational, then Sara-beloved can be understood by some form or standard apart from Sara’s act.

By asserting $(7_{AI} * 1)$, Euthyphro only meant to claim that the gods did not love the pious irrationally, i.e. for no reason at all. By $(7_{AI} * 1)$, Euthyphro specifies that by *love* he meant either (ii)^I or (iii)^I. Consider that for the class of all pious actions A_P , there exists some further divine criterion C that decides whether or not action α belongs within A_P or without it. If C were the external characteristic *loved by gods*, it would thereby follow that the gods love indiscriminately and that they are irrational. If (ii)^I or (iii)^I, however, then one can understand C in terms beyond the gods’ act of loving. These further characteristics become the standard by which one understands pious actions. If the gods are rational or subrational, the class of actions A_P would have some further characteristic, nature or criterion, C , other than *loved by the gods*. The criterion the gods use for determining piety implicates their own

²⁷ *Euthyphro*, 11b.

²⁸ Cohen briefly suggests a similar analogy on 11. This essay has, however, amplified it.

characteristics just like the criterion Sara uses for determining the class of men she loves reflects her own nature. Consider the following three answers to the question *why do the gods love the pious?*

(7A) *Because the pious allows the gods to enjoy the smell of sacrificial meats*

(subrational gods);

(7B) *Because the pious tends toward the proper end of human nature* (rational gods);

(7C) *Because the gods have just made it so* (irrational gods);

Each premise provides Socrates with a possible *C*. Significantly, considering these premises raises two further questions. First, (7A) and (7B) are incomplete, for one could still ask why the gods decided on this *C* rather than another *C*? And Socrates' argument does not preclude him from answering with a statement about the divine will or the divine nature. Second, it may, however, be objected that Socrates has asserted (7A₁) as a quality of piety but not a definition. But, recall, Socrates has a specific understanding of a definition in this dialogue: "to make [piety's] nature clear," whereby *nature* he means something, i.e. *C*, that can be used "as a model" to distinguish between pious and non-pious actions.²⁹ Inasmuch as providing a model for pious actions, the gods' love—even if it does somehow make *C*—would be subsidiary unless Socrates had a privileged knowledge of the gods' nature, which he does.

Thus, the form or model of piety, even if made by divinity, is more practically understood in terms of its intrinsic characteristics, its correspondence to the divine criterion, and/or divinity's motivations, reasons, or metaphysical needs/desires that brought the criterion into existence. Furthermore, any answer to Socrates' original question—what is the pious?—implicates thereby some further conclusion about the gods' nature. Socrates' argument has shown that they must be either immutably rational or subrational.

Significantly, this sort of theologizing exemplifies the charges that Meletus brings against Socrates: the creation of new gods and disbelief in old ones.³⁰ (6A₁) fell because the gods could not

²⁹ *Euthyphro*, 11a-b; 6e.

³⁰ *Euthyphro*, 3b.

exemplify morality and engage in “terrible enmities and battles.”³¹ (7_{A1}*) fails, because Euthyphro has acknowledged that the gods must be rational or immutably subrational. By refuting (7_{A1}*), Socrates has demonstrated that the gods’ affections reflect their moral wisdom and nature. To Plato’s contemporaries, this thesis would hint at a challenge to the essential ceremonial of Greek religion, animal sacrifice. The Greeks understood animal sacrifice as essentially appetitive. In the ceremony, the community ate the edible part of the animal and burnt the inedible parts to the gods, who presumably savored the fatty vapor. Every Greek admitted this act pious. What aspects of the sacrificial act do the gods approve? To riposte that they enjoy the fatty vapors like man enjoys meat forces a further question: what must the gods be to have appetites for manifestly useless parts of the animal? Walter Burkert has pointed out that this consideration had already made traditional sacrifice the subject of “burlesque.”³² Socrates’ rejection of (7_{A1}*) lays the groundwork for the criticism of religious practice in the second half of the dialogue.

First, Socrates prods Euthyphro into real progress. Euthyphro redefines piety as

(8_{A1}) “[T]he godly and pious is the part of the just that is concerned with the care of the gods, while that concerned with the care of men is the remaining part of justice.”³³

Having led Euthyphro to (8_{A1}), Socrates approves of it. He believes the premise vague and asks Euthyphro to define “care.” For “you do not mean the care of the gods in the same sense as the care of other things” such as care of horses. Euthyphro insists that he does mean this; but Socrates demonstrates to him that the horse breeder aims at the good and benefit of horses. How, then, does man improve the gods? Euthyphro has defined *care* by referring to a relationship between a superior, caring for an inferior. Realizing his error, he inverts his definition of *care* and modifies (8_{A1}). By *care* he means the kind of care that “slaves take of their masters.”³⁴ Hence, he avers that

³¹ *Euthyphro*, 6b.

³² Walter Burkert, 57.

³³ *Euthyphro*, 12e.

³⁴ *Euthyphro*, 13d.

(8_{A1}*) The godly and pious is(=) the part of the just that is concerned with “a kind of service to the gods.”³⁵

All human experience of the service a social inferior offers to a superior, Socrates points out, has a goal. E.g., Servants of a shipbuilder build ships under his direction. If (8_{A1}*), then Euthyphro must further specify it by answering,

(Q1_{A1}) “what is that excellent aim that the gods achieve, using [man] as their servants?”³⁶

In answering (Q1_{A1}), Euthyphro abandons (8_{A1}*) and asserts a new premise:

(9_{A1}) Piety is(=) “knowledge of how to sacrifice and pray.”³⁷

This new premise disappoints Socrates. Had Euthyphro answered (Q1_{A1}), Socrates claims that he would “have acquired from [him] sufficient knowledge of the nature of piety.”³⁸ Therefore, the propositional answer to Socrates’ original question, *what is the form of piety?*, takes the form of

(8_{A1}*1) The godly and pious is(=) the part of the just that is concerned with serving the gods’ for the end of $\Omega\tilde{I}\tilde{Y}$, , where $\Omega\tilde{I}\tilde{Y}$ is the specific end for which the pious man serves the gods.

Having ended consideration of (8_{A1}*1), Euthyphro instead holds fast to the conservatism expressed in (9_{A1}). Traditional religion, which Euthyphro champions, implies that a knowledge of how to perform traditional, ritual actions “both at prayer and sacrifice” pleases the gods toward the end of preserving “both private houses and [the polis].”³⁹ This simple conservatism about the significance of pious actions expresses the rationale for the city’s official cults. Socrates responds by reducing (9_{A1}) to burlesque. If (9_{A1}), then pious practice resembles trading: man offers sacrifices and in return feels confident to pray for favors. Therefore,

(9_{A1}*) Piety is(=) “a knowledge of how to give to, and beg from, the gods.”⁴⁰

³⁵ *Euthyphro*, 13d.

³⁶ *Euthyphro*, 13e.

³⁷ *Euthyphro*, 14c.

³⁸ *Euthyphro*, 14c.

³⁹ *Euthyphro*, 14a-b.

⁴⁰ *Euthyphro*, 14b.

But giving well requires knowing what the receiver needs from the giver. Since it would impinge upon the gods' divinity to believe that they need man, Euthyphro answers that what the gods receive from man does not benefit them. Rather, they receive "honor, reverence, what I mentioned just now [i.e. sacrifice]....to please them"⁴¹ Hence,

(9_{AI}*1) Piety is(=) a knowledge of, first, how to give honor, reverence, and sacrifice to the gods for the purpose of pleasing them and of, second, how to beg all good things from the gods.

(9_{AI}*1) partly defines piety as a knowledge of how to give to the gods gifts that serve no purpose other than pleasing the gods. Following (7_{AI}*1), the question arises, what reason would the gods have for being pleased by such ritual actions? Euthyphro responds by restating the gods' affection for these actions, which repeats (7_{AI}*1)'s folly. And this reopens the question of what the gods must be if their affections for xyz cannot be understood by anything other than the fact of these inexplicable affections.⁴²

To understand the significance of (9_{AI})'s failure, reconsider that it did arise as an attempt to answer (Q_{AI}). Euthyphro understood honoring divinity as the end of serving them. Ancient Greek had no word corresponding to the modern concept of religion. Instead, they employed the phrase "the honors of the gods" (*theon timai*).⁴³ The specific honors of the gods included the sacrifices and prayers referenced by (9_{AI}). Therefore, (9_{AI}) was a conventional, perhaps even analytic, definition. To define piety with the concept of *honor* understands the gods with reference to a certain social order. In Homeric literature the hero/aristocrat sought the community-given recognitions of *timê* (honor) and *kleos* (glory). The community's recognition (*timê*) resulted in material "honors," the means to prosperity/happiness such as slaves, property, and power. The hero's excellences manifested themselves as the ability to enforce his will. The Greeks understood *aretê*—the word for *goodness*, *virtue*, or *excellence*—in terms of this ideal self or hero. (9_{AI}*1) propositionally expresses the gods' goodness with reference to their status at the very

⁴¹ *Euthyphro*, 15a.

⁴² *Euthyphro*, 15b.

⁴³ Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 271.

top of a complicated hierarchy.⁴⁴ *Piety* reasonably consists in recognizing them as super-aristocrats by giving them honors, material or otherwise.

Inasmuch as the master defines himself as *master*, however, he depends upon the recognition of the slave. Without this recognition he cannot be a master. The greater emphasis Euthyphro and traditional religion put on divinity's goodness as super-aristocrats, the greater divinity depends upon man's recognition. *Aristocrat* and *slave* are not natural kinds. Being an aristocrat requires external social recognitions like deference and tributes from social inferiors. The concept of honor itself requires such recognitions from another. Lacking these recognitions, the aristocrat ceases to be honored. In modern society, one could easily make sense of the idea that one was worthy of honor despite lacking "material honors." But the society in which Socrates philosophizes partially defines *goodness* on status and prosperity. It is not *prima facie* clear that hidden *aretê* is possible. Unlike an aristocrat, however, the gods are naturally gods. They possess inalienable virtue. Therefore, the gods do not need honor or recognition. Since the gods' goodness is independent of external recognition, *aretê* must be reexamined. The failure of (9_{A1})'s conventionalism exposes many potential inadequacies in traditional assumptions.

While a troubled concept, piety would remain useful so long as people believed in gods interested in humanity. Ingratiating oneself to a powerful but unpredictable being would provide no sureties. The prudent man, motivated by the numerous external benefits provided by the being, would regardless pursue the relationship. But the relationship would offer no internal good. *Internal good* means some good unattainable except within a practice. Likewise, *external good* means those goods such as power, wealth and status that accrue from human practices but are inessential to them. For instance, friendship provides entertainment. While entertainment accompanies friendship, the pursuit of friendship for entertainment alone seems callow; because it lacks the internal good of friendship. *Practice* means

any coherent and complex form of socially established co-operative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity,

⁴⁴ WKC Guthrie, *The Greeks and their gods* (Methuen, 1950), 117-127.

with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.⁴⁵

E.g., husbandry involves chores—like weeding. These chores themselves do not constitute the practice; neither do they, taken haphazardly, constitute husbandry. Under the rational ordering required by husbandry, the individual chores proceed as actions demanded by husbandry's internal good. This good is a certain state of the self, the virtues gained and the unique satisfaction attained by husbandry's successful practice.

An essentially commercial relationship with the gods makes worship more like a chore than a coherent practice; because the relationship with the divinity of (9_{A1}*1) lacks any coherent internal good. It may seem as if one could have an essentially commercial relationship with the gods. They give man harvests and other blessings and man reciprocates with sacrifice and other ritual actions. The good of this relationship would then become the justice of the commercial transaction. Call this commercial piety or piety_C. Socrates considers piety_C unacceptable. All man's experience of just commercial exchanges involve the open giving and receiving of things perceived as having equal value: "to give correctly is to give [the receivers] what they need from [the givers], for it would not be skillful to bring gifts to anyone that are in no way needed." But this criterion cannot indicate a just exchange between gods and man, because man has nothing that the gods need. Socrates implies an alternative, which Euthyphro ignores: man may have "such an advantage over them in the trade that we receive all our blessings from them and they receive nothing from us."⁴⁶ This alternative, however, stretches the metaphor of the commercial relationship. Instead, it appears like a relationship of tribute. But one receives tribute only from one's subjugated inferiors; and if there is a relationship of subjugation between gods and man, the gods should subject man, not vice versa.

Perhaps, Socrates fails to consider an alternative. Not all just exchanges involve the transaction of things equally needed. The gods may desire sacrifices and ritual manifestations of reverence as superfluous luxuries while man receives essentials from gods. This proposition would capture the

⁴⁵ MacIntyre, *After Virtue: a study in moral theory* (London: Duckworth, 1981), 187.

⁴⁶ *Euthyphro*, 14e.

master/slave relationship that Euthyphro had earlier articulated. Bracketing the question of the master's identity, the master may not require a particular slave's service. A slave, however, depends on his master. To return to an old question, what sort of desire, then, do sacrificial rituals satisfy in the gods?

Assume that man's rituals satisfy an inessential but subrational desire. Even so, piety_C would become limited compared with the virtue that Euthyphro desires to articulate. Piety_C would be important given the gods' power. But this importance would be narrow. It would not extend to the sort of moral issues that Euthyphro needs it to if his dealings with his father be pious. The *Euthyphro* begins with a conception of piety that, while vague, has broad moral applications and assumes moral gods. But piety_C has narrow applications and only entails that gods have certain desires. Piety_C in (9_{A1}), etc., cannot provide for the wide range of moral applications that Euthyphro and Socrates assume. Thus, Plato confronts the defender of traditional religion with the following dilemma: either (9_{A1}), etc. or (8_{A1}*1). If (8_{A1}*1), then perhaps man can make sense of the wide moral application of piety; but he may not be able to understand piety in tradition's terms. If (9_{A1}) he can understand piety in the comfortable terms of cult ritual. But piety_C cannot provide a broad moral framework. Piety_C cannot extend to Euthyphro's own dilemma. Hence, if (9_{A1}), etc., then the discussion in the early part of the dialogue is incoherent. Neither Euthyphro nor Socrates believe themselves so misguided. Ergo, piety_C fails. This failure marks the failure of the best extant attempt to build piety around divinities that have immutable subrational desires. The gods' favor limits piety. The favor must be rational. The dilemma shows the potential divorce between piety as a moral concept and piety as a concept tied to cult ritual. If (8_{A1}*1), then what could *QIY* be to include ritual sacrifices? The *Euthyphro* highlights that the traditional practice of worship may play but a little part in the virtue of piety.

Despite the ultimate failure to define piety, the *Euthyphro* provides four criteria any notion of piety must satisfy. First, since Socrates assumes a normative voluntarism (*x* is good if and only if the gods say it is), then the gods must be in moral harmony. Second, since the Greek gods are rational, piety must be likewise rational. Third, the definition of piety takes the form of (8_{A1}*1). This particular criterion does limited philosophic work, however. Piety as justice in relation to the gods appears like a truism. For *x* to

act justly to y , x would give what he owed to y . To say that piety is the giving of what one owes to the gods is rather limited without specifying what is owed. Fourth and most importantly, piety as the internal good of a relationship with moral gods must have wide moral application. Socrates believes that the divine has a large role in human life, a fact that becomes apparent in his defense of himself and his unique practice of philosophy in the *Apology*.

II. The Apology

The *Apology* recounts Socrates' defense against charges of impiety and corruption of the young. While defending himself, Socrates intimates that his unique practice of philosophy exemplifies true piety. This section will examine the traditionalist's case against Socrates and explore the implications of Socrates' alternative: elenctic philosophy.

A. *Trial and the Traditionalist Response*

Socrates' arguments in the *Euthyphro* did challenge the old gods of the city and did provide philosophically-informed alternatives. Stripping the heroic good from Homer's Zeus, the psychology supporting that good, changes indeed the identity of that god. Giving him new characteristics, even more coherent ones, creates a new god. Homer's defender could challenge the legitimacy of the assumptions informing Socrates' alternative gods. The *Euthyphro*'s challenge to traditional notions of divinity assumes that

(H_r) Human rationality can speak meaningfully about the divine and thereby about reality.

Tradition tended to presume otherwise: by its standards, theologizing was *ipso facto* impious: Burkert writes that the Greeks believed that "[o]ne should not be meddlesome or inquisitive, *polypragmonein*, in

religion, and one should refrain from curiosity.”¹ (H_r) assumes a rational kinship between man and god. Traditional religion maintained a dependence on the Muse’s revelation. The distance it placed between man and god assumed (H_r)’s contradictory, $\neg(H_r)$.

The *Apology* represents Socrates’ accusers maintaining $\neg(H_r)$. In addition to formal charges, the accusers slur that “Socrates is guilty of wrongdoing in that he busies himself studying things in the sky and below the earth; he makes the worse into the stronger argument.”² The slur illustrates an understanding of the insignificance of human rationality when it implies that the former premise, Socrates’ wrongdoing, bears on the latter, Socrates’ intellectual pursuits. Socrates rebuts the accusation by showing the premise to have nonsensical implications. Accusing someone of making the worse argument stronger accuses him of trickery. Trickery either occurs unconsciously, in which case one fools oneself and others, or consciously, in which case one fools only others. Socrates intimates the tenuity of this accusation when rebutting Meletus’ parallel charge of corrupting the young. To corrupt one’s closest associates would willingly harm oneself, since to make a close associate wicked puts oneself in danger of suffering from their wickedness. To corrupt unconsciously, puts one in need of instruction and exhortation rather than indictment. Upon learning better, the individual will cease to practice and teach absurdity.³ Likewise, to make the worse argument stronger unconsciously convicts one of ignorance. To accuse someone of knowingly committing himself to falsehood accuses him of blank inconsistency, of averring that “ x is y but I believe ‘ x is not y ’”? In either case a presentation of the better argument is the best response.

Socrates’ accusers, however, believed the accusation correct; the jury agreed. Why? They may have presumed that forensics was argument as such. Political and legal debates are designed to persuade and exhort men to action. In these *ad hoc* circumstances, “making the worse argument stronger” implies the ability to play both sides of an argument. If one’s opponent argues “Athens ought to a because xyz ,” it is not *ipso facto* specious to reply that further consideration of xyz suggests Athens ought not to a . What is

¹ Burkert, 273.

² *Apology*, 19b.

³ *Apology*, 26a.

virtuous in debate, however, becomes impious in religion. Theological premises are not *ad hoc*. They concern all reality and are the bedrock against which any particular practical or legal proposition makes sense. Applying the rhetorician's craft to such premises threatens the consensus around which social cohesion is based.

Socrates would respond that he questioned bedrock premises, because he wanted to know them, or, at least the truth about proper living and proper honoring of the gods. Even so, to demonstrate that certain premises concerning the divine are irrational or rational would not necessarily entail anything about their veracity, because the debate concerns the value of rationality itself. The inference from a premise's irrationality to a conclusion about its veracity requires (H_r), which tradition denied. If human rationality cannot investigate reality, any human analysis of revelation and of human practices with divine origins will result in confusion. The practice of asking questions, which lack intelligible answers, may indeed endanger the community.

For instance, in *Euthyphro* Socrates, speculating about the motivations behind the gods' quarrels, assumes that they would fight for the same reasons as man—i.e. over normative values rather than facts.⁴ To assume that man can inquire after the cause of his disputes and attribute this answer to the gods presumes the rational kinship with divinity that traditionalists deny. Socrates' argument is circular.

It may not be viciously circular. The traditionalist position has the same problem. Consider a modification of a traditionalist argument that Adeimantus, one of Socrates' interlocutors from the *Republic*, presents (A2):

- (1_{A2}) The gods do exist (= G_e) \vee The gods do not exist (= $\sim G_e$)
- (2_{A2}) $\sim G_e \rightarrow$ Man ought not concern ourselves with them
- (3_{A2}) $G_e \rightarrow$ The gods care about human affairs (= C) \vee The gods do not care about human affairs (= $\sim C$)
- (4_{A2}) $\sim C \rightarrow$ Man ought not concern ourselves with gods.
- (5_{A2}) $C \rightarrow$ Man has "learned all [he] know[s] about [the gods] from the [laws/customs] and the poets who give their genealogies."
- \therefore (6_{A2}) Man "should believe [the poets and custom] on both matters [, i.e. the existence of the gods and their nature] or neither."⁵

⁴ *Euthyphro*, 7b-8b.

⁵ Extrapolated from *Republic* 365d-366a.

The traditionalist's argument depends on (5_{A2}). This premise asserts that since all knowledge about the gods heretofore derives from custom, custom is the only possible source of knowledge about the divine. This ambitious claim, disputed by Socrates and Plato, expresses religious conventionalism, like (9_{A1}).⁶ To defend (5_{A2}), however, the traditionalist must assert $\neg(H_r)$ and the consequent inference that

(7_{A2}) Philosophical challenges to tradition and common life are nugatory, vain, and idle.

But this assumes (6_{A2}). The traditional, religious framework of capricious, powerful gods and pathetic, servile men confronts a philosophic alternative of rational, immutable gods and their rational, embodied servants, men. Negotiating between them requires understanding the nature of Socrates' rational practice, his devotion to god—philosophy.

B. Philosophy

Socrates began practicing philosophy when he heard that the Oracle at Delphi had stated that “no one was wiser” than himself. Aware of his ignorance, Socrates reluctantly began questioning others. If he could find someone wiser than himself, he could return to the Oracle and justly demand an explanation.⁷ Socrates does not believe that Apollo at Delphi had lied as his investigation may imply. “[I]t is not legitimate for him to do so.”⁸ He desires to solve the god's riddle. Two aspects of Socrates' reaction to this divine command recall *Euthyphro*.

First, in the *Apology* Socrates commits himself to an authoritarian normative ethics. Before he has reached a reasonable understanding of the gods' proclamation, Socrates believes the god ordered him to “live the life of a philosopher, to examine [himself] and others.”⁹ He accepts the god as a moral authority to whom he owes absolute obedience. In one of his only pronouncements of knowledge, Socrates states

⁶ Burkert, 274-275.

⁷ *Apology*, 21a-e.

⁸ *Apology*, 21b.

⁹ *Apology*, 28e.

that “it is wicked and shameful to do wrong, to disobey one’s superior, be he god or man.”¹⁰ He exemplifies this statement by himself following the gods’ orders before knowing his reasons.

Second, Socrates’ desire to understand rationally the god’s command recalls the metaethical thesis of *Euthyphro*. Actions *xyz* may good or bad because the god commands/love them. *Good* or *bad* may be voluntaristic, receiving their nature from god’s nature. Since god is rational, however, he discerns a characteristic of *A_p* that merits him commanding them beyond his activity of commanding them. Socrates explicitly juxtaposes his authoritarian normative ethics, that *x* is moral iff the god says it is, with a non-authoritarian meta-ethics, that the gods commands have a further rationale: “it is impossible for me to keep quiet [by not practicing elenchus] because that means disobeying the god... I say that it is the greatest good for man to discuss virtue every day and those other things about which you hear me conversing and testing myself and others, for the unexamined life is not worth living for men.”¹¹ Socrates cannot stop practicing philosophy, because the god has commanded it; but the god commands Socrates to practice philosophy, because “it is the greatest good.” Its contradictory engenders a life “not worth living.” It does not follow that man can know the greatest good as the gods know it. The god’s rational considerations may be too profound for man’s faculties. Nevertheless, man’s iota of rationality allows an intelligible pursuit of the answer to the question: apart from Apollo’s command, why is discussion of elenctic philosophy the greatest good?

While examining men, Socrates categorically found claims of knowledge unjustified. He concluded that

what is probable...is that in fact the god is wise and that his oracular response meant that human wisdom is worth little or nothing, and that when he says this man, Socrates, he is using my name as an example, as if he said: ‘This man among you, mortals, is wisest who, like Socrates, understands that his wisdom is worthless.’ So even now I continue this investigation as the god bade me—and I go around seeking out anyone, citizen or stranger, whom I think wise. Then if I do not think he is, I come to the assistance of the god and show him that he is not wise...I live in great poverty because of my service to the god.¹²

¹⁰ *Apology*, 29b.

¹¹ *Apology*, 38a.

¹² *Apology*, 23a-c.

Socrates' conclusion weaves together philosophy as a divine calling, the worthlessness of human wisdom, the superiority of divine wisdom, and an example of the service man renders god. Elenctic philosophy tends, for Socrates, toward the realization of a theological truth with important moral implications. Along with Homer and Hesiod, the Delphic maxims approximated the Abrahamic religions' notion of revelation. Carved into the temple at Delphi, these short aphorisms exemplify tradition's basic preconceptions. Socrates adopted one, *know thyself*. He alludes as well to another, *think as a mortal*. That human knowledge is "worth little or nothing" *eo ipso* entails that all mortal thought is non-wise thought.¹³ To think as a mortal is to understand one's limitations. Through elenctic examination, Socrates helps his subject discover his ignorance. This discovery implies the recognition of the distinction between god and man: the gods possess an excellence and wisdom that men lack. Understanding one's ignorance and insignificance somehow entails moral wisdom—as much as man can achieve. In the *Symposium* Alcibiades, an infamous fifth-century political opportunist, recounts this experience of Socrates' *elenchus*. It makes him "dissatisfied with the slavish quality of [his] life." Only in Socrates' presence does he experience shame.¹⁴ Socrates does not give Alcibiades propositional knowledge about morality. Rather, his example teaches an ethical know-how from which Alcibiades intuits the poor quality of his life. A gulf appears between the theological recognition of man's limitedness and the moral knowledge that Socrates teaches: how does self-knowledge of one's ignorance entail moral knowledge of how to live?

Since Socrates understood himself as a servant to Apollo at Delphi, he believed himself to be developing tradition. Indeed, turning from the *Apology*'s philosophical drama to Sophocles' earlier, tragic drama, *Oedipus Rex*, reveals significant continuity with tradition's understanding of the relationship between self-knowledge and morality. Oedipus is a prideful man with great confidence in his ability to "bring what is dark to light" with rational inquiry.¹⁵ After his profound failure, he becomes aware of his ignorance and lowly status. He subsequently blinds himself, an action signifying his realization of

¹³ Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 49-50.

¹⁴ *Symposium*, 216a-b.

¹⁵ *Oedipus Rex*, 76, 9.

reason's limitations. Once humbled, Oedipus can "listen to the god." Like Sophocles, Socrates believes self-knowledge removes hubris thereby helping man to act properly—according to his limited place in the cosmos.

Socrates disagrees with Sophocles, however, on the nature of reality. Oedipus' fall seems like the necessary consequence of reason challenging tradition. This implies rationality's impotence against divine forces and suggests Sophocles' commitment to (7_{A2}). Socrates believes that the recognition of an infinite distance between divine and man does not require envisioning the gods as so far from man that no analogy between divine reason and human reason exists. Neither does it require the consequent belief that inquiry is fruitless. Socrates differs from Sophocles, because he believes that a life spent in rational investigation, the "examined life," is the best life. Like Sophocles, Socrates understands his action in moral terms:

I shall not cease to practice philosophy, to exhort you and in my usual way... Good Sir, ... are you not ashamed of your eagerness to possess as much wealth, reputation, and honors as possible, while you do not care nor give thought to wisdom or truth, or the best possible state of your soul?" ...

[A]s I say to you: "Wealth does not bring about excellence, but excellence makes wealth and everything good for men, both individually and collectively."¹⁶

Proper living needs rationality in order to subordinate external goods to virtue.

But how does elenctic philosophy entail both a realization of ignorance and moral knowledge? Consider a derivative question first: what is the substance of Socrates' moral knowledge? Socrates does not specify the nature of a moral life; and he does not overthrow conventional Greek morality. Instead, he often appears very conservative, as when he expresses shock that Euthyphro prosecutes his own father.¹⁷ In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades' encomium of Socrates shows an idealized but conventionally moral life: despite his eccentricities, Socrates outdoes Greeks in campaign, drink, love, and worship.¹⁸ Even his eccentricities lie in taking traditional morals to an unheard of extreme. This conservatism makes Socrates'

¹⁶ *Apology*, 29d-30b.

¹⁷ *Euthyphro*, 4a.

¹⁸ *Symposium*, 215-219.

elenctic philosophizing bizarre. Why would Apollo command a new practice to achieve conservative moral ends?

An illusion of knowledge, Socrates intimates, encourages men to conceive of goods and of evils extraneous to the cultivation of the soul's excellence. This artificial moral horizon justifies shameful behavior. Socrates believes that the demonstration of ignorance will lead men to return to moral behavior as its own end. "I shall never," Socrates states, "fear or avoid things of which I do not know." Therefore, he does not fear death; to do so is to "think oneself wise when one is not." No one knows whether "death may not be the greatest of all blessings for man."¹⁹ Understanding ignorance of the ultimate ends of human action entails that man respond to each new contingency with rectitude, rather than with schemes to benefit himself. He asserts, in other words,

(C_{AP}) The purpose of a human life is ethically living that life, excluding of any other consideration.

While it may seem modest, (C_{AP}) separates non-moral *aretê*, i.e. external goodness, from moral *aretê*, internal goodness. The Homeric hero, in practice if not in poetry, was given to make the kind of moral compromises Socrates deplored partly due to selfish human nature. Partly, however, the sort of behavior Socrates urged, lent itself to terrible sacrifices not entirely coherent from tradition's purview. After death, the self continued existence as a witless, "powerless, unconscious image of recollection in a gloomy Hades."²⁰

Such high stakes make it seem that Socrates' ignorance claims too much. To allow ignorance to disregard the benefit of external ends like glory, honor, and power may be admirable; to allow ignorance to disregard the consideration of whether or not one lives or dies appears foolhardy. The pursuit of virtue to the endangerment of one's life destroys the very goods that make the pursuit of virtue worthwhile. Conceding, then, that "excellence makes...everything good for man," a virtuous man could respond that one practices virtue to live the good life. Man has no knowledge of death. It could be the greatest

¹⁹ *Apology*, 29a-b.

²⁰ Burkert, 300.

blessing; it could be the greatest evil. Socrates recognizes this argument and responds with an appeal to tradition.

Achilles died rather than live as a coward, and all Greeks believe a man shameful if he flees in battle to save his life.²¹ In other words, a retreat to save one's life that involves vice, i.e. cowardice, *ipso facto* destroys the virtuous life it meant to preserve by destroying virtue. But the metaphor of soldiering that Socrates employs is troublesome. A soldier fights for an end decided by the general. A perfect general's perfect battle plan does not guarantee good outcomes for each individual soldier. It often sacrifices lives for a greater good. If Socrates takes his metaphor seriously, he has no guarantee that his death for the sake of virtue benefits him personally.

Nevertheless, he remains sanguine. Socrates has a "good hope that death is a blessing."²² Socrates reasons that his *daimon*, his divine sign which frequently stopped him in even small matters, did not oppose him on his way to the courthouse. From this lack of a divine intuition, Socrates concludes that "it [is] better for him to die now" rather than to escape trouble and die later.²³ Socrates recognizes, however, the ambiguity in this statement arising from the word *better*. *Better* does not necessarily refer to a personal *better*: it could refer to a cosmic better against which an individual's concerns mean little.

Socrates' last words to the jury do emphasize the uncertainty of his fate: "I go to die, you go to live. Which of us goes to the better lot is known to no one, except the god."²⁴ But these admissions make his assertion of the following "truth" to the jury enigmatic:

(S_{AP}) "a good man cannot be harmed either in life or in death, and...his affairs are not neglected by the gods."²⁵

How does (S_{AP}) chime with the skepticism toward death that he expresses before and after its assertion? From the purview of the *Apology*, no adequate answer suggests itself.

²¹ *Apology*, 28c-e.

²² *Apology*, 40c.

²³ *Apology*, 41d.

²⁴ *Apology*, 42a.

²⁵ *Apology*, 41d.

Despite the *ad hoc* nature of Socrates' arguments in the *Apology*, he has given answers relevant to the *Euthyphro*'s discussion of piety. Reconsider (8_{AI}*1), which marks the zenith of the *Euthyphro*'s progress:

(8_{AI}*1) The godly and pious is(=) the part of the just that is concerned with serving the gods' for the end of $\Omega\tilde{I}\tilde{Y}$.

Socrates has explicitly detailed his own service to the gods, his elenctic philosophizing. This activity improves the interlocutor's moral character by forcing him to a realization of (C_{AP}). The service of the gods, therefore, manifests itself in moral action. To act piously is to act morally and exhort others to do the same. Even with Socrates' defense in the *Apology*, however, we lack any understanding of what $\Omega\tilde{I}\tilde{Y}$, the ultimate end of pious action, could be. Socrates has provided a particularly vivid picture of how one behaves piously, but it remains particular. The *Apology* does not define the ultimate end of pious action. Indeed, it may seem to suggest that such knowledge is beyond man's ken. Defining $\Omega\tilde{I}\tilde{Y}$, the end to which man's moral service to the gods' tends, requires an account of the gods and their nature.

Part Two: Platonic Answers

This section will demonstrate how Plato revised the gods of traditional religion, challenged alternative theories, and proposed an alternative. These theological developments define the gods' relationship with man. In so doing they specify the nature of piety. Plato's early dialogues relate the problem of the radical disagreement of the application of moral terms to problems in rational theology. Later dialogues continue reflecting on this interaction. Hence, he attacks competing theories for being morally corrupting and for being theologically inadequate. The *Republic* (c. 380 BC) will be the touchstone for the first charge and Plato's last work, the *Laws* (c. 348~347), for the second.

I. The Republic: Contra Morally Inadequate Gods

In the *Republic* Plato argues that the just life is preferable to the unjust. His interlocutors claim that the goodness of justice and other virtues derive from its external benefits rather than its internal benefits.¹ Therefore, appearing just matters more than being just; because it affords all of justice's external benefits without any of justice's restrictions on the means of amassing external goods.² He who practices justice does so because he is too weak to act unjustly with impunity. Shared weakness causes men to "come to an agreement with each other" about "proper" action, i.e. justice.³ The argument divorces standards of morality from natural human happiness by making the former an artificial constraint on the latter. Justice may benefit society, but individuals benefit by acting unjustly. Good character

¹ Since this thesis is about piety and not about the sundry arguments against justice with which Plato's Socrates contended, the case against just living will be somewhat idealized and disagreements between the similar views of Thrasymachus and Callicles minimized.

² *Republic*, 357b-358e.

³ *Republic*, 358e-359b.

becomes contrary to morally virtuous character. Rectitude exemplifies irrationality or self-doubt or unenlightenment. The ideal man ought to defy artificial social constraints in order to assert his will over others.⁴

Plato believes that this perspective derived partly from a misunderstanding of the good, a theme that develops the inadequacies of the *Euthyphro*'s

(9_{A1}*) piety is(=) a knowledge of, first, how to give honor, reverence, and sacrifice to the gods for the purpose of pleasing them and, second, how to beg all good things from the gods.

This premise failed, because it devolves piety into a practice that brings only external goods. Glaucon, Socrates' interlocutor, continues this theme by proposing the case of the perfectly unjust man. While possessing no virtue, this man enjoys all external goods, including those accruing from a reputation for virtue. Therefore,

[he] becomes wealthy...He makes adequate sacrifices to the gods and sets up magnificent offerings to them. He takes better care of the gods, therefore...than a just person does. Hence it's likely that the gods, in turn, will take better care of him than of a just person."⁵

Since external goods motivate the gods themselves, the perfectly unjust man practices the sacrificial "care" expressed in (9_{A1}*). Even were the gods to institute rules for just behavior, he could excuse himself from them by taking advantage of mystic cults, which promised to "free people [who participated in these pleasing initiations] from punishment hereafter."⁶ To avoid ultimate punishment the man need only flatter the gods with a portion of his lucre.

These cults' mythology gives further cause for concern. The gods "lead the just to Hades" where they enjoy an eternal symposium drinking with other pious men "as if ...drunkenness [were] the finest wage of virtue."⁷ The gods punish "the impious and unjust" in various external ways: they bury them in mud, "force them to carry water in a sieve," etc. Giving external rewards for justice and external

⁴ *Gorgias*, 482c-486d.

⁵ *Republic*, 362b-c.

⁶ *Republic*, 364e-365a.

⁷ *Republic*, 363b-d.

punishments for injustice implies that justice is not its own reward and injustice, its own punishment.⁸ If justice in life makes sense only because of an assurance of greater external goods in death, then justice does become a means only.

Plato associates this paradigm with tradition's portrayal of the gods. The traditional gods' goodness allowed for their intense, unlimited enjoyment of external goods. The gods' activity thereby included paroxysm; violent laughter; intense, uncontrollable sexual urges and their immediate gratification; unlimited food and drink. Desire for these goods subjugates the gods' rationality.⁹ The gods attain goods with few consequences or constraints. Hence, "an unjust person, who has secured for himself a reputation for justice, lives the life of a god."¹⁰

This unjust man apes the gods' use of cleverness and force. He will likewise use "sacrifices, gentle prayers, and offerings," harnessing the "great power" of "mystery rites" to persuade the gods to overlook his injustice.¹¹ In the *Euthyphro* (9_{A1}*) suggests that sacrificial religion makes the gods dependent on mortal recognition. Plato's characterization of sacrificial worship in *Republic* develops this theme, suggesting that it subordinates the gods to man's will rather than vice versa. To say that the unjust man will manipulate the gods just as he manipulates assemblies of his peers exalts the unjust man's powers and debases divinity's. This desecrates worship: it becomes manipulation rather than trade. The association of rational beings—whether god or man—with one another becomes naturally competitive. Since goods are external, enjoyment of a good deprives another from enjoying it.

This apology for injustice implies a claim about human rationality and reality. Plato's *Gorgias*, written prior to *Republic*, elucidates it. Gorgias (485~380), a rhetorician and philosopher, wrote *On What is Not or On Nature*. He argues that nothing is real; that even if something is real, it cannot be known; and that even if something is real and can be known it cannot be communicated.¹² This argument questions

⁸ *Republic*, 363d-e.

⁹ *Republic*, 388-392.

¹⁰ *Republic*, 365b.

¹¹ *Republic*, 364d and 365.

¹² Robert Wardy, *The Birth of Rhetoric: Gorgias, Plato, and their successors* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 16.

the possibility of philosophical ratiocination and human communication. Gorgias in his “Encomium of Helen” claims that rationality is a violent force that moulds the passive human soul, manipulating and controlling it. Conviction, whether by flattery or apparent order, becomes a function of dialectical “force.”¹³ Since the real is either a chimera or unknowable, this force wields great power over others. Therefore

(H_{Gr}) Human rationality has the power to forcibly seize control of another’s will and convince forcibly. It cannot speak meaningfully about reality or any foundational, certain premises since these neither exist nor, if they do, correspond to reason.

The ethic of the unjust man presumes (H_{Gr}). Not every unjust man need believe (H_{Gr}). But it justifies the immoral—by conventional lights—life. Plato himself makes the association explicit in *Gorgias*. In *Gorgias* the character Callicles justifies the paradigm above by distinguishing between justice according to nature and justice according to convention. Justice by nature is the will of the stronger, uncorrupted by the mollifying influence of justice according to convention. The other-focused morality of conventional justice stymies natural justice. The superior man may rule with impunity. Brute force is ineffective, since inferior masses can overwhelm the superior individual; rhetorical manipulation, subtle force, becomes the first art.¹⁴ If rhetorical manipulation be the prime art, then any justification of this unjust life is another instance of manipulation. Rationality creates only specious order. Hence, since all moral claims are specious, the apology for the “natural” life can seek only to persuade rather than reveal the truth.

In responding to these apologies for (conventional) injustice, Plato’s Socrates in the *Republic* articulates an alternative theology. All stories about the gods ought to conform to it so that education will instill proper moral values into children. He asserts this theology’s veracity almost as an afterthought. He elaborates with three arguments.

First, he argues that the gods are good, (A3):

(1_{A3}) “[A] god is ... good.”

¹³ Wardy, 39.

¹⁴ *Gorgias*, 488b-489b.

(2_{A3}) “[N]othing good is harmful.”

(3_{A3}) “[W]hat isn’t harmful [can] do [no] harm.”

∴(4_{A3}) A god can do no harm.

(5_{A3}) “[W]hat does no harm [can] do [nothing] bad.”

(6_{A3}) “[W]hat does nothing bad [cannot] be the cause of anything bad.”

∴(7_{A3}) A god can do nothing bad.

(8_{A3}) “[T]he good is beneficial.”

(9_{A3}) “[The beneficial] is the cause of doing well.”

∴(10_{A3}) “The good isn’t the cause of all things...but only of good ones; it isn’t the cause of bad ones.”

∴(11_{A3}) A god is responsible only for the good things that happen to us, not everything.

∴(12_{A3}) “The actions of the gods are good and just.”¹⁵

The word *good* in this proof is ambiguous. Socrates relies on premise (2_{A3}), but the relationship between one’s goodness and one’s potential to cause harm depends on goodness’ nature. Unfortunately, good was the concept originally in question. Consider two probable alternatives. (i) If the good, even in part, is not an intrinsic characteristic of divinity, then it could become an object of competition. Even *if* the gods would never intentionally harm mortals, competition for limited external goods could accidentally harm them. Therefore, the gods’ goodness does not mean that their expression or pursuit of that goodness would not harm another. (1_{A3}) potentially contradicts (3_{A3}). Alternatively, (ii) the gods’ goodness does not necessarily imply benevolence to each part of the whole. The good of the gods or the whole may or may not be good to the individual mortal. These considerations moderate (A3). (2_{A3}) becomes

(2_{A3})’ Nothing good is ultimately harmful to itself or to the one enjoying it.

Therefore, (4_{A3}) becomes

(4_{A3})’ A god can do no ultimate harm to himself or to one enjoying a specific, conscious instance of his goodness.

¹⁵ *Republic*, 379-380b.

Consequently, (7_{A3}) becomes

(7_{A3})' A god can do nothing bad to himself or to one enjoying a specific, conscious instance of his goodness.

Likewise, (8_{A3}) becomes

(8_{A3})' The good is ultimately beneficial to the one enjoying it.

These plausible expressions of the gods' goodness limit Socrates' argument such that one may accept (12_{A3}) without (10_{A3}) or (11_{A3}).

To conclude (10_{A3}) and (11_{A3}), Socrates requires three related premises:

(13_{A3}) The good of a part of reality harmonizes with the good every other part.

(14_{A3}) The good of one part of reality is good for all other parts. (This ought not be taken to imply, however, that each part of reality is able to enjoy this goodness. The gods may enjoy *x*; man may enjoy a good that approximates *x*; and nature may participate in *x*.)

(15_{A3}) The good is such that the specific good that befits each part of the whole may be enjoyed entirely without depriving another part.

With these premises, the gods' goodness implies benevolence to each part of the whole.¹⁶ The gods' justice now signifies their moral benevolence toward each individual.

These conclusions may expand Socrates' own insistence that no harm comes to the just man. But the amorality of nature's regularities become difficult to understand, especially because the gods rule nature. Plato accepts the manner in which his conclusions limit the interaction of the divine in human affairs without providing an answer to the problem of evil created by (A3): divinity causes "only a few things" that happen to men, since "good things are fewer than bad ones in our lives...[W]e must find some other cause for the bad ones, not a god."¹⁷ The limitation of the gods' influence has little significance. Socrates does not limit the gods' association with nature and Plato's later works explicitly

¹⁶ *Republic*, 380a-b.

¹⁷ *Republic*, 379c.

assert it. Plato must believe, despite appearances, that behind nature's regularities cosmic justice works for the good of every part of the whole. Within the *Republic*, Socrates shies away from the ambitious implications of (A3). He makes explicit only its disproving the gods' deliberately malicious actions like the assignment of an evil fate.¹⁸

How, then, to explain the cause of evil? Because traditional religion did not believe that the gods' goodness entailed they would seek the good of others, evil was conceptually unproblematic. Yet Plato's problem of evil differs from that of Judaism and Christianity. The gods of Plato do not romantically love man; neither do they love him in particular. Their goodness implies (3_{A3}) and (9_{A3}), doing well and doing no harm. From premises (13_{A3}), (14_{A3}), and (15_{A3}), this goodness derives from and concerns the harmony of the cosmic whole. The concern for this whole may be selfless, as Timaeus states in *Timaeus*; but the gods do not selflessly love man in particular. In comparison the Christian and Hebraic traditions describe the divine's care for man romantically; Jehovah and the Trinity selflessly love man in particular as the pinnacle of their respective traditions. They even miraculously intervene to effect salvation. As such, the fallen nature of man proves especially problematic in Christianity and Judaism. If God is good and man is the pinnacle of his creation why is man vicious? If the Jewish and Christian divinities love creation because they love man, the gods of Plato's philosophy care for man because they care for creation. Hence, man's viciousness is not as problematic for Plato, since the gods only concern themselves in the second place with man. In Plato's scheme the problem of natural evil is more problematic. The apparent disorders of nature—plague, flood, etc.—suggest poor governance rather than harmony.

Hence, the most vulnerable premises are those implied by (A3)'s notion of goodness: (13_{A3}), (14_{A3}) and (15_{A3}). Each posits a harmony in the natural world such that rationally seeking one's own good seeks the good of the whole. Plato never addresses the topic in the *Republic* partly because the argument, while a valid theological proof, has the *ad hoc* purpose of serving as a model for pedagogical poems. Later works hint at an answer.

¹⁸ *Republic*, 379c-380c.

The second and third proofs concern the gods' use of sorcery. By sorcery, Plato means the gods' ability to transmogrify to manipulate mortals, as when Zeus transforms himself into a swan to rape Leda.

(A4):

(1_{A4}) If a god changes his form, then he must "change himself or be changed by someone else."

(2_{A4}) The best things are least liable to "alteration or change."

DEM1 of (2_{A4}): "The most courageous and most rational soul is least disturbed or altered by any outside affection."

DEM2 of (2_{A4}): "whatever is in good condition...admits least of being changed by anything else."

(3_{A4}) "A god and what belongs to him are in every way in the best condition."

∴(4_{A4}) A god would least need to change himself.

(5_{A4}) If a god were to change himself, it would be into "something worse and uglier," because a god is not "deficient in either beauty or virtue."

(6_{A4}) No one would deliberately make himself worse.

∴(7_{A4}) "Since they are the most beautiful and best possible, it seems that each always and unconditionally retains his own shape."

With the principle of sufficient reason Socrates infers from (7_{A4}) that

∴(8_{A4}) "the gods are unable to change."¹⁹

Since transmogrifying is a type of deceit, Socrates immediately adds (A5) to (A4). (A5) strengthens (A4) with the claim that the gods cannot deceive. (A5):

(1_{A5}) "To be false in one's soul about the things that are, to be ignorant and to have and hold falsehood there, is what everyone would least of all accept, for everyone hates a falsehood in that place most of all."

(2_{A5}) True falsehood is ignorance in the soul of someone who has been told a falsehood.

¹⁹ *Republic*, 380e-381.

(3_{A5}) Falsehood in words “is a kind of imitation of this affection in the soul, an image of it that comes into being after it and is not a pure falsehood.”

(4_{A5}) Gods and man hate true falsehood.

(5_{A5}) Falsehood in words is not necessarily deserving of hatred; because it can be useful

(6_{A5}) Falsehood is useful only in the following circumstances: against one’s enemies or when so-called friends are attempting something bad through madness or ignorance or in the case of ancient events about which we know nothing like Homer and Hesiod’s myths.

(7_{A5}) A god would not be false for fear of his enemies

(8_{A5}) “No one who is ignorant or mad is a friend of the gods.”

(9_{A5}) The gods are not ignorant of ancient events.

∴(10_{A5}) There’s no reason for a god to use falsehood.²⁰

From (A₄) and (A₅) Socrates concludes that

(1_{A4-A5}) “A god...is simple and true in word and deed. He doesn’t change himself or deceive others by images, words or signs, whether in visions or in dreams.”²¹

These two arguments elucidate the gods’ activity and their good.

The gods’ immutability, (8_{A4}), implies that they do not enjoy external goods. The intellectual vogue contemporary to Plato understood desire in terms of the experience of a lack and physical pleasure in the terms of satisfying that lack.²² If one cannot change one can neither experience desire nor satisfy it. Therefore, if a god could experience lack, which would contradict (3_{A4}), his inability to change would make it impossible for him to sate it with a good external to his being. Such a god would exist in a perpetual state of unsatisfied desire—an unhappy existence. (A₅) reinforces this conclusion by making manipulative rationality impossible for the gods. By (1_{A4-A5}), divine manipulation is metaphysically impossible. Furthermore, the ends toward which these deceptions generally tend—Socrates singles out

²⁰ *Republic*, 382.

²¹ *Republic*, 382e.

²² *Phaedrus*, 258e.

pursuit of status through vengeance²³—become ungodly. Since a god is perfect and cannot change, he enjoys only goods internal to his godhead.

If man is a morally obligated to imitate the gods and the gods are immutable, morally beneficent, and uninterested in external goods or desires, then man ought to imitate this ideal. Since the gods' happiness derives from the good internal to his soul, so must the pious man's. The position anticipates a third-century development, Stoicism, which likewise emphasized the nonessential nature of goods external to the self. To distinguish between goods internal and external to the soul from those internal and external to a practice, let the former be *internal_s* and *external_s* goods and the latter be *internal_p* and *external_p* goods.

Before completing his theological proofs, Socrates reminds his audience of their ethical and pedagogical focus: children ought to hear stories consistent with these arguments so that they “honor the gods and their parents and not take their friendship with one another lightly.” Socrates often appears to ignore the distinction between what the stories must say in order to inculcate virtue and what the stories must say to portray the gods accurately. Instead, he considers these theological “models” proofs about how stories ought to portray the gods to ensure a virtuous citizenry.²⁴ For example, he infers from the need for citizens to have courage to the need for them to “be told stories that will make them least afraid of death”²⁵; from the need for them to possess moderation to the statement that Achilles, the son of a god, could not have “[been] such a money-lover that he would...release the corpse of Hector for a ransom but not otherwise.”²⁶ Plato's Socrates' concludes that “these things are both [morally] impious and untrue.” While (A3) does substantiate the latter claim, (A3) itself presumes the nature of *good* is moral.²⁷ In Book I, Socrates makes a parallel assertion: the gods are just and “an unjust person is an enemy of the gods...while a just person is their friend.”²⁸ The statement is worrisome, because Socrates' interlocutors

²³ *Republic*, 383a-c.

²⁴ *Republic*, 386.

²⁵ *Republic*, 386a.

²⁶ *Republic*, 391a.

²⁷ *Republic*, 391d-e.

²⁸ *Republic*, 352a-b.

on justice represent one of two positions. They dispute the admirableness of justice or the content of *justice*. In the first case Socrates cannot assume the justice of the gods; as ideal beings, they would not be just beings. In the second case Socrates cannot assume *justice* has a moral content. Thus, the theological arguments in the *Republic* bring two worries. An old difficulty returns: how can Socrates assume that these words have moral dimensions when applied to the gods, especially when all extant stories suggest otherwise? The question is partly answered by reflecting on how Plato thought the following paradigmatic argument that appears in Books II and III of the *Republic*, (R1), valid:

(1_{R1}) The gods ought to be represented as *X* in order to inculcate moral virtues in citizens.

∴ (2_{R1}) The gods are *X*.

(1_{R1}) does not entail (2_{R1}). This argument presumes (5_{A1}), the gods' exemplification of the moral criterion. With (5_{A1}), Socrates can infer that the strictest standards of human justice reflect the gods' nature. This would implicate (4_{A1}), i.e. one ought to strive to imitate the gods. Does Plato, however, provide any justification for these necessary premises in his paradigmatic proof, (R1)? He does not; he simply assumes that *good* means *moral good* and that the gods are thereby moral exemplars. This may be worrisome because the good of the unjust life, might is right, has some grounding in the morass of tradition. The Hymn to Demeter justifies religious worship thus: "the gifts that the gods bestow we humans endure/Perforce, though filled with grief: for they are more mighty by far."²⁹ As one would expect from Callicles' position, the gods' might justifies their right to rule. This paradigm could provide at best an unattractive and at worse an incoherent picture of divinity. In light of this fact, Plato may have believed it best to assume *good*'s moral nature and build his theology from that assumption.

He may have held the following against competing positions. From the observation that men everywhere voluntarily worship the gods, Socrates could infer that

(3_{R1}) the gods are worthy of man's worship.

(3_{R1}) entails that the gods embody certain moral and ethical ideals. Man himself is a creature concerned with moral action—ideally for its own sake, but also because he needs it to function as a rational animal

²⁹ Hymn to Demeter, line 147.

among and dependent upon his fellows. A being worthy of man's worship by a social, ethical creature cannot itself engage in antisocial behavior. If it did, man would have little reason to worship it voluntarily. Hence, (3_{R1}) allows for man's criteria to judge the gods. Being worthy of man's worship requires meeting man's terms. In order for the worship of divinity by a moral, social creature to be coherent, divinity itself must display moral and harmonious brilliance, (5_{A1}), such that it behooves man to imitate this brilliance, as per (4_{A1}), and recognize it with worship. Rejecting (3_{R1}) and the premises it supports signifies, therefore, that the gods are worthy of moral contempt or indifference.

But what makes a god worthy of worship depends upon the prior notion of goodness. Socrates' interlocutors understand man's nature differently and thereby commend avaricious and unscrupulous behavior, despising conventional morality. While their notion of good can substantiate commending or praising the gods, it cannot make coherent the further act of worship. The type of commendation specific to worship recognizes the gods' perfect or near-perfect exemplification of the good. This exemplification is often such that man depends upon the gods like a slave depends upon a master, as Socrates and Euthyphro hold in *Euthyphro*. On one level worship recognizes these realities. But not every conception of *good* and *godly* can support the coherency of the human practice of worship.³⁰ Worshipping implies, where commendation does not, a particular moral obligation in the virtue of piety. A proper disposition toward the gods "is a positive qualification which guarantees further virtues."³¹ Hence, if the obligation to worship is to be coherent, the gods' superiority and reign over man must jibe with the requirements of morality.

Therefore, since Socrates assumes a moral foundation to *good*, he could infer from (3_{ARe}) the moral conclusion that

(3_{R1}*) Man ought to worship the gods.

Compare (3_{R1}) with another premise:

(4_{R1}) The gods are worthy of praise.

³⁰ *Euthyphro*, 14c-15.

³¹ Burkert, 273.

Everyone could agree with (4_{R1}). But this agreement is limited. If Denis is worthy of praise, others do not necessarily have a moral obligation to praise Denis. If the *raison d'être* of Denis' praise lacks a moral foundation—if it were an athletic accomplishment—then no one would have a moral obligation to praise Denis. One may have been, for instance, a partisan of the competing player. In prudence, competing players may be advised to study his technique or submit to his direction. In justice, one may be obligated to recognize his accomplishment with the proper reward. Stripping *good* of its moral meaning nullifies this last obligation.

From (4_{R1}), Socrates, however, could conclude that

(4_{R1}*) Man ought to praise the gods.

Thrasymachus and Callicles could not recognize this moral obligation or (3_{R1}*), for they recognize no moral obligations—a position that presumably includes the obligation to worship. Tradition, as well, would have, at least, difficulty justifying (4_{R1}*). Upon reflecting on the excerpt from the Hymn to Demeter, one may ask why it is a moral obligation rather than a prudential one for the recipients of the gods' cruel “gifts” to praise them.

The strength of the moral *ought* in (4_{R1}*) and (3_{R1}*) allows Socrates to argue (R2), effectively substantiating the traditional Greek belief in the moral duty to show devotion to the gods:

(5_{R2}) Man is such as to have certain moral ideals XYZ.

(6_{R2}) The gods are such as to have certain characteristics super-XYZ.

(7_{R2}) Man is dependent upon the gods' greater power.

∴(3_{R1}) The gods are worthy of man's worship.

∴(3_{R1}) Man ought to worship the gods.

∴(4_{R1}) The gods are worthy of praise.

∴(4_{R1}) Man ought to praise the gods.

Hence, one can justify the virtue of piety and the impulse to worship.

In contrast, Thrasymachus and Callicles could only recognize (7_{R2}), the gods' higher power. (7_{R2}) does important work in (R2); without it, any morally exemplary figure would be worthy of worship, but it

does not alone substantiate (3_{R1}*) and (4_{R1}*). By natural justice, the gods' greater power entitles them to rule man; but the gods must also prove their superiority against every new challenger. In tradition, at least their complete victory was not assured. Sisyphus, the wily king of Thessaly, briefly won victories over Persephone, Thanatos, and even Zeus before his ultimate defeat. The most Callicles and Thrasymachus' recognition of (7_{R2}) could substantiate with regard to worship would be the amoral premise that

(3_{R1}^{CT}) man has reason to worship the gods.

For them, *reason* would signify a clever hedging of bets. One worships or praises the gods for the same reason one folds in a card game when dealt a bad hand. Thrasymachus and Callicles, like Socrates, philosophize about the proper ends of human life. Since their answer elevates the ego and goods external to both soul and practice, then the only perspicacious motivation behind worship would be the scheme to profit from the benefit accruing from the practice. This worship revisits the manipulative worship described above. But these pragmatic understandings of worship are troublesome. If the gods exemplify Callicles and Thrasymachus' ideal character, then a god would only enter an agreement with a mortal for his own benefit. But what could a mortal of limited means have that a god of near-infinite means want? And why would such a god need to reach an agreement with a mortal when he could achieve his end through force? Assuming an answer to these questions, worship would become an unpredictable, empiric—the gods being perfectly wily—practice divorced from its traditional status as a moral action: a logical possibility, perhaps but one that destroys much more of tradition than Plato's own (A3) does; for at least with (A3) one can substantiate (R2), worship as a moral virtue.

Hence, Plato accepted (R1). The alternate gods could not explain the universal belief that (3_{R1}). Indeed, under the alternate gods, the observation that men worship becomes inexplicable or, more likely, a testament to human folly. Instead, Plato assumes what he needs to support the intuition, shared with the traditionally minded, that worship is a moral obligation with moral significance.

The *Republic*'s style of argument draws attention to what the gods must be if they are to deserve man's admiration. Because the *Republic* focuses on man, it has limited theological conclusions: the gods' moral goodness means that they only cause good; the gods are immutable; and they enjoy goods internal

to their godhead. The *Laws* expounds upon these conclusions with its more theological orientation. These limited conclusions clarify the philosophic poverty of traditional religion.

II. Laws: Theologically Inadequate

The *Laws* concerns itself with three impieties: (1) the belief that the gods don't exist, (2) the belief that the gods do not care about man, and (3) the belief that sacrifices and petitions affect them. Asserting these impieties reflects an impious character. Therefore, the ethical problem does remain. This dialogue's principal character, the Athenian, argues against each position in a series of proofs. Through these arguments, he establishes a substantive theology of rational gods ruling the cosmos' regularities; demonstrates continuity between the divine and the mortal; and indicts traditional religious practice as "the worst and most impious of the impious" beliefs.¹ While treating these subjects, the Athenian treats the problem of evil and implies an answer to a metaethical question raised in *Euthyphro*—i.e. the relationship between the gods and the content or force of moral language like *piety*.

A. *Contra Atheism*

1. The Position of the Atheist

The atheist position, which the Athenian summarizes, has a metaphysical and an ethical component. Of the metaphysical component, Gregory Vlastos writes that Plato "has in mind the most mature physical systems, including atomism; but he makes no fine distinctions, for he is convinced that all those who sowed the materialist wind must be held responsible for the whirlwind, i.e. the conventional theory of justice."² Let the metaphysical position be called, then, ancient materialism. This will rule out the earlier Greek naturalists who made no distinctions between matter and soul/agency. Furthermore, it will lend itself to the generality with which the Athenian himself sketches the view. For ease, however, the fifth-century atomist will often be considered an exemplar of this general position.³ Call the ethical

¹ *Laws*, 907b.

² Gregory Vlastos, "Equality and Justice in Early Greek Cosmology," *Classical Philology* 42 (July 1943): 22n177.

³ While Robert Mayhew does endorse Vlastos's interpretation of the general force of Plato's argument (see 76 and 79), he does interpret Plato holding, in *Laws* 889a-c, the pre-Socratic natural philosophy and science as a model for

position leoninism. This section will describe each component and demonstrate that one does not follow from the other.

The Athenian says that materialism asserted that “the greatest and finest things in the world are the products of nature and chance, the creations of art being comparatively trivial.” Certain ultimate elements compose the primordial cosmos. From chaos, the whole emerged due to the “random” motions of the elements, impelled by their own “inherent properties.” Everything, including life and rationality, arose from this random, unplanned evolutionary process.⁴ Art, “the brain-child of ... living creatures, arose later, the mortal child of mortal beings.”⁵ Mayhew clarifies the atheist outlook and Plato’s worry. By “chance” Plato means two things. On one level, he means that atheists believe that “each element just happens to exist and have the nature that it does.” On another, he means that things form arising from “whatever materials *happen* to be around and *happen* to be moving in this particular direction and at this particular speed, etc.” By nature, the atheist invokes necessity. The chance elements have certain intrinsic characteristics. That is, what happens, whether the formation of compounds or the creation of a planet, “*must* happen, given the (chance) nature and (chance) motion” of the elements. As Mayhew points out, Plato does not object to the idea of necessity. He will doubt, as will be seen, that one could found necessity on materialism alone.⁶

The concept of *archê* was central to the entire materialist attempt to understand the universe, although Plato does not explicitly say so in the *Laws*. *Archê* was the basic principle reality. Their forebears, the early naturalists, theorized before the distinction between the material and the spiritual. Tradition had taught that the gods personified the forces of nature. For instance, when it stormed, Zeus, the god of weather, both caused and was the storm. Consequently, Hesiod’s *Theogony*, an account of the

refutation (81). He is unfortunately vague, saying that Plato may have chosen to do so, because “Plato finds impossible...the notion that this [the creation of cosmos with various harmonious forces in nature] all happened by chance, i.e. without any intelligent guidance or design” (81). I have chosen to use the atomist challenge as the exemplary one, because what Mayhew calls its “‘billiard-ball’ mechanics,” in which order arises by the chance how atoms act together in the void, goes to the heart of what concerns Plato. Robert Mayhew, *Plato: Laws 10* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2008).

⁴ *Laws*, 889a-c.

⁵ *Laws*, 889c-e.

⁶ Mayhew, 81.

birth of the gods, had served as a cosmogony. As products of this culture, the early naturalist philosophers naturally associated the material that governed reality with the divine. But they had begun pushing divinity to the periphery. The *archê* was not the fundamental principle of reality because it was divine; it was divine because it was the fundamental principle of reality.⁷ As this tradition—a unified tradition of inquiry at least to Plato’s ken—developed, it became more explicitly materialist. The fifth-century atomists believed that material atoms, which moved chaotically in a void, were the *archê*. Intelligence was secondary; god had no place in an account of the world. Beside the concept of an *archê* and an increasingly materialist bent, “[e]pistemological optimism” characterized the entire naturalist-materialist “tradition.” JH Leshner says that “virtually every early thinker about whom [significant information is known] embraced what might be called the basic presupposition of epistemological optimism: that the events taking place in nature happen in accordance with a set of fixed...general principles.” They thus optimistically inferred that human rationality could mirror reality and know these principles.⁸ This belief marked a significant break with tradition’s normal epistemological skepticism in which mortals’ thoughts “reflect only their present experiences.”⁹

The Athenian believes that this position commits the materialist to a leonine ethical framework. The Athenian’s characterization of leoninism resembles a collection of ideas, especially defended in Plato’s by the *Gorgias*’ Callicles. The view distinguishes between goodness according to artifice and goodness according to nature. “[M]en are always wrangling about their moral standards and altering them.” This wrangling represent only man’s vagaries, i.e. artificial justice. By natural justice, “anything one can get away with by force is justified.” The “true natural life” “is essentially nothing but a life of conquest over others,” rather than the other-centered morality that enjoins a life “of service to your neighbor.”¹⁰ In *Gorgias* Callicles amplifies the leonine view. He argues that nature “among the other

⁷ Sarah Broadie, “Rational Theology” in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*, ed. A.A. Long (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 206.

⁸ JH Leshner, “Early Interest in Knowledge,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*, ed. A.A. Long (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 228.

⁹ Leshner, 225.

¹⁰ *Laws*, 889e-880a.

animals and in whole cities and races of men...shows that ...justice...[is] that the superior rule the inferior and have a greater share than they.” Callicles infers from the constant “warfare” of animals in nature to the conclusion that in warfare one observes man’s true nature. Man’s expediency during war belies his moral claims in peace: “what sort of justice did Xerxes go by when he campaigned against Greece...?”¹¹

The leonine ethic elevates the ego and the ego’s desires, which Callicles justifies with his “might makes right” view of ethics. But one ought not to construe this foundational premise of Callicles’ ethics as a premise with any moral, normative force. Contradistinguish the type of entailment in these two proofs. First, (C1):

(1_{C1}) It is unjust to lie.

(2_{C1}) If it is unjust to lie, then it is unjust to lie to Denis

∴(3_{C1}) One ought not lie to Denis.

Bracketing Hume’s Guillotine, (3_{C1}) follows clearly from (1_{C1}), which states a rational moral universal, and (2_C), which applies that universal to a particular. Compare with (C2):

(1_{C2}) It is just for the superior/mighty to rule.

(2_{C2}) If it is just for the superior/mighty to rule, then it is just for Sara, who is superior and mighty, to rule.

∴(3_{C2}) Sara ought to rule.

How does (3_{C2}) follow from (1_{C2}) and (2_{C2})? Not by application of a universal moral norm to a particular instance of that norm. Indeed, Callicles’ position is a type of moral nihilism. He does not believe that Sara is owed rulership like Denis is owed the truth. Sara’s right to rule follows as a practical conclusion—what a reasonable man would expect given Sara’s superiority. Callicles clarifies (C2)’s validity, adding the premise that

¹¹ *Gorgias*, 483d.

(4_{C2}) the end of human life is found in participation “in the laws of [the] city or in the kind of speech one must use to deal with people on matters of business, whether public or private” and in “human pleasures and appetites.”¹²

This form of participation is, however, one of martial and domination by other means. Callicles justifies (4_{C2}) not by rational argument. Rather, he asserts that

(5_{C2}) “an active life and...a reputation for being intelligent” is antithetical to philosophy’s “subtleties,” which is either “just silly or outright nonsense.”¹³

(5_{C2}) elucidates how one should understand (C2). (5_{C2}) relegates philosophical speculation of the sort that justifies (C1) as a form of speechmaking distinguished from political speechmaking by its recondite uselessness. Thus, central to the leonine ethic is (H_{Gr})

(H_{Gr}) Human rationality is the power to seize control of another’s will and convince forcibly. It cannot speak meaningfully about reality. If objective reality exists, it does not correspond to reason.¹⁴

Therefore, (C2) is not a rational proof, for no rational proof is possible. Once one removes from man all faculties, except his animal nature, then (C2) follows as a description of what will likely happen: the superior man proves himself superior by ruling. Since no moral reality exists, Sara’s right to rule is as good as anyone else’s. But since she is superior, she will “rise up and be revealed as...master.” From (H_{Gr})’s viewpoint it is true that both (C1) and (C2) exemplify dialectical manipulation. For Callicles, they differ in the following crucial respect: (C1) manipulates from a position of weakness and (C2), from a position of strength.¹⁵

How does materialism entail leoninism? The Athenian sees the materialist’s assertion of this premise as a linchpin:

¹² *Gorgias*, 484d.

¹³ *Gorgias*, 486c.

¹⁴ *Gorgias*, 482c-486d, 491e-492c. Wardy, 172 n. 31 and *Gorgias*, 505d.

¹⁵ *Gorgias*, 483b-c.

(ΛΣ) “[a]rt, the brain-child of these living creatures, arose [after creation], the mortal child of mortal beings; it has produced...various amusing trifles that are hardly real at all—mere insubstantial images of the same order as the arts themselves.”¹⁶

The Athenian observes that (a) government and legislation are artificial. Therefore, (b) the gods and morality are legal fictions. Each, the atheist would argue, “vary very widely according to the different conventions people agree on when they produce a legal code.”¹⁷ A trick of the Greek language makes this inference easier. *Nomos* means law/legislation, convention, or moral norm. The conclusion of the artificiality about gods and morality is thus aided from an observation about the varieties of political life.

Plato thinks that leonism and materialism commit themselves to (ΛΣ)’s understanding of rationality. (ΛΣ) assumes that rationality must be secondary in human nature if it is secondary in the natural world at large. The micro reality of human nature resembles the macro reality of the universe’s nature. But this connection is fallacious. Material equivalence between the natural world’s rationality or irrationality and the human world’s rationality or irrationality is contingent. The Athenian attempts to show that the equivalence is necessary with a rhetorical legerdemain--moving quickly between the natural scientist’s use of *nature and chance* to describe the chaos of the universe to the leonine use of *nature* to describe the chaos of the human interaction.

One’s metaphysics can influence one’s ethics; but it does not go without saying how. The ancient materialist could maintain that man, having originated randomly, is a rational, social creature who empathizes with his fellows and finds his greatest happiness with them. Morality arises as the best way to govern this natural society and realize happiness. Rationality and morality do not have to be natural to the cosmos at large for them to be natural to humanity in particular. The materialist could even believe that the illusion of the gods’ existence and the practice of conventional religion benefit society.

Indeed, it is far more likely that the leonine ethic would have threatened the coherency of materialism. Although materialism believed the elements produced the observed order of the world

¹⁶ *Laws*, 889c-d.

¹⁷ *Laws*, 889e.

through their unplanned, unintelligent, and random interactions, he shared Plato's epistemological optimism and believed that reason could mirror reality. Any cosmological theory is a product of reason. According to (ΛΣ), the natural scientist ought to regard his theory just "an amusing trifle." But of course the materialist cannot share this view of his speculative endeavor.

If materialism does not logically entail leoninism, why does the Athenian assume it does? The mistake is egregious, particularly because the atomists produced ethical writings that flatly contradict the leonine ethic. Perhaps, Plato's commitment to a harmonious universe blinded him to the possibility that rationality order could be secondary to the whole and primary to a part. It seems, however, unsatisfactory to attribute such a crude mistake to Plato. Perhaps, Plato's fallacious assumption that an entailment holds between materialism and leoninism can be salvaged as a social and psychological observation rather than a logical or philosophic one. Mayhew says that, "[h]istorically there was likely *some* connection between the atheistic or deistic views of the natural philosophers and the moral relativism of the sophists." Moreover, Plato does state in his *Phaedrus* and later implies in the *Laws* that a philosopher needs to consider the difference between rationally, logically refuting a position and convincing one's interlocutor when presenting an argument.¹⁸ Recall, furthermore, the purpose of the *Laws*. Despite the Athenian's theological focus in book ten, its proofs ultimately lead to the induction of the best possible laws with which to govern a city. Understanding the psychological and social causes of moral and theological decline would be just as important to the project of constructing an ideal city as the defense of the rational values upon which that city ought to be founded. The entailment would thereby have the substance of "from *X* a certain individual with certain ends and tendencies would be inclined to infer *Y*" rather than the logical $X \rightarrow Y$. Mayhew may object, for he seems to interpret Plato as asserting a philosophically necessary connection between the two propositions.¹⁹ Briefly, this is not at all clear. All Plato does in 889-890 is assert three things: first, he describes materialism; second, he describes the leonine ethic; and third, he says that the same person, the atheist, asserts both. Discerning what Plato may have meant in regard to

¹⁸ *Phaedrus*, 271d-282b; *Laws* 903b. And, as will be apparent in his refutation of atheism, Plato makes very clear that he is speaking to a particular person, i.e. a *young*, impious atheist.

¹⁹ Mayhew, 88.

social commentary or whether he meant the association as social commentary at all extends beyond this thesis' purpose.

2. The Objection From Tradition

Clinias, the Athenian's interlocutor, articulates the first response to the atheist position:

[w]ell, just look at the earth and the sun and the stars and the universe in general; look at the wonderful procession of the seasons and its articulation into years and months! Anyway, you know that all Greeks and all foreigners are unanimous in recognizing the existence of gods.²⁰

Clinias makes two claims. One, that the widespread belief in the existence of the gods demonstrates their existence. Two that the teleological order of nature demonstrates their existence. Claim two has proved more enduring and philosophically complicated. Mayhew interprets claim one as a crude argument from general agreement, "perhaps the weakest argument for the existence of god(s) in the history of philosophy." While it is a poor argument, Plato's Athenian does not seem to dismiss it as perfunctorily as Mayhew implies.²¹ It may even have some argumentative value and has antecedents in Plato's other works.

The Athenian adds to the first claim:

If [atheists] had only believed the stories which they had as babes and sucklings from their nurses and mothers! ... [T]he children heard them related in prayer at sacrifices, and saw acted representations of them...and they saw their own parents praying with the utmost seriousness for themselves and their families in the firm conviction that their prayers and supplications were addressed to gods who really did exist. At the rising and setting of the sun and moon the children saw and heard Greeks and foreigners, in happiness and misery alike, all prostrate at their devotions; far from supposing gods to be a myth, the worshippers believed their existence to be so sure as to be beyond suspicion. When some people contemptuously brush aside all this evidence without a single good reason to support them...[how can we refrain from anger]?²²

²⁰ *Laws*, 886a.

²¹ Mayhew, 62-63.

²² *Laws*, 887d-888a. Mayhew sees this as an argument for why one should hate the atheist, namely that he has not been formed by the theistic beliefs of his parents. This evinces a character flaw (see 71-72). This interpretation seems rather narrow, especially in the light of the atheist's brushing aside "all this evidence without a single good reason to support them" (in Mayhew's rendering, "Those people have contempt for all this, and without a single sufficient argument"). Surely part of the Athenian's claim is about how the virtuously, well-formed person should take traditional claims. The anger simply makes no sense unless it is a claim about how a well-formed character should philosophically take the traditional claims of his philosophically naïve culture and surroundings.

This passage shows the Athenian and Clinias appealing to tradition to connect their metaphysical claims with tradition. Tradition and Plato both associate nature with divinity, albeit differently. For both, divinity explains natural forces and is metaphysically necessary for nature's existence. This appears like an *argumentum ad verecundiam*. But the Athenian intercedes for authority not because it is authority. Rather, he claims that the materialist “brush[es] aside” the testimony of tradition and authority without “a single good reason.” In other words, he claims that one ought to defer to the established framework in the absence of a compelling reason. Absent an understanding of *good reason*, this is a truism. The claim of brushing aside tradition without “a single good reason” would not indict the materialist, who had carefully worked out a theory from which atheism followed. The Athenian justifies this observation with an appeal to philosophy's proper relationship with tradition.

Evidence for a theory comes after its postulation. One determines superfluous versus significant phenomena with reference to what the theory deems important. Traditional religion contained elements suggesting that the universe was not nomological. Zeus could change the weather for his own ends—whatever they be. Evidence for order in nature could be recognized only once another assumption replaced this aspect of tradition. Materialism and Plato both explain the observable, which appears disordered, with counterintuitive appeals to unobserved order. The atomists may have built their system upon the chaotic, unplanned, undirected and even random movements of unchangeable atoms within a void. Despite the lack of a final cause in nature, however, nature is nomological; and the atomist, no less than other materialists, sought to explain “the observed variety of natural processes by means of deterministic laws about the basic underlying matter.”²³ Atom *x* collides into atom *y*, either rebounding to collide with another atom or bonding with it, for atoms are such in that they cannot merge or disappear. This may be random in the sense that an independent atom moves indeterminately, but the intrinsic properties of an atom are such that atoms, though themselves individually lifeless and chaotic, behave nomologically. For instance, the atomist, Leucippus asserted that “nothing happens at random, but

²³ Terence Irwin, *Classical Thought* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 50.

everything for a reason and by necessity.”²⁴ Despite the randomness of the atoms’ movements, the atomist finds an unobserved, deterministic order resulting from the atom’s inherent properties.

The Athenian seems to object above, however, that the inadequacy of certain traditional beliefs does not entail the inadequacy of the entire tradition. Scientific inquiry, for instance, retains tradition. The discovery of subatomic physics’ idiosyncrasies did not disqualify all of Newtonian physics’ advances. Instead, science assumes that any new scientific theory ought to incorporate the strengths of older theories.

Plato believes that the Greek tradition, despite its faults, had made progress. While it required philosophical nourishment to become coherent, Plato emphasizes some of its institutions’ unique potential to harmonize with philosophy’s insights. In the *Laws* Plato defends symposiums, a drinking party, as pedagogical and philosophic moments, even arguing against teetotalism. In the *Phaedrus* Socrates reforms but conserves the homosexual ephebophilic relationships common in Athens. In each case Plato’s characters defend a potentially troubling traditional practice to show the philosophic underpinnings and potential of each.

Socrates echoes the argument from authority in *Republic*, although there he appeals to tradition in order to buttress moral, rather than metaphysical, claims. In that dialogue he explicitly mentions the rectitude of traditional moral claims and upbringing. From childhood “man holds certain convictions about just and fine things; [he is] brought up with them as with [his] parents, [he] obey[s] and honor[s] them.” But “other ways of living,” bolstered by pernicious philosophy, threaten this rectitude.²⁵ These passages reveal that—despite Plato’s characters articulating new doctrines that may seem like innovations and rejecting old beliefs that were widely accepted—Plato’s characters believed themselves to be defending important parts of tradition.

The materialist could resist this argument. But this broadly construed materialist tradition faced two problems. Independently, each objection that Plato raises is fallacious. Taken together, however, they

²⁴ Terence Irwin, 51.

²⁵ *Republic*, 538-539.

support each other, delimiting Plato's desired conclusion. This "wigwam" argument may have had some, albeit limited, argumentative force. The first problem, mentioned above, is an *argumentum ad verecundiam*: that is, that the natural scientist rejects certain cornerstones of tradition. The second problem is an *argumentum ad ignorantiam*. Clinias criticizes the materialist on the ground that his "doctrines in fact exist in the thousands."²⁶ The inability of the materialist to produce a theory the veracity of which would command the broad support of most rational inquirers within his "tradition" does not thereby mean that no such theory exists. Each claim taken together, however, suggests that the materialist has done away with an intellectual framework that, while flawed, functioned and commanded widespread acceptance in return for nothing at all. In this context the repeated failures of materialism to articulate a coherent theory with widespread acceptance from materialists may suggest that the inquiry should return to tradition and build a coherent system from that general foundation.

The Athenian does that in his amplification of Clinias' second objection against the atheists. Significantly, this objection's metaphysical nature makes little use of the questionable entailment between natural scientism and leoninism.

3. The Second Objection: The Proto-Cosmological Argument

The Athenian develops Clinias' second objection, i.e. that the rationality of the universe proves the gods' existence, by arguing that soul/Mind rules over matter. Plato believes that the atheist's belief that nature and chance precede artifice and reason signifies that matter precedes soul. The Athenian will argue the contrary position. If soul precedes matter, he believes that it follows that "anything closely related to soul [would] necessarily have been created before material things." Therefore, "[o]pinion, diligence, reason, art and law will be prior to roughness and smoothness, heaviness and lightness." Then, the "grand and primary works of the universe...will be attributable to art." If successful, the argument would paradoxically signify the naturalness of artifice. Matter and its regularities become "the secondary

²⁶ *Laws*, 886e.

products of art and reason,” i.e. artificial.²⁷ The argument depends upon two inferences. First, the Athenian will establish the primacy of soul over matter and substantiate its association with reason. Second, the Athenian will infer the gods’ existence from soul’s necessary connection with reason.

a. The Primacy of Soul and Reason

i. The Argument and Two Worries

The Athenian proves the primacy of soul with a variation of the cosmological argument, heretofore (L1). From the observation of motion, he concludes the necessity of a type of change that *perpetually* moves both itself and all the movement in the cosmos. The Athenian isolates ten different types of “motion.” Of these, the most significant is movement permanently capable of moving itself and other things, a metaphysically necessary movement: the “sort of change and motion of all things that exist.”²⁸ This characterization of movement need not presuppose commitments anathema to the materialist. Motion that moves both itself and other things does not *ipso facto* entail life and rational agency. The atom’s motion occurs from without by random chance collisions within a void. While these atoms do not “move themselves” as result of rational agency, their inherent nature combined with randomness and chance, produces movement. This chaotic but nomological movement writ large provides the ultimate cause for physical motion. Atoms with their inherent properties in collusion with other atoms with their inherent properties “move themselves,” in the limited sense that with reference to their nature and interactions all motion—both their own and that of other “things,” which are revealed as bonded atoms—is explained. Though he refers to *motion*, the Athenian’s examples are better expressed by *change*. His classifications of motions give an account of everything observed in the material realm. For instance, when he considers the conditions that are “always present when anything is produced,” he answers with a description of “the process of change and alteration to which everything owes its birth.”

²⁷ *Laws*, 892.

²⁸ *Laws*, 894b.

An initial impulse grows, producing something that thereby presents “percipient beings with something to perceive.”²⁹

What accounts for the cause of the change, i.e. the initial impulse? If a prior impulse, then how does one explain the resulting sequence? These questions attempt to discern the necessary conditions for change in nature. The Athenian asserts that

(1_{L1}) there is “an original cause of change.”

From (1_{L1}) the Athenian infers that

∴(2_{L1}) self-generating motion is the original cause of motion.

He justifies (2_{L1}) with two arguments, each of which appropriates something from materialism’s tradition. First, he appeals to the *archê*. Anything whose “motion is transmitted to it from something else” could not start a sequence of change *ex nihilo*. A causal chain “must surely spring from some initial principle,” even if the initial principle is removed from the ultimate effect by “thousands upon thousands” of intermediary causes and effects. If the unobserved cause behind all perception of change is an original or ruling principle of reality, this ruling principle must be “motion that moves both itself and other things.”³⁰ His second demonstration of (2_{L1}) appropriates from the cosmogonies of some of the earlier materialists and natural philosophers. These cosmogonies often viewed the cosmos as cyclical: dynamism becomes slowly inert, which, due to the inherent nature of certain elements, becomes dynamic again. Suppose, the Athenian says, that the universe did come to a standstill. Only self-generating motion could cause it to restart. From these demonstrations, the Athenian concludes that

∴(3_{L1}) “Self-governing motion, then, is the source of all motions, and the primary force in both stationary and moving objects, and we shan’t be able to avoid the conclusion that it is the most ancient and the most potent of all changes.”³¹

Modern cosmological arguments use contingency or causation to conclude the existence of a necessary being or a supernatural cause. This being explains contingent reality, presumably by “causing”

²⁹ *Laws*, 894a.

³⁰ *Laws*, 894b-895b.

³¹ *Laws*, 895b.

the world of causes. This being and the unique causation that he exerts stand outside of or transcend the causal, contingent phenomena, which he explains. But (3_{L1}) does not make this conclusion, nor does it purport to. The Athenian refers to soul as a creation in time: soul “is one of the *first* creations, born long before all physical things, and is the chief cause of all their alterations and transformations.”³² It itself comes to be and therefore—though this is not something upon which the *Laws* meditates—could not be.

The Athenian does not attempt, then, to use the concept of causation, known only by experience within the world, to infer to an alleged event outside of the cosmos. The Athenian’s self-moving motion is a (spiritual) cause within the world; it does not create the universe. Rather, it is the metaphysically necessary part of a created contingency, although Plato himself does not use the concepts of contingency or necessity. Like the gods of traditional religion, self-moving motion gives a total explanation of the dynamism and regularity of the universe; but it does not give an explanation for the existence of the cosmos, of which it is the fundamental, governing part. Having thus clarified this argument’s goals, does it succeed? This argument for a metaphysically necessary but logically contingent self-generating motion is open to criticism on two points.

First, from the fact that self-generating motion is first motion, it does not have to be *metaphysically* necessary. The Athenian justifies (2_{L1}) by arguing that any chain of causes within the world must have an initial principle. Specifically,

when something which has set itself moving effects an alteration in something, and that in turn effects something else, so that the motion is transmitted to thousands upon thousands of things one after another, the entire sequence of their movements must surely spring from some initial principle, which can hardly be anything except the change effected by self-generated motion.³³

For every effect within nature, c_n , an original cause within nature, c_0 , exists such that $c_0 \rightarrow c_1 \rightarrow \dots c_n$, where n may signify a number of “thousands upon thousands.” As the causal chain demonstrates, the Athenian presumes that c_0 cannot have a prior cause.³⁴ Therefore, it is self-movement. But c_0 need not figure in an

³² *Laws*, 892a

³³ *Laws*, 894e.

³⁴ Mayhew (119-120) rightly notes that this argument simply asserts that an infinite regress is impossible without an explanation. My following interpretation attempts to explain why, given his audience, Plato’s Athenian makes this

explanation of c_n . The causes represented by c_n need have no relation to c_0 other than c_0 's status as originator of a very long causal chain. Bracketing issues of contingency and necessity, consider the big bang as a cause within nature, c_0 , analogous to *soul*. Bracketing issues of a creator, assume that the big bang somehow changed itself and other things. Every new effect, c_n , can be traced back to the big bang. But such a maneuver would, for certain questions and desired explanations, be inappropriate. That is, appeals to the big bang would give only a very marginal understanding of, say, the regularities discerned by meteorology. If one concedes that the role of self-moving motion, c_0 , could only be had by rational soul/mind, then the Athenian has succeeded in proving the primacy of this principle over matter; but he has not demonstrated its continuing in the task of giving an explanation of things. Soul/mind could simply be an initial action. In the cyclical cosmogonies of the natural scientist, it could be the impetus that sparks dynamism after stasis. But any further analysis of nature's regularities would not thereby need to invoke it any more than the modern scientist would invoke the original "bang" that brought the cosmos into existence to explain certain laws of nature. This would be a Pyrrhic victory for the Athenian. His argument needs to associate soul with the gods and he needs the gods to be of enduring cosmological (and moral) relevance. If this problem holds, however, it would be a stretch to conclude that the gods "govern" the cosmos' regularities, for by "govern" the Athenian assumes a certain "hands on" involvement.

Second, as adverted to above, the concept of self-moving motion within nature is not hostile to the atheist position.³⁵ That is, even if spontaneous motion is metaphysically, eternally necessary, it need not advert to an intelligent and thereby divine agent. Consider the observed regularity $(x) F(x) \rightarrow G(x)$. What makes $F(x)$ into $G(x)$? *Prima facie*, some spontaneous, metaphysical necessitation holds. This necessitation may evidence self-moving motion. All F s, somehow, become G s. Can only the rational agency provided by soul explain this necessitation? Matter itself could contain laws of nature—the

assumption. In brief, Plato's atheistic interlocutors do desire the sort of ultimate explanation of reality that is incompatible with the notion of an infinite regress of material causes. See below.

³⁵ Mayhew (120) makes this point separately, asking "even if it is granted that there must be a starting point—that there cannot be an infinite regress (and certainly not an infinite regress of explanations), as we must begin somewhere—why can't the starting point simply be physical reality and the motions that inhere in physical reality by its very nature?" I consider this question, too, below.

intrinsic characteristics of elements that make Fs into Gs. Plausibly, laws of nature, which do not necessarily entail a “law-giver” or “law-enforcer” could thereby necessitate $(x) F(x) \rightarrow G(x)$. While the materialist does not use the phrase *laws of nature*, what the phrase signifies, the attempt to make matter independent of intelligence, fits with his account. If the materialist understands the properties of his basic elements as universal, then he could plausibly claim that these universal properties necessitate the observed regularities. Thus, he explains the self-movement that percipient beings observe without an appeal to divine intelligence. Soul appears unnecessary. Plato’s argument does not immediately address these worries. Let this be problem (P1).

Before addressing (P1), consider the Athenian’s attempt to complete his argument by relating self-moving motion to soul:

(4_{L1}) “When an object moves itself,” “[i]t emphatically is alive.”

(5_{L1}) “When we see that a thing has a soul...[w]e have to admit that it is alive.”

\therefore (6_{L1}) Soul is “motion capable of moving itself.”³⁶

Restated,

(4_{L1}) If an object moves itself, then it is alive ($M \rightarrow A$).

(5_{L1}) If a thing has a soul, then it is alive ($S \rightarrow A$).

\therefore (6_{L1}) If a thing has a soul, then it moves itself ($S \rightarrow M$).

(6_{L1}) only follows, however, if we interpret (4_{L1}) and (5_{L1}) as biconditionals. Therefore,

(4_{L1}*) An object is alive if and only if it moves itself ($M \equiv A$).

(5_{L1}*) An object alive is alive if and only if it has a soul ($S \equiv A$).

(5_{L1}*) follows by definition. (4_{L1}*) is contentious. These premises allows a more ambitious conclusion

(6_{L1}*) A thing has a soul if and only if it moves itself ($S \equiv M$).

(6_{L1}*) and (3_{L1}) support the conclusion that soul is the “source of motion,” “the most ancient thing there is,” and thereby “the cause of all change and motion in everything.”³⁷ Thus, soul is the *archê*, the

³⁶ *Laws*, 895c-896a.

³⁷ *Laws*, 894e-895a and 896a-b.

primordial ruling principle: “[s]oul is the master, and matter its natural subject.”³⁸ Plotinus (204/205-270 AD), a neo-Platonic philosopher, inferred an important consequence of this argument in what he called the Chain of Being, which arranged all life hierarchically. (L1) anticipates this notion by implying a sort of kinship amongst all things that live. By (L1), man, who likewise lives, possesses soul thus shares in the divine nature—so too with everything that lives. This consequence of (L1) demonstrates (P1)’s threat. It threatens to unravel this Chain.

The ancient materialist may have accepted (4_{LI}) and, quite possibly, (5_{LI}*). In traditional religion, *soul* was conceptually related to *breath*. The Greeks assumed that breath or soul animated the corpus. The Athenian’s use of (4_{LI}) and (5_{LI}*) depends upon aspects of the traditional framework. But the materialist could not accept (4_{LI}*). (P1) has shown that the materialist could explain the apparent self-movement of nature’s regularities without reference to agency and without analogy to the living. If the Athenian cannot demonstrate that self-movement—the way in which F(x) necessitates G(x)—entails life, then ensoulment will not follow from self-movement. This deepens (P1).

Moreover, it creates another type of problem, (P2): soul has a mysterious association with rationality and concepts dependent upon rationality. If self-governing motion defines life, then such motion may be the essence of life. But no relationship other than dependence holds between life and rationality: without a living thing existing in the cosmos, rational agency could not exist in the cosmos. It would not follow, however, that life somehow authored rationality: if *x* depends on *y*, it does not follow that *y* describes *x*’s nature or essence: Ted’s mother and father do not fully explain Ted. Self-moving motion, furthermore, does not appear to encompass only the manifestly rational. Of living things, rationality resembles the exception rather than rule. Rationality and personal consciousness do not follow from the animating breath. It is a necessary but insufficient cause of rationality. Even if soul is a/the first principle, it does not follow that soul is intelligent or rational. Mayhew seems to agree with the difficulty of Plato’s argument on this point, saying that he has committed the fallacy of division, in essence arguing that since soul is prior to body, then “every part or manifestation of soul is older than or prior to every

³⁸ *Laws*, 896b-c.

part or aspect or manifestation of body.” Plato has given no reason to think that the various *rational* manifestations of soul, including reason itself, “did not come to be only alongside or after the appearance of certain physical entities.”³⁹

The Athenian appears to recognize at least one aspect of this problem. It does not follow from soul being the *archê*, that it therefore has the laudable characteristics of the gods, like intelligence or rationality. The spiritual realm of things contains both “good and evil, beauty and ugliness, justice and injustice and all the opposites”—all caused by soul. Since one soul cannot contain opposites, at least two souls exist. The Athenian characterizes one as “rational and supremely virtuous,” the other, as irrational and vicious.⁴⁰ Mayhew suggests that Plato thought that bad soul, i.e. “soul-without-reason,” exists only in humans, not the cosmos at large. Plato’s consideration of the possibility of a cosmic bad soul is academic only.⁴¹ If true, this demonstrates that Plato understood the invalidity of the thought: that if soul is older than body, then every part or manifestation of soul is older than or prior to every part or aspect or manifestation of body. For, he recognizes soul deprived of reason as a phenomenon occurring only once soul becomes associated with the embodied humans. Therefore, a phenomenon occurring within soul after its embodiment.

The Athenian argues for the good soul’s primacy in the universe. He uses a teleological argument that infers the superiority of an orderly, good soul from the observation of orderly motion. He places two choices before his reader:

(7_{L1}) \oplus (8_{L1}), where

(7_{L1}) If the “whole course and movement of the heavens and all that is in them reflect the motion and revolution and calculation of reason...then clearly...it is the best kind of soul that cares for the entire universe.”

(8_{L1}) If “these things move in an unbalanced and disorganized way,” then “the evil kind of soul is in charge of them.”

³⁹ Mayhew, 130-131. See also 102-103.

⁴⁰ *Laws*, 896b.

⁴¹ Mayhew, 138.

Unfortunately, mortal eyes cannot “ever...look upon reason and get to know it adequately: let’s not produce darkness at noon ... by looking at the sun direct. We can save our sight by looking at an *image* of the object we’re asking about,” i.e., motion. Things in motion move *either* “in a single location” “just like wheels being turned on a lathe” *or* “in a succession of locations.” Two different types of rationalities correspond to each type of movement. Call the latter human and the former divine reason.⁴²

Human reasoning “serve[s] evil ends”—the sundry pleasures and appetites desired by the individual. It fits means to ends. These ends have the potential to change; once achieved, they fail to endure. One feast betokens another; the successful coup requires constant vigilance against competing factions. Therefore, human reason resembles irregular motion. Irregular motion is “never uniform or regular or at the same point in space or round the same center or in the same relative position or in a single location, and is neither planned nor organized nor systematic.” Just as the ends of irregular motion vary erratically so too do the ends of human reason, which vacillate to the whims of desire. The Athenian associates it with “every kind of unreason.”⁴³

Divine reasoning, associated with virtuous soul, resembles “continuous revolution round a central point.” Regular, uniform motion, always fixed relative to other objects and centered round a certain point, it is “determined by a single plan and procedure.”⁴⁴ Why does the Athenian believe this motion an apt analogy for divine reason? Consider this analogy in the light of (A3), the *Republic*’s argument about the gods’ goodness. (A3) demonstrated that *good* implied the harmonious order of all parts of the whole. The gods and good soul, as expressed in the *Laws*, “[guide] everything to an appropriate and successful conclusion.”⁴⁵ This entails a detached concern for the whole, against which one’s personal perspective means nothing. This “cosmic” good implies the good of the individual, but it does so derivatively. The appropriateness of a successful conclusion is judged by reasoning that takes as its object the immutable, metaphysical truths, upon which the cosmos is based. If (8_{LI}) makes reason personal, then (7_{LI}) frees

⁴² *Laws*, 897-898c.

⁴³ *Laws*, 897a-d and 898b-c. The moniker of “human reason” for “soul without reason” seems particularly apt in light of Mayhew’s contention that soul-without-reason can exist in humans.

⁴⁴ *Laws*, 898a-b.

⁴⁵ *Laws*, 897b.

reason from the individual reasoner, allowing it to be impersonal and thereby view the whole. The distinction between (8_{LI}) and (7_{LI}) resembles but does not necessarily mirror that between (H_{Gr}) and (H_r) .

From the lawlike nature of the cosmos, particularly heavenly bodies' circular movements, the Athenian concludes that rational soul guides the universe entire. Indeed, Clinias claims it would "be rank blasphemy to deny that ...[the world is governed by] one or more souls blessed with perfect virtue."⁴⁶ Because the Athenian presents an exclusive disjunctive, $(7_{LI}) \oplus (8_{LI})$, $\sim(8_{LI})$ follows from the assertion of (7_{LI}) . Therefore, the same argument that establishes the primacy of order and divine reason, banishes its opposite to the fringes of the cosmos.

The argument for the primacy of soul over matter and for good soul over evil soul has proceeded from observation of phenomena to an induction to the best explanation: (i) from motion, to the existence of a source of self-moving motion that permanently supports the universe; (ii) from the regularity of motions to the induction of the necessary principle of the universe's rationality. Inference (ii) may answer (P2). Regular laws of nature may justify the association of a type of self-governing motion with divine rationality. But regularity, though it mollifies the mind's quest for order, need not imply rationality. Problems (P1) and (P2) remain. Consideration of a parallel argument in modern metaphysics elucidates how Plato may have believed that his argument overcomes both worries.

ii. A Solution in a Modern Parallel: The Requirements of an Explanation

In one sense, (L1) concerns how to explain nature's regularities. The Athenian adverts to rational agency; the ancient materialist adverts to the intrinsic properties of his essential, material elements. This argument has a significant parallel in modern philosophy, although the concept of soul has been marginalized, if not dropped entirely. After a brief digression introducing the modern corollaries to the debate portrayed in (L1), this section will attempt to show how Bas van Fraassen's antirealism may elucidate Plato's argument.

⁴⁶ *Laws*, 898 c.

Modern philosophers Dretske, Tooley, and Armstrong (DTA) explain the regularity of the universe by appealing to laws of nature as “contingent necessitating relations among universals.” That is, a further relationship between universals, $N(F,G)$, makes the necessitation between particulars, $(x)F(x) \rightarrow G(x)$, intelligible. (DTA) has two advantages over its rival, which reduced “laws” to universally true descriptions of regularities only. First, reductionist laws have trouble supporting counterfactuals. Saying that “all F is G for all time” does not imply that this new F must be a G. Just because all dogs in this room, past, present and future, are brown does not mean that were a white dog to enter this room it must turn brown. This modal worry leads to a second, related worry: laws as descriptive, universal truths cannot explain why some new instance of F must thereby be an instance of G. Treating universal truths as intrinsically different from laws of nature may allow one to posit an intensional relationship between universal properties that would explain what universal truths do not. If F and G are universals with a relationship of “nomic” necessity holding between them then $(x) F(x) \rightarrow G(x)$ will be explained.⁴⁷ How coherent is this option?

(DTA)’s argument depends upon the validity of the following inference, (U):

(1_U) $N(F,G)$

(2_U) $F(x)$

$\therefore (3_U) G(x)$

Consider, firstly, a problem in the first premise. Logical necessitation does not characterize the relationship between universals. In another possible world F could nomically necessitate something other than G or, alternatively, nothing at all.⁴⁸ Like soul, relations between universals, as (DTA) conceive them, are logically contingent but metaphysically necessary. If the laws of nature could be otherwise or, alternatively, not be at all, what explains them? $N(F,G)$ may explain $(x) F(x) \rightarrow G(x)$, but what explains $N(F,G)$? David Armstrong answers that “the inexplicability of necessitation just has to be accepted. Necessitation, the way one Form (universal) brings another along with it, as Plato puts it in the *Phaedo*

⁴⁷ Fred Dretske, “Laws of Nature,” *Philosophy of Science* 44 (1977): 261-263.

⁴⁸ Stathis Psillos, *Causation and Explanation* (Acumen, 2009): 161.

(104d-105), is a primitive, or near primitive, which we are forced to postulate.”⁴⁹ $N(F,G)$ is an atomic fact; the original inference from “regularities to strong laws” is a Moorean inference to the best explanation.⁵⁰ That is $(x) F(x) \rightarrow G(x)$ must be explained by a further relationship between universal, $N(F,G)$; but $N(F,G)$ does not require itself further explanation. This may justify (1_U) . But—and secondly— (U) has a major drawback: it is not and does not purport to be logically valid.⁵¹ To infer that x is G from (1_U) , a premise about necessitation between universals F and G , and (2_U) , a premise stating that x is F , commits the fallacy of four terms. Briefly, (DTA) has claimed that (U) , while logically invalid, is somehow metaphysically valid—that the universals of (1_U) govern particular relations. Dretske in particular takes seriously the analogy with governance. He suggested that his interlocutor could see (U) ’s “intuitive” validity by way of analogy to the US Constitution.⁵² We can clearly see the validity of (U) :

(1_U) $N(\text{Presidency, Speaker of the House})$

(2_U) p is the president and s is the speaker of the house.

$\therefore (3_U)$ $p \rightarrow s$

(U) , like (U) , is not valid on the basis of logical form. Its validity relies on the strength of (1_U) , which presupposes the Constitution. The Constitution does this work, however, because it evidences the existence of rational agents in 1789, who established the framework that would bring about (U) ’s “validity” by providing a positive law that would constrain future rational agents. The Constitution thereby provides two distinct strengths that make (U) intuitively valid. First, it organized a cohesive political framework, establishing universals and law-like relations between any particular man took on a universal role. Secondly, it provided for its enforcement by constraining different and future rational actors to govern and enforce what it constituted. (U) needs therefore two things from rational agents: it needs them to create a model, seen in (1_U) , and it requires that they enforce it such that rational agents will conclude (3_U) if the particular (2_U) . In the natural law case, however, no reason exists to suppose that

⁴⁹ Armstrong, *What are Laws of Nature?* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 92.

⁵⁰ Armstrong, “Discussion: Response to van Fraassen,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 66 (June 1988): 227-228.

⁵¹ Dretske, 249 and 262-265.

⁵² Dretske, 264-265.

anything analogous to the Constitution or its enforcement by rational agents exists. Indeed, skeptics of constitutional governance would argue that even (U') is optimistic, for no real reason compels future generations to interpret the constitution in the manner originally intended. Hence, they would argue, the sort of necessitation or constraint needed for (3_U) to follow from (1_U) and (2_U) is stronger than even an analogy to political governance can provide. These considerations threaten the non-logical “validity” of (U). More troubling, this saps the basis for positing (1_U), because it suggests that no ground exists for believing that an explanation for (x) $F(x) \rightarrow G(x)$ ’s necessitation exists. (DTA) is not entitled to the strong first premise needed to make (U) valid. Metaphysically, it seems as if one must just recognize (x) $F(x) \rightarrow G(x)$ as a brute fact.

(DTA)’s view and this problem belongs more to the ancient materialist, who believed that matter imposed an order upon itself, so to speak, than Plato—despite Armstrong’s use of Plato. The ancient materialist posited elements, “[moving] at random, each impelled by virtue of its own inherent properties.”⁵³ From these premises, the materialist infers the result of the unobserved and unobservable stasis and regeneration of the universe.⁵⁴ Only a metaphysics with robust support for counterfactuals could substantiate these speculations. To infer that the past universal truth, that all $F(x)$ happen to be $G(x)$, necessarily portends the future requires an account with robust necessitation that (DTA) provides. Indeed, the “intrinsic properties,” which compel the atoms of the natural scientist, fulfill the same purpose as (DTA)’s universal properties. In either case, laws of nature follow as relationships between these intrinsic/universal characteristics.⁵⁵

⁵³ *Laws*, 889b.

⁵⁴ *Laws*, 895a.

⁵⁵ Recall that Plato does not reject the concept of necessitation *per se* (see Mayhew, 80-81 and 134-136). The *Timaeus* (47-48) makes very clear that Plato believed that intelligence directed necessitation to create cosmic order. But he does not have so robust a notion of necessitation independent soul as the atheist materialist or DTA have, for he believes that the order required intelligence. He does not, for instance, believe that simple “material” necessitation could account for anything like the laws of nature or the cosmos’s rational regularities. Mayhew gives a useful example, which I adapt here. Fire has certain intrinsic characteristics, like the giving of heat. These characteristics owe from the manner in which lesser particles create fire. The lesser particles which create fire, however, cannot spontaneously come together to form fire, neither can many fire molecules come together to form the sun with its regularities (day, night, summer, winter). Analogously, wood does not spontaneously come together to form chairs and chairs do not spontaneously become arranged around a fireplace. Wood, however, having its characteristics, does influence what chairs are and can be.

While Plato accepts (U), he does so on the basis that what Armstrong calls an “ultimate explainer” is impossible without appeal beyond the material, a position (DTA) eschews.⁵⁶ He explicitly appeals to divine rational agency and divine governance. This may run afoul of the parsimony of modern metaphysics, but it allows (U)’s validity to come easily. With the addition of the following premise (U) becomes intelligible:

(1_G) Matter cannot give a full causal account of itself. It cannot explain the necessitation that holds between particulars in regularities. Only non-material rational agency could explain this necessitation.

(1_G) allows Plato to take the analogy of (U) far more seriously than (DTA). For Plato believes, like (U)’s validity suggests, that (U) needs the presence of rational agents to be valid. One can find this agency throughout Plato’s oeuvre. In the *Phaedrus*, for instance, the gods have a privileged knowledge of the rational forms, their governing agency ultimately explains how the relations between universals entail relations between particulars.⁵⁷ The gods actually govern; and regularities are actually, rather than metaphorically, laws. Significantly, (L1)—and the gods proved by it—remain concerned explicitly only with governing. The argument infers governing, just gods from the observation of orderly motion. There’s nothing in (L1) to prove that they found that constitution, i.e. the model upon which the motion rests. While they are intimately associated with reason, which could provide such a model, reason remains independent of them.⁵⁸ Similarly, the *Phaedrus*’ governing gods are intimately associated with the Forms, which provide the constitution for their governance, but do not themselves create the Forms. Indeed, they exist on a lower plane than the Forms, which exist beyond the world that the gods rule.

Regardless of how the just, governing gods interact with the Constitution—or what *Timaeus* calls the “Model”—Plato’s metaphysics allows him to justify (1_U), where (DTA) must simply posit it. Plato does so, primarily in the *Phaedo* and the *Timaeus*. Both dialogues present arguments for the teleological

⁵⁶ Armstrong, *What are Laws of Nature?*, 3.

⁵⁷ *Phaedrus*, 247. Plato still has, of course, the third man problem; but this relates more generally to the relationship between a universal form, F, and its instance F(x), rather than to the more specific problem of necessitation holding between necessitation among universals and necessitation among particulars.

⁵⁸ *Laws*, 897.

nature of the cosmos. While an in-depth analysis of these dialogues' argument would entail too long a digression from (L1), a brief analysis will amplify how Plato's metaphysics handles (U) and specify how Armstrong's use of Plato to give authority to his position that the relationship between universals must be posited as an atomic fact is unfortunate. In fact in the cited part of the *Phaedo* that Armstrong references to corroborate his view, Plato's Socrates may have argued against it. Socrates adverts that certain

kind of things, while not being opposites to something, yet do not admit the opposite, as for example, the triad, though it is not the opposite of the Even, yet does not admit it because it always brings along the opposite of the Even, and so the dyad in relation to the Odd, fire to the Cold, and very many other things...Not only does the opposite not admit its opposite, but that which brings along some opposite into that which it occupies; that which brings this along will not admit the opposite to that which it brings along.⁵⁹

Since fire contains the universal Hot, Cold flees it. This relationship follows analytically from the concept of Hot, like Oddness' inability to "admit" Even. The relationship between these universals is analytic a priori. In this passage Socrates ruminates on how the analytic a priori relations between universals instantiate themselves into particulars, whose properties can be known only synthetic a posteriori. So while Hot must oppose Cold, only experience teaches that fire contains Hot rather than Cold. This concern differs from (DTA)'s and modern science's more generally. (DTA) discusses concepts such as Mass, Energy, or Particles. Unlike Plato's universals, relations between such concepts are only known synthetic a posteriori: lacking experimental physics, the concept of Mass implies nothing about the concept of Energy or Particles or Atoms, etc. Indeed, rather than supporting Armstrong's position, this passage is a step in Plato's Socrates' argument against scientific and materialistic explanations of reality upon which (DTA) and natural scientism builds. Instead, Plato argues that synthetic relations between universals must be understood as contributing to a teleological end or good. In the *Phaedo* Socrates makes this point by way of describing his initial reaction to Anaxagoras (500-428), who had had claimed that Mind "directs and is the cause of everything." This contention anticipates (L1)'s central assertion, the primacy of mind/soul and thereby rational order over the material. Socrates believed that this thesis entails that nature be teleological: "the directing Mind ...direct[s] everything and arrange each thing in

⁵⁹ *Phaedo*, 105a.

the way that was best.” Therefore, “to know the cause of each thing, why it comes to be or perishes or exists, one had to find what was the best way for it to be, or to be acted upon, or to act.”⁶⁰ To know a nature of a thing, one merely has to investigate its particular good. This particular good harmonizes with the “general good for all”—Socrates again presuming cosmic harmony.⁶¹ Hence, $(x)F(x) \rightarrow G(x)$ because the Mind, i.e. divine rationality, seeing the good of all, had decreed $N(F,G)$. The *Timaeus*, later, gives numerous examples of how Plato thought this teleology may work.⁶²

Bas van Fraassen, a skeptic about using the concept of law to understand nature’s regularities, disagrees with Plato’s metaphysics; but he agrees with Plato’s reasons for rejecting a non-theistic, non-teleological worldview that nevertheless insists upon strong laws of nature. Fraassen’s amplification of Plato’s worries help to specify them. Fraassen echoes David Hume (1711-1776 AD). Scientific theories account for data. The ability to account for ever more data entails that science can uniquely judge the merits of ways of modeling data. An exact scientific model does not entail that the model captures the way the world is; only that it accounts for the data that the world presents to man. It therefore does not follow from a theory’s ability to account for data that a scientific theory could ever give an ultimate explanation of things. One may explain phenomenon *e* with the cause *c*; but later find that *c* has a cause, *c*₁, of its own. No ultimate explainers need exist to give an adequate causal account.⁶³

As explained above, (DTA) rejects this broadly Humean view. It explains metaphysically contingent regularity by appealing to the (nomicallly) necessary, something holding between properties like universals that do not exist within matter. Metaphysically necessary relationships between universals “explain, but [are] not [themselves], a regularity in the natural phenomena.” The Humean view with its parsimonious metaphysics would fail to explain anything: it would, Fraassen ironically argues, posit an “infinite series of coincidences.” The “regularities in natural phenomenon,” “surprising to the intellect,” demand explanation. If that explanation takes the form of a theory that need not be objectively true, then

⁶⁰ *Phaedo*, 97.

⁶¹ *Phaedo*, 98a-b.

⁶² *Timaeus*. 29d-30b provides a general justification of a global teleology to which the book adds particulars.

⁶³ Brodie, 206-207.

it seems far “too much of a coincidence” that any tradition of inquiry should be able to provide coherent answers.⁶⁴ The regularities of nature can be understood either as coincidental or “as necessarily proceeding from underlying reasons.” If the former, then we cannot know them as regularities: “what happens by coincidence may not happen.”⁶⁵

For van Fraassen these arguments are *ad hominem* parody against positions like (DTA). While not a necessary consequence of (DTA), its proponents tend toward atheism. Fraassen believes that their arguments resemble traditional proofs for the existence of God. This parody reveals an undercurrent in (L1). “While we have learned not to ask the question *why is there a world rather than nothing?*, we still regard as totally legitimate the question *why is the world the way it is rather than some other way?*” To answer that it simply is “is as unacceptable to the second question as to the first.”⁶⁶ The expectation of a full explanation of contingent regularity appears incongruent with the acceptance of a contingent reality, not itself needing further explanation. By insisting that regularity needs explanation,, (DTA) and materialism endorse a philosophic maneuver that would commit them to reach beyond contingency or, at least, the material to explain the cosmos. It is tenuous at best for the atheist to commit himself to the proposition that an adequate explanation or causal account be an ultimate one. Since “ultimate explainers” are elusive within matter, the materialist opens himself to the riposte that one must appeal beyond matter to satisfy the ultimate criteria of his explanation. Indeed, this is one reason why modern atheists tend to argue against the need for an ultimate explanation. (DTA) and natural scientism attempt to appeal beyond regularities to universals without invoking intelligence but this middle ground, built upon the necessitation that universal properties impute to their particulars, is uncertain.

While it is not explicit in the *Laws*, Plato echoes van Fraassen’s argument in the *Timaeus*. In the excerpts below his character, Timaeus, speculates on the nature of an adequate explanation. He draws a distinction between explanations of material coming to be and those of spiritual being:

⁶⁴ Van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 205-207.

⁶⁵ Van Fraassen, 209.

⁶⁶ Van Fraassen, 209-210.

- (1_F) [W]e must begin by making the following distinction: What is *that which always is* and has no becoming and what is *that which becomes* but never is? The former is grasped by understanding, which involves a reasoned account. It is unchanging. The latter is grasped by opinion, which involves unreasoning sense perception. It comes to be and passes away, but never really is. Now everything that comes to be must of necessity come to be by the agency of some cause, for it is impossible for anything to come to be without a cause...⁶⁷
- (2_F) The accounts we give of things have the same character as the subjects they set forth. So accounts of what is stable and fixed and transparent to understanding are themselves stable and unshifting...On the other hand, accounts we give of that which has been formed to be like that reality, since they are accounts of what is a likeness, are themselves likely, and stand in proportion to the previous accounts, i.e., what being is to becoming, truth is to convincingness.⁶⁸
- (3_F) We shall of course have to study the intrinsic nature of fire, water, air and earth prior to the heaven's coming to be, as well as the properties they had then...We tend to posit them as the elemental "letters" of the universe and tell people they are its "principles" on the assumption that they know what fire and the other three are. In fact, however, they shouldn't even be compared to syllables...for the present I cannot state 'the principle' or 'principles' of all things ...I couldn't convince even myself that I could be right to commit myself to undertaking a task of such magnitude. I shall keep to what I stated at the beginning, the virtue of likely accounts, and so shall try...to say about things...what is no less likely than any."⁶⁹

Since matter is always coming to be and passing away, it could always be otherwise. Plato would not have understood this in terms of contingency, although he may have understood it in terms of unreasoned flux—note the distinction in (1_F) and (2_F) between “stable and unshifting” accounts suitable for being and the uncertain ones suitable for, presumably, that which is unstable and shifting, i.e. matter. Matter’s unreasoned instability signifies, for Plato, that it cannot provide an ultimate explanation of reality or, even, a sure understanding of reality itself. Indeed, (3_F) sees him eschewing the task of giving a complete *material* account of reality. A further cause may exist for the fundamental principles inquirers took for “fundamental.” This assertion suggests that a full account of physical matter is not needed to prove the supremacy of reason over matter. More important to the discussion at hand is that (1_F), (2_F), and (3_F) imply a skepticism toward anything induced from sense data. This epistemic position anticipates parts of van Fraassen’s scientific antirealism, which he presents against Armstrong’s view of laws of nature. Let *E* represent all the evidence, gotten through sense data of course, of the material world that the human race

⁶⁷ *Timaeus*, 27d-28a.

⁶⁸ *Timaeus*, 29b-c.

⁶⁹ *Timaeus*, 48b-d.

will ever accumulate and H_I represent an hypotheses, agreed to by a community of inquirers, that explains E . Two factors weigh in favor of H_I 's veracity. First, it explains E .⁷⁰ Second, it conforms to those rational criteria that the community of inquirers believe an explanation must satisfy—e.g. simplicity. *Prima facie*, neither consideration limits the class of hypotheses that explain E , to H_I alone. H_I likely is one of numerous possible hypotheses, H_X , of a class that explain E and conform to the inquiring community's criteria.

Therefore, for any H_X perhaps another H_X exists. And so, Plato argues, likely accounts will multiply: “one man surrounds the earth with a vortex to make the heavens keep in place, another makes the air support it like a lid.” Hence, Plato's Socrates notes that the natural scientist investigates reality like “people groping in the dark.”⁷¹ One discerns here Clinias' complaint that too many materialist doctrines exist. Thus, Socrates explicitly recants from natural science's tasks of discovering “the causes of everything, why it comes to be, why it perishes, and why it exists.”⁷² It is a dead end, an investigation that cannot discover truth. Even if a hypothesis were postulated that perfectly mirrored reality, there would be no way of knowing it. Man ought “to be content” if he “can come up with accounts [of coming to be] no less likely than any [other].” He must remember that he “[is] only human” and therefore epistemically limited.⁷³

Plato and van Fraassen significantly disagree on whether or not philosophical inquiry can provide a ultimate explanation of things. For, van Fraassen believes that these considerations demonstrate the folly of plumbing the material world for a complete explanation that mirrors reality, especially if one has already forsaken the attempt to give of complete explanation for reality itself. Contrariwise, Plato believes that these considerations merely evidence the need to look beyond the material to provide adequate explanations. He significantly expects reason can give an account of all reality. Hence, Plato's Socrates posits “stable and fixed” intellectual Forms for this alternative inquiry. Based on immutable truths, they

⁷⁰ Van Fraassen, “Armstrong on Laws and Probabilities,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 65 (September 1987): 259.

⁷¹ *Phaedo*, 99b-c.

⁷² *Phaedo*, 96a.

⁷³ *Timaeus*, 29c-d.

promise an understanding that science's causal reasoning cannot.⁷⁴ Socrates' argument claims that natural scientism's methodology and assumptions cannot support the goal of its inquiry.

Hence, one would expect that (DTA)'s attempt to give an ultimate explanation would fail to adequately explain. In particular, even if H_I not only modeled E but perfectly mirrored reality and man knew it indubitably—the Oracle at Delphi revealed it—ancient materialism would still have difficulty with van Fraassen's and Plato's worries. In particular, it would have to show how universal/intrinsic properties result in laws that govern reality. That is, it must (a) demonstrate how the relationship between universal/intrinsic properties necessitates an analogical relationship between the corresponding particulars, $(x)F(x) \rightarrow G(x)$. Moreover, it must (b) explain why the intrinsic or universal properties are irreducible, why the necessitation between universals does not require explanation itself.

(DTA) is blithe in relation to (b). Armstrong, recall, posited the relations between universals as an atomic fact.⁷⁵ But the same desire for a complete explanation that cause the postulation of $N(F,G)$ ought to cause him to explain that relationship with a second order necessitation between universals, $N(F\text{-}Ness, G\text{-}ness)$. This, too, would not ultimately explain, and an infinite regress of super-universals explaining the necessitation between sub-universals begins.⁷⁶ A regress does not automatically disqualify a thesis. But why should one seek to explain necessitation amongst particulars with necessitation amongst universals if the latter account is itself an incomplete explanation, requiring stipulation to be ultimate? Why not simply be contented with the incompleteness of the regularity? Despite the strength of the promised explanation, ancient materialism and (DTA) cannot give an account of themselves.

On the other hand, Plato's metaphysics can support his ambitious goals. The failure of (DTA) shows that strong, prescriptive laws of nature require the sort of potent intelligence that Plato assumes. (P1) fails. Since (P1) fails, then Plato's teleological view of nature bridges the potential gap between reason/intelligence soul, i.e. (P2). For once he has shown that an animating life force moves reality, then he can ascribe reason to it by arguing that the regularities of the world evince a teleological and thereby

⁷⁴ *Phaedo*, 100b

⁷⁵ Armstrong, *What is a Law of Nature?*, 92.

⁷⁶ Van Fraassen, *Laws and Symmetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 104-112.

rational nature. Reason precedes man. In the *Phaedo*, he argues that if the divine is primary in reality, then any science must incorporate the divine's Mind into its explanations. This requirement leads easily to the teleological view of reality that *Timaeus* in part defends. By the time he had written the *Laws*, Plato had already defended and articulated a teleological and rational account of the world. He may have consequently believed that the rather cursory arbitration between (7_{L1}) and (8_{L1}) more than sufficed. While an exploration of these themes in the *Phaedo* and *Timaeus* would provide fuller accounts of Plato's rational theology, it is beyond the scope of this thesis' purpose. Even having answered (P1) and (P2), (L1) forces another question.

iii. The Incompleteness of the Athenian's Argument

The basis for (L1)'s validity—the requirements of an ultimate explanation—appear, however, to make (L1) itself incomplete. Recall the two questions that van Fraassen asks his interlocutor:

(FQ₁) why is there something rather than nothing?

(FQ₂) why is the world the way it is rather than some other way?

The parody atheist position, representing (DTA), which van Fraassen attacks, accepts (FQ₂) but rejects as meaningless (FQ₁). From the perspective of the *Laws*, Plato only considers (FQ₂). (L1) only demonstrates that a sufficient answer to (FQ₂) must appeal to the primacy of soul/mind over the soulless. While (L1) does appeal beyond the material, it does not appeal beyond the contingent: soul is self-moving motion within the cosmos, not a transcendent cause. Nevertheless, if (L1) be valid, then it follows that a necessary God must exist, though this God does not need to transcend time and place. Otherwise, soul came to be just randomly or chaotically; and the ancient materialist position of non-rationality over rationality would have succeeded. Because Plato's Athenian has established the preeminence of soul with the implicit reference to the need for an ultimate explanation, he commits himself to answering (FQ₁), although he himself never used modal concepts. Soul's contingency cannot provide an ultimate explanation for things. Moreover, since (L1) purports to demonstrate the primacy of rationality over

matter, Plato must answer (FQ₁) by referencing this dynamic: the creator must demonstrate an even higher rationality than that of the gods’.

If confronted with this problem, would Plato have simply modified (L1)’s conception of soul? If soul is primary, then nothing caused it. Since nothing caused it, it is eternal and it begins to resemble a necessary being. Plato does, at least, distinguish in *Timaeus* between eternality and sempiternality. The former signifies being coeval with time and the latter, having existed before time.⁷⁷ This recognition suggests that he appreciated a distinction between soul as eternal and thereby “born” and something sempiternal and thereby sempiternal “being.” The *Timaeus*, written before the *Laws*, gives a proto-Kalam cosmological argument, which uses the distinction between created and uncreated.

He argues, (TK):

(1_{TK}) “now everything that comes to be must of necessity come to be by the agency of some cause, for it is impossible for anything to come to be without a cause”; “that which comes to be must come to be by the agency of some cause.”⁷⁸

(2_{TK}) “the whole universe...has come to be.”⁷⁹

∴(3_{TK}) the whole universe has a cause.

∴(4_{TK}) Since nothing within the universe could cause its own existence, the universe has a cause outside of itself.

∴(5_{TK}) This cause is ultimate and therefore self-moving.

While Plato never explicitly mentions (4_{TK}), it follows from (1_{TK}) and (2_{TK}) that an agent not a part of the cosmos ordered the cosmos. Likewise, Plato never explicitly states (5_{TK}). But such a conclusion would follow from his rejection of the possibility of an actual infinite regress of causes in (L1). Plato, moreover, understands that sempiternity means that the being proved by (TK) exists without the cosmos, i.e. time and place: “*was* and *will be* are forms of time that have come to be. Such notions we unthinkingly but

⁷⁷ *Timaeus*, 37c-38b, 41a-b.

⁷⁸ *Timaeus*, 28a; 28c.

⁷⁹ *Timaeus*, 28b.

incorrectly apply to everlasting being [that being which (TK) proved]...but according to the true account only *is* is appropriately said of it.”⁸⁰

(TK) has cosmological implications that (L1) avoids. The *Laws*’ (L1) proves soul as a necessary condition for the movement of things with an induction to the best explanation, from sense perception to the necessary conditions for sense perception to exist at all—i.e. the existence of rational governance.⁸¹ It is important not to see (TK) as unambiguously answering (FQ₁). Nevertheless, it deduces from causation the necessary condition—the creation by an agent—for anything to have been constituted at all. (TK) explicitly deals with “constitution” of the order in the universe in a way that (L1) leaves vague. The word *constitution* has been chosen to recall the analogy between (U’) and (U). Furthermore, it captures what Plato meant by *creation*. The being proved by (TK) does not create *ex nihilo*. Timaeus says that the Demiurge “looked over all that was visible—not at rest but in discordant and disorderly motion—and brought it from a state of disorder to one of order.”⁸² The Demiurge constitutes raw material into the cosmos. This constituting being is all Plato believes soul’s coming to be in (L1) points to. This being would be cosmologically necessary for the constitution of the cosmos—something which (L1)’s soul could not strictly do since it came to be and thereby presumably exists in time.

Nevertheless, Plato shows little recognition of the distinction that (TK) could create between a necessary being and a contingent universe. Timaeus justifies (1_{TK}), not with appeals to contingency but rather with appeals that run roughshod over this distinction. In (1_F) he distinguishes between “*that which always is* and has no becoming and...*that which becomes* but never is. The former ... is unchanging. The latter ... comes to be and passes away, but never really is.”⁸³ He couches his distinction, however, in epistemic terms: reason grasps the former; sense perception, the later. Later, he clarifies that “that which comes to be must have bodily form, and be both visible and tangible.”⁸⁴ Presumably, *being* refers to the incorporeal, but this distinction again fails to realize the difference between the logically contingent but

⁸⁰ *Timaeus*, 37e-38a.

⁸¹ *Laws*, 894a.

⁸² *Timaeus*, 30a.

⁸³ *Timaeus*, 27d-28a.

⁸⁴ *Timaeus*, 31b.

metaphysically necessary soul and its logically necessary creator. In *Laws* and *Timaeus*, soul has no terminus and is an antipode to the tangible, matter. In both it is incorporeal. In both it is the governing principle of reality. Yet in both it comes to be.

The epistemic, rather than logical, terms in which he couches this distinction in (1_F) and (2_F) signifies that anything unchanging, associated with reason, and thereby “stable and fixed” is *being*—regardless of whether or not it was created. Hence, the sempiternal god, the eternal gods, and the god that is the cosmos itself enjoy *being*, despite the fact that the latter two are created; because they are intimately associated with reason. And this may begin to explain why Plato’s character takes few pains to distinguish the sempiternal Demiurge and the gods that the Demiurge creates—using the same appellation for each, *god*.

The addition of lesser gods may seem a baroque adornment, upon which Plato insists. Their presence is not a cultural adornment. The difference between (L1) and (TK) suggests that these gods have different roles within the cosmos. *Timaeus* later makes this difference explicit. To understand why Plato does insist on a baroque metaphysics, one must understand another question, intrinsic to (L1). Namely, why does the Athenian call the soul *archê*, the ruling, governing principle, if it is potentially not the ultimate principle of reality by Plato’s division between sempiternity and eternity?

As suggested before, one way to answer this question would be to insist that soul is the ultimate principle in the *Laws*. This answer would make the *Laws* somewhat continuous with the *Timaeus*, but the two dialogues may not be so intimately related. The Athenian does, however, make one enigmatic reference to a divinity that is suggestive: “according to the ancient story, there is a god who holds in his hands the beginning and end and middle of all things, and straight he marches in the cycle of nature.”⁸⁵ On one hand, this quotation appears in the context of giving a hypothetical exhortatory speech to citizens of the city that the *Laws* founds, and perhaps it should not be read seriously. On the other hand, it appears to refer to something other than soul, which would presumably regulate the “cycles of nature.” (7_{L1}) associates soul with circular motion and the *Timaeus*’ description of the physics of soul explicitly stated

⁸⁵ *Laws*, 715e-716a.

that soul was composed of seven revolving circles that revolved “within itself.”⁸⁶ David Sedley specifies that “there is every indication in the [*Timaeus*] that the circularity of [the soul’s] motions is not merely a metaphor for eternity, but is, as Aristotle recognized, meant as a physical fact too.” The thoughts produced by the human soul “like those of the world-soul,” do literally move in circles.”⁸⁷ Therefore, the god, who marches “straight...in the cycles of nature,” seems to differ from the gods composed of soul. This god may be an immanent first principle in nature like reason itself. It nevertheless suggests a timelessness—holding the beginning, the middle and end of all things—that the Athenian later denies to soul. Since soul comes to be, it could only be as old as time. Moreover, in the *Timaeus* Timaeus’ provides a cosmology; in the *Laws* the Athenian provides an ideal foundation for the state. The *Timaeus* focuses on the metaphysical; the *Laws* focuses on the ethical and political. Indeed, the Athenian provides (L1) in order to justify punitive laws against impious actions. Plato’s Athenian does not attempt in (L1) to give a complete cosmology.⁸⁸ Therefore, one would not be surprised were Plato to believe an order higher than the gods exist and not explicitly mention it in the *Laws*, since disproving the atheist position requires only proving the primacy of soul over matter.

Consider, therefore, an alternative. Plato concluded that the *archê* as ruling principle could not be the *archê* as ultimate explainer and necessary being. Ethical, rather than metaphysical, considerations led him to this conclusion. To govern the material world necessarily entails involvement in it; and Plato’s ethical ideal consistently remained separation from the material.⁸⁹ Therefore, soul necessarily has imperfection impressed upon it. To be perfect, the ultimate principle of reality must enjoy a blissful solitude, removed from his creation.⁹⁰ This moral requirement explains why (L1) would ignore (FQ_I). The being adverted to in (5_{TK}) could not involve itself in governance. Hence, it was removed from the practical ethical and political concerns of the *Laws*.

⁸⁶ *Timaeus*, 36c-e.

⁸⁷ David Sedley, “The Ideal of Godlikeness,” in *Plato 2: Ethics, Politics, Religion, and the Soul*, ed. Gail Fine (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 317.

⁸⁸ *Laws*, 884-885.

⁸⁹ See *Phaedo*, 67c-e; *Phaedrus*, 249; *Republic*, 518c-519b-c; *Theaetetus*, 174.

⁹⁰ *Republic*, 519d. This will be discussed in detail below.

Plato ultimately believed his predecessors correct in assuming that the world required a ruling principle and an ultimate explainer. Each requirement, however, pointed to a different intelligence—a governing and thereby imperfect intelligences for the former and a perfect and thereby detached intelligence for the latter. To translate this thought into terms of (U), the Demiurge accounts for the strength of (1_U) and the governing gods account for the peculiar necessitation that holds between (1_U), (2_U) and (3_U). These considerations will have ramifications for Plato’s ethical ideal below.

iv. Conclusions

The Athenian exploits the general theistic framework from which materialism sprung. The materialists lived in an epoch in which science had not freed itself from a religious framework. Contrary to science, mythology necessarily provides an ultimate explanation of reality. Theologizing likewise tends to give an ultimate explanation, since “nothing can be divine that is reducible to terms beyond itself.”⁹¹ Any theistic understanding of an explanation seeks to explain *e* with reference to a divine cause, *c*, that is irreducible. As a product of a culture that associated divinity with natural forces, certain early philosophers did associate those forces with divinity. While ancient materialists ceased conceptualizing the *archê* as a divinity, they nevertheless retained the theistic framework’s assumption that an adequate explanation must be an ultimate one; only an ultimate causal account could adequately explain an effect.

For instance, the fifth-century atomists believed that they had given an absolute explanation of reality with the atom and the void. Like divinity, their atom and its intrinsic characteristics are irreducible. The materialist committed himself to providing the same thing as the theist: an ultimate explanation of reality. Plato’s arguments claim that the materialist’s atheism contradicts his inquiry’s desires. The attempt to explain the natural world with reference to an unseen and ultimate order of intrinsic, universal properties and basic elements fails to explain how necessitation between one type of thing, universals, governs necessitation between another type of thing. Hence, Socrates claims that the position accounts for

⁹¹ Broadie, 206-207.

appearances only, for it pursues the wrong cause.⁹² If, as Plato argues, matter alone cannot meet the standard of explanation that the materialist desires then materialism must either accept (L1) or reject the concept of *archê* and the search for an ultimate causal account.

b. From Soul to Gods

Once he has demonstrated the primacy of soul, the Athenian infers the existence of the gods. This second inference would not have been commonsensical, since *soul* did not necessarily refer to personal consciousness. Especially in light of (L1), soul could advert instead to an impersonal scientific principle within nature, of the same order as matter but distinct from it. The Athenian attempts to justify this inference with (L2):

(1_{L2}) If “soul drives round the sun, moon and other heavenly bodies,” it impels each individually.

∴(2_{L2}) The soul drives the sun as it does other bodies.

(3_{L2}) The soul drives the sun in one of three ways: either “(a) the soul resides within this visible spherical body and carries it wherever it goes, just as *our* soul takes us around from one place to another, or (b) it acquires its own body of fire or air of some kind (as certain people maintain), and impels the sun by the external contact of body with body, or (c) it is entirely immaterial, but guides the sun along its path by virtue of possessing some other prodigious and wonderful powers.”

∴(4_{L2}) “Whether we find that it is by stationing itself in the sun and driving it like a chariot, or by moving it from outside, or by some other means, that this soul provides us all with light, every single one of us is bound it as a god.”

∴(5_{L2}) “A soul or souls—and perfectly virtuous souls at that—have been shown to be the cause of all these phenomena, [i.e. heavenly bodies] and whether it is by their

⁹² *Phaedo*, 99b-c.

living presence in matter that they direct all the heavens, or by some other means, we shall insist that these souls are gods. Can anybody admit this and still put up with people who deny that ‘everything is full of gods’?”⁹³

The inference of (4_{L2}) from (3_{L2}) may give pause. Its validity depends on the Athenian’s argument about life’s relation to soul. Recall, that (4_{L1}*) and (5_{L1}*) together imply that (6_{L1}*), a thing has a soul iff it moves itself. Since the planets move themselves and are therefore soul and all planets are gods, then the existence of soul entails the existence of the gods.

The Athenian’s argument entails that divine, rational gods animate material reality. The argument implies also that the gods somehow found moral reality. As the foundation of the spiritual order soul causes “all things, ... [i.e.] good and evil, beauty and ugliness, justice and injustice and all the opposites.”⁹⁴ But the moral causation of the soul is ambiguous. It could mean that the soul provides the medium through which moral concepts present themselves. Alternatively, it could signify that the soul creates those moral concepts—that they are founded upon soul’s nature or otherwise stipulated by the gods, who are soul.

Plato suggests the former reading. When the Athenian relates soul to spiritual concepts, he emphasizes that soul does not cause “divine rationality” but rather “cleaves” to it.⁹⁵ He had earlier claimed that “[o]pinion, diligence, reason, art and law” are only “closely related to soul.”⁹⁶ *Prima facie*, this conclusion may contradict the conclusions in *Euthyphro* and *Apology*. In these early dialogues, Plato’s characters argue for a divine, authoritarian ethics. Indeed, the *Euthyphro*’s argument against proposition (7_{A1}*) clarifies what the gods and piety must be if the divine creates piety. This conclusion even contradicts the Athenian’s reference to the single god, who holds the beginning, middle, and end of all things. This god “is preeminently the ‘measure of all things’ much more so than any ‘man,’ as they

⁹³ *Laws*, 888c-889b.

⁹⁴ *Laws*, 896e.

⁹⁵ *Laws*, 897a-b.

⁹⁶ *Laws*, 892a.

say.”⁹⁷ The citation references Protagoras, who had argued that “a human being is the measure of all things—of things that are, how they are, and of things that are not, how they are not.”⁹⁸ No objective natural or moral reality exists, only reality perceived by man, understood both individually and collectively. Transposing the Protagorean dictum from man to this single god results in voluntarism, in which no reality, moral or objective, exists independent of this single god’s measuring. Does Plato’s Athenian contradict himself?

To answer this question, reconsider that (L1) does not attempt to clarify any metaethical question about the cause of moral principles. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the discussion of the incompleteness of the Athenian’s argument, perhaps the *Laws* acknowledges an intelligence higher than soul. This interpretation would have the benefit of not only explaining this measuring god in the *Laws*. It furthermore jibes with Plato’s aforementioned dialogues and, as will be seen, aspects of *Timaeus*’ cosmology.⁹⁹

According to (L1) the god’s characteristic activity is governing the cosmos, but the gods’ interest in governing the whole does not exemplify moral virtue. Nature seems manifestly amoral, and man is an insignificant part of it. Plato’s Athenian attempts to dismiss this worry, next.

B. Contra the moral indifference of the gods

Even if the gods exist and are good, does it follow that their purview extends to humanity? The apparent prosperity of moral evil suggests the gods’ indifference to human affairs.¹⁰⁰ The Athenian’s argument contra atheism ultimately makes this position untenable. The Athenian has demonstrated that the gods exist by adverting to the rational order of the natural world.¹⁰¹ Coupling rationality with divinity entails that the gods’ care for man. Consider (L3):

⁹⁷ *Laws*, 716c.

⁹⁸ Irwin, 59.

⁹⁹ Mayhew briefly discusses the relationship between cosmic reason, which Plato would doubtless call a god; the gods; and soul on 137.

¹⁰⁰ *Laws*, 899d-900.

¹⁰¹ *Laws*, 897b.

- (1_{L3}) The gods express their perfect virtue by watching over the universe.
- (2_{L3}) The gods' perfect goodness implies that they possess reason and moderation and courage.
- (3_{L3}) A rational creature can neglect one's job for one of three reasons. He "[a] thinks it makes no difference to his job as a whole if he neglects the details, *or* [b] important though they are, he nevertheless lives in idleness and self-indulgence and neglects them." Alternatively, [c] he is ignorant.
- (4_{L3}) The gods "know and see and hear everything, and...nothing within the range of our senses or intellect can escape them."
- (5_{L3}) The gods "can do anything within the power of mortals and immortals."
- (6_{L3}) Sloth and self-indulgence springs from vice.
- (7_{L3}) No god suffers from vice.
- ∴(8_{L3}) No god suffers from sloth and self-indulgence.

From (8_{L3}), one can infer ~[b]; from (4_{L3}), ~[c]; and from (5_{L3}), the falseness of an unstated fifth possibility, that the gods recognize their duty but cannot accomplish it. The Athenian demonstrates ~[a] when he points out that although "little things are more difficult to see or hear than big, they are much easier, when there are only a few of them, to carry or control or look after." Rational order implies strict attention to the tiniest of details. Doctors do not neglect "individual limbs and tiny parts." "[E]ven masons say the big stones don't lie well without the small ones." Either ~[a] or the proponent of the gods' indifference to humanity must "treat God as less skilled than a mortal craftsman."¹⁰² Therefore, the gods' rationality implies their commitment to care for the least part of the universe.

To buttress this conclusion, the Athenian asserts a second argument, (L4):

- (1_{L4}) "[h]uman life has something to do with the world of the soul, and man himself is the most god-fearing of all living creatures."

¹⁰² *Laws*, 900e-903a.

(2_{L4}) “[W]e regard all mortal creatures as possessions of gods, like the universe as a whole.”

∴(3_{L4}) “whether you argue these possessions count for little or much in the sight of the gods, in neither case would it be proper for our owners to neglect us, seeing how very solicitous and good they are.”¹⁰³

This argument proves more than (3_{L4}): (2_{L4}) alone entails (3_{L4}). (2_{L4}) itself is justified either from the traditional belief that the gods own men or from inferring the gods’ ownership of a part of the universe, man, from the gods’ possession of the universe entire. (1_{L4}), contrariwise, describes the nature of man in relation to the universe and other creatures. It describes man’s interest in the gods rather than the converse. What purpose does it serve in the argument?

Nowhere in the *Laws* does the Athenian amplify the phrase “world of the soul,” a suggestive phrase meaning “all human things share in that nature that is animated.”¹⁰⁴ The *Timaeus* describes a “world soul,” suggesting a clarification. Timaeus speculates that the necessary being, the Demiurge, “put intelligence in soul and in body, and so he constructed the universe... [hence, bringing] our world into being as a truly living thing with soul and intelligence.”¹⁰⁵ Since the craftsman “wanted to make the world like the best of the intelligible things, complete in every way, he made it a single visible living thing, which contains within itself all living things whose nature it is to share its kind.” This “god,” i.e. the universe, is a conscious, living being, existing in blissful solitude.¹⁰⁶ Like humanity, the gods participate in this spherical, impersonal god. Like the gods, therefore, man attempts to make the whole as much like its Model as possible.¹⁰⁷ The myth of the *Phaedrus* implies that man actively cares for this cosmos again like the gods. “[A]ll soul looks after all that lacks a soul, and patrols all of heaven...the entire universe is its dominion.”¹⁰⁸ Inferior souls, through accident or evil, fall to earth and take a body. Only those souls

¹⁰³ *Laws*, 902. (1_{L4}) is restated in *Timaeus*, 42a.

¹⁰⁴ Translation provided by S. Broadie.

¹⁰⁵ *Timaeus*, 30.

¹⁰⁶ *Timaeus*, 34.

¹⁰⁷ This reality beyond reality is seen in the hyperuranian realm depicted in the myth of the *Phaedrus*.

¹⁰⁸ *Phaedrus*, 246b-c.

that have seen a certain amount of the Forms—no human soul ever sees them completely—become men. Hence, man approaches the divine to an extent unsurpassed by all other fallen soul. The *Timaeus* even speculates that the gods themselves created man as the creator-god created them; men are the gods’ children.¹⁰⁹ (2_{L4}) only allows the conclusion that the gods care about the details of human morality just as they would care about the minutiae of anything else in the universe. (1_{L4}), on the other hand, implies that the gods would properly care about the details of human activity more than just any other minutiae. Man’s fear of god in (1_{L4}) suggests his propinquity to the divine—his especial acknowledgement of it. To emphasize man qua part of the world soul, reinforces this connection between man and god as self-conscious, rational parts of the rational and harmonious whole, the world soul.

(1_{L4}) does not signify that the gods possess an especial interest in humanity or an especial love for man, since the gods’ interest in and connection with man derives from an interest in the whole. Even in *Timaeus*, the gods only create mankind under the Demiurge’s direction, whose concern is the good of the whole. (1_{L4}) does suggest, however, that man’s uniqueness amongst the embodied implies a similarly unique contribution to the whole. Significantly, (1_{L4}) does not justify this uniqueness with reference to man’s rationality. Rather, man is especial because of his “fear of the gods,” i.e. piety. Plato’s Athenian implies that man’s relationship with divinity or his potential for such a relationship is essential to his being man. He does so just as he begins to argue that the conventional understanding of that relationship—divine blessings or curses on one hand and intercessory prayers and sacrifices on the other—is itself impious.

C. Contra Greek Sacrificial Religion

For the Athenian the greatest impieties against the gods are the assumptions motivating sacrificial religion. Plato’s Athenian offers two proofs of this position. The first deduces the impossibility of persuading the gods from their nature. The second argues by analogy: if the universe be the gods’ realm,

¹⁰⁹ *Timaeus*, 41a-d and 42e.

how do they reign? Answering this question demonstrates the incomprehensibility of certain aspects of traditional religion; it specifies the gods' relationship with the cosmos; and it implies an alternative piety.

Despite his earlier encomium to tradition, the Athenian seems radical. By calling traditional sacrifice blasphemous, he inverted what he saw as the conventional expression of and motivation for piety.¹¹⁰ The greatest act of honor and piety becomes the greatest act of dishonor and impiety. These two arguments amplify Socrates' criticism of (9_{A1}) from the *Euthyphro*.

1. The First Argument

The Athenian's first argument uses (4_{L3}) and (5_{L3}). Being omniscient, powerful, and good, the gods could not "do what the most wretched of men are said to do, namely, fail in their duty because they are somehow overcome by temptation or pain, even though they know that there are better options than the one they've in fact chosen."¹¹¹ The gods' goodness precludes them from temptation; their might, pain. If we add this proof to the conclusion of (A4) and (A5) from the *Republic*—that the gods are immutable—then the conclusion becomes emphatic: petitionary acts of worship directed to unchanging, perfectly virtuous gods existing in time are worthless. As virtuous beings, they do not compromise on moral matters; as non-transcendent immutable divinities they cannot grant non-moral petitions. An immutable governor cannot change his governance no matter how pressing the concern. But Plato probably believed it impossible that any occasion could arise that would justify the the gods changing their initial decisions. The Athenian characterizes ideal reason, recall, as an unchanging lathe; in the *Epinomis*, an appendix to the *Laws* added by Plato's editor, Phillip of Opus, the Athenian says that the gods have reached "the best decision in accordance with the best intelligence." The gods "are doing what was decided an astonishingly long time ago." Having decided the best way for things to be, they made their mind once and for eternity.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ *Laws*, 907b.

¹¹¹ *Laws*, 901-902.

¹¹² *Epinomis*, 982.

2. The Second Argument

The Athenian introduces his second argument with an outburst: “[I]ook—in the name of the gods themselves—*how* would they be bought off, supposing they were? What would they have to be? What sort of being would do this?”¹¹³ This interjection parallels Socrates’ ironic *reductio* of the attempt to define *piety* in *Euthyphro*’s (9_{A1}). Socrates’ argument, then, demonstrated an anthropocentric concern with piety. His *reduction* argued that any human virtue based on (9_{A1}) would be limited. The Athenian’s second argument emphasizes, instead, a theological concern. It clarifies how traditional, sacrificial worship degrades the gods themselves.

If the gods “are going to run the entire universe forever, ... they’ll have to be rulers.” The Athenian isolates four types of human “rulers” to elucidate the gods’ rule:

- (i) “drivers of competing teams of horses, or steersmen of boats in a race”
- (ii) “commanders of armies”
- (iii) “doctors concerned to defend the body in the war against disease”
- (iv) “farmers anxiously anticipating the seasons that usually discourage the growth of their crops, or to shepherds.”¹¹⁴

These examples demonstrate the incoherence of attributing venality to the gods. If one agrees, however, that the gods always indulge “the unjust man and the criminal, provided they’re given a share in the loot,” then one must “be prepared to say that if wolves...were to give watch-dogs a small part of their prey, the dogs would be appeased by the gift and turn a blind eye to the plundering of the flock.” Since the gods are “the most supreme guardians of all” and “look after our supreme interests,” it would be absurd to hold that dogs make better guardians. If gods “the most supreme guardians of all,” then their failure to “look

¹¹³ *Laws*, 905d-e.

¹¹⁴ *Laws*, 905e-906a.

after [man's] supreme interests" becomes as inconsistent as a farmer who colludes with plague to destroy his crops.¹¹⁵

Within the context of refuting this blasphemy, the Athenian changes how he talks about the gods, transforming their *care* of the universe into their *guardianship* of it. Caring implies maintaining; guarding implies a struggle against another whose disruptive plans one attempts to foil. This is clear in (i) and (ii). Even in (iii) and (iv) the Athenian introduces conflict into his example: he refers to doctors fighting "wars" against disease and farmers "anxiously" awaiting winter.¹¹⁶ This motif is central to the *Laws*' treatment of evil. The "universe is full of many good things and many bad as well," but "the latter outnumber the former."¹¹⁷

Acquisitiveness causes this blasphemous belief that man can bribe the gods, which encourages him to practice sacrificial worship. Man calls this vice disease when "it appears in flesh and blood," "'plague' when brought by the seasons or at intervals of years," and injustice when it occurs in "state and society."¹¹⁸ The same type of vices that appear in men and cause the moral problem of evil arise in the cosmos and cause the natural problem of evil. Because soul pervades everything, the Athenian infers vice in man parallels "vice" in nature.

From within the context of the *Laws*, only the bad soul, allied with "unreason" and disorder, could cause acquisitiveness.¹¹⁹ Since the Athenian has inferred the existence of good gods from good soul, he must infer the existence of evil, cursed gods from bad soul. He acknowledges their existence when he says that "gods and spirits are fighting on our side," but then specifies that he adverts specifically

¹¹⁵ *Laws*, 906d-907b. Mayhew (190) points that "it is no coincidence that Plato in each case quotes or alludes to Homer. Perhaps he wants to show that in attacking the third kind of impiety—what I'm calling traditional theism—he actually has the tradition on his side." This is secondary but interesting to a point made above in the section, "2. The Objection from Tradition." The cases he refers to are the ill-behaved dogs, captains, and charioteers in the analogy.

¹¹⁶ *Laws*, 903.

¹¹⁷ *Laws*, 906.

¹¹⁸ *Laws*, 906.

¹¹⁹ *Laws*, 896d.

to “the gods and spirits whose chattels we are.”¹²⁰ Presumably, within the *Laws* gods and spirits whose chattels we are not, also exist.

The Athenian’s dualism explains the world’s disorder, albeit with two problems. First, the Athenian’s arguments against atheism and against the gods’ moral indifference depend upon the same cornerstone: the cosmos’ teleological order explained by Good, rational soul’s preeminence. The Athenian’s brief clarification may sap his argument’s foundation. The clarification does, however, jibe with the *Republic*’s argument in which Plato’s Socrates believes that the goodness of the gods entails that they only cause good, (A3). Hence, they cause “only a few things, for good things are fewer than bad ones in our lives.”¹²¹ But the cosmos cannot be teleological, harmonious *and* essentially marked by conflict. Second, if the bad outweighs the good in man’s life, then in what sense do perfectly virtuous gods guard man? They ought to guard him perfectly, but this now appears impossible. Plato’s oblique recognition of the problem of evil imperils his argument. Two solutions suggest themselves.

3. The Problem of Evil: Plato’s Answer?

Plato attacks the problem of evil with two arguments. First, he gives an argument from man’s epistemological limitedness. This approach leads to his second and more convincing argument, which is buttressed by Plato’s development of the concept of soul. He argues that from man’s identity as soul, not body, all experienced evil is self-inflicted evil.

a. The Epistemic Approach

In the *Republic*, Plato’s Socrates qualifies the claim that bad things outweigh good ones within the context of man’s life.¹²² This need not imply anything about the context in which man’s life is made possible. Disorder becomes odious only as an exception to ordered regularity. “Acquisitiveness” in society occurs within the general order of a society; “acquisitiveness” in the natural world, i.e. plague,

¹²⁰ *Laws*, 906a-b.

¹²¹ *Republic*, 379c.

¹²² *Republic*, 379c.

occurs as an exception to the climate. The Athenian's statement about evil in the universe takes for granted the larger backdrop of cosmic order that makes human life and society possible. Only the world's surprising order makes the hardships of that life possible. A society in which acquisitiveness outweighed virtue would cease to be a society. Hence, evil outweighs good only from the perspective of human life, a perspective made possible only from the surprising goodness of the whole.

This observation mitigates the problem of evil but cannot solve it. Consider a parallel in the Book of Job. After suffering terrible evils, the godly man, Job, states that "[t]he life of man upon earth is warfare." He later asks Jehovah, "[d]oth it seem good to thee that thou shouldst calumniate me, and oppress me, the work of thy own hands, and help the counsel of the wicked?" Jehovah responds with a series of rhetorical questions: "[w]here wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?...Who can declare the order of the heavens, or who can make the harmony of heaven to sleep?"¹²³ By allowing evil, Job complains, Jehova has belied his status as a good guardian. Jehovah responds with reference to the greater order of the world, which he governs. The riposte suggests the myopic nature of Job's concerns. This is not just a metaphysical truth, signifying Jehovah's interest in the whole. Job's myopia extends even so far as his own understanding of his well-being: as the Book's end demonstrates, Jehovah repaid Job many times over. Despite appearances, therefore, the pious man ought to hope in divine providence.

Plato may continue this thought in the *Laws*. Recognizing the greater order in the world ought to provide a "good hope." Socrates vaguely appeals to this hope in the last paragraphs of the *Apology*, and the Athenian qualifies the existence of evil with the assertion that gods and spirits fight for man.¹²⁴ Hence, while man qua man cannot know why the gods allow the universe to act as it does, he can remain sanguine; because the universe's larger order suggests their goodness and involvement. It may appear that "[a]ccidents and calamities occur in a thousand different ways, and they are the universal legislators of the world." Subsumed under faith in divinity, however, "the all-controlling agent in human affairs is God,

¹²³ Job 7:1, 10:3, 38:4.

¹²⁴ *Apology*, 40c-41e and *Laws* 906a-b.

assisted by the secondary influences of ‘chance’ and ‘opportunity.’”¹²⁵ Calamities may occur but the universe proves its goodness, because they bring opportunity to rational beings. Evil may be the characteristic end for man; but it is not the ultimate end, just the end in sight. This engagement with evil further elucidates the Athenian’s objection to intercessory prayer. Divine providence directs history, using what man may call *chance* and *opportunity*. In truth, however, “[t]he supervisor of the universe has arranged everything with an eye to its preservation and excellence, and its individual parts.... These parts, down to the smallest details... have each been put under the control of the ruling powers that have perfected the minutest constituents of the universe.” Intercessory prayer distrusts this providence and doubts the rationality of the gods by presuming that man instead knows the best way to arrange the world. To pray that the gods to give *x* instead of what they have given, *y*, pretends that for at least this one particular *x* ought to happen instead of *y*. But man, “a mere speck that nevertheless constantly contributes to the good of the whole,” clearly does not have such knowledge.¹²⁶ Therefore, the Athenian may conclude, the argument that the gods do not exist from the observation of evil, fails.

This sort of epistemological answer is both problematic and natural to any theism. It is natural, because divinity traditionally possesses a profound, even privileged understanding of the nature of things. If man exists in a divinely rational world but lacks the fullness of divine rationality, certain things may appear senselessly evil. But this appearance would only reflect his limitations. The evil in question becomes, from the proper perspective, the best option possible. It is problematic, because it assumes that man is not the only or even the most rational being in the universe—that another, higher rationality exists in which the world’s evil is actually perfectly managed. And this imperils Plato’s entire position. The Athenian expects, in other words, that one ought to take certain phenomena, the order of the heavens, etc., to imply the existence of gods’ governance. Once he has made this inference from orderly phenomena like natural evils with reference to the hidden wisdom of the gods’ governance. To one committed to a belief in gods, this epistemic answer may comfort. To one not so committed, it will not, because the

¹²⁵ *Laws*, 709.

¹²⁶ *Laws*, 903b-e.

world presents apparent order and apparent disorder. It is not clear which should be used to explain which. Nevertheless, accepting the Athenian's position may mitigate the problem of evil. It does so at the cost of extirpating intercessory prayer from Greek religion.

b. The Argument from Soul

In supporting this epistemic argument with another, Plato's Athenian provides an alternative to intercessory prayer that keeps the gods reign supreme. In doing so, the argument from soul amplifies how sharing soul creates a kinship between man and god. The Athenian rebukes the vicious man, who believes in the efficacy of intercessory prayer, arguing that he has forgotten that "nothing is created except to provide the entire universe with a life of prosperity." He "exist[s] for the sake of the universe," not vice versa.¹²⁷ The acquisitive soul has made himself dissonant with the cosmos by cultivating an individual perspective, which sees the whole in the light of the self, rather than cultivating a cosmic perspective, which attempts to see the self in the light of the whole. GRF Ferrari in *Listening to the Cicadas* argues that in the *Phaedrus* Socrates attempts to balance between the cosmic perspective that the philosopher seeks—that man's soul's kinship with the governing force of the cosmos invites—and the reality that he must have a personal perspective.¹²⁸ The argument will proceed in three steps. First (i), it will show how the gods must, like man, "cope with contingency"—the intrinsic stubbornness of matter, which they must govern.¹²⁹ Second (ii), it will show how Plato thought that by cultivating his divine, true self the virtuous man will view evil as irrelevant. This second step naturally invites the response that it is only from the perspective of the virtuous that such immunity from evil is agreed. Plato, thirdly (iii), agrees with this

¹²⁷ *Laws*, 903c.

¹²⁸ GRF Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas: A Study of Plato's Phaedrus* (Cambridge, New York, Port Chester, Melbourne, Sydney: University of Cambridge Press, 1987), 119-131.

¹²⁹ I am inspired, at least, by the gist of GRF Ferrari's argument in 119-123. Although he remains more concerned with the *Phaedrus*, I believe that his approach elucidates parts of the *Laws* as well. The phrase, "coping with contingency" is Ferrari's. I note further that Ferrari's interpretation of the gods coping with contingency may be another way in which Plato reflected upon how intelligence interacted with matter and its intrinsic characteristics (Mayhew, 136).

riposte but attempts to exculpate divinity from culpability, for man's vice putting the blame instead on man in general.

i. The Gods and Contingency

Recall how the gods champion man's cause. They fight for man like

- (i) A steersman, for his crew;
- (ii) A general, for his army;
- (iii) A doctor, for his patient;
- (iv) A farmer, for his crops and livestock.

These analogies reference man's participation in the world soul and elucidate how the gods possess man. On one hand, the examples appear contradictory. Examples (i) and (ii) give man a very active, albeit subordinate, role. On the other hand, in examples (iii) and (iv) man is passive and vulnerable.

Plato's Athenian defines a professional skill as "coping with contingency." The steersman's skill, for instance, allows him to seize whatever opportunity presented by a storm to steer his ship into a safe harbor.¹³⁰ Therefore, he understands the gods' guardianship, their skill, in terms of their ability to cope with the contingencies that non-rational matter presents. The *Phaedrus* expands upon this idea.

In the *Phaedrus* Socrates imagines a complex soul. Soul, divine and mortal, has a rational component, a charioteer; a spirited component and an appetitive component, both represented by horses. To order matter, soul requires nourishment from intelligence and pure knowledge. The gods must see the "being that really is what it is," i.e. the Forms, so that each can do "his own work." The rational vision sustains the gods' administration of the material cosmos. The Forms nourish only the charioteer; and since he wanders the halls, "seeing to his own work" without the horses, Plato associates him, the rational element, with the self-conscious and identity-bearing part of the soul.¹³¹

¹³⁰ *Laws*, 709.

¹³¹ *Phaedrus*, 247a.

Once soul has viewed the Forms, ordering the material proceeds from its essential nature, but soul orders the material cosmos, as oppose to something else, only contingently. Soul cares for “non-soul,” i.e. whatever else happens to exist.¹³² Matter thereby imposes itself upon the gods, who must involve themselves with giving order to its intransigent disorder. Therefore, their nature demands that they involve themselves in imperfection. The horses represent the gods’ resulting limitations. The charioteer needs them to transport him to the place of his feasting, and he must care for them after the trip. Since the horses resemble the material, they require ambrosia and nectar rather than the Forms. Socrates does not imply that this coping troubles the gods; they cope perfectly. The charioteer “throws in ambrosia, and nectar...besides.” The “gods’ chariots move easily.”¹³³ Nevertheless, their quotidian, practical involvement with matter limits them. As Timaeus states in his eponymous dialogue, the gods “come as close as possible to attaining perfection.”¹³⁴ But they are not perfect.

This makes the Athenian’s reassurances—i.e. that the gods fight on man’s behalf—intelligible. If coping remains necessary even for the gods, then the universe as coming to be rather than being, is intrinsically imperfect. Consequently, happiness, even divine happiness, is compatible with the need to cope that accompanies matter. Since intercessory prayers arise from the desire to mitigate evil, the gods’ example promises a way to mitigate this evil without eradicating it, which is impossible.

ii. Evil as Irrelevant

Man must therefore marginalize, as much as possible, the body. Natural evil can only be marginalized if the terrible effects it has upon the body are of ultimately no concern to the self. This positions has deep roots in Plato’s thought. The *Apology*’s Socrates, who insists on dying rather than compromising his ideals, hints that man’s good is an internal, good immune from even the most heinous torture. *Gorgias*’s Socrates later explicitly reaffirms this belief—that it is better to suffer greatly than do

¹³² Ferrari, 128.

¹³³ *Phaedrus*, 247b, 247e.

¹³⁴ *Timaeus*, 40a-b.

injustice.¹³⁵ The *Phaedo*'s Socrates defends it, arguing that the true philosopher "[is] training for dying," the separation of the soul from the body.¹³⁶ He therefore lives a life purifying himself from everything associated with embodiment.¹³⁷ To reject the body entirely in favor of the soul defends a dualism that associates man's intrinsic good and self entirely with soul: Socrates does not have a soul; he is a soul who, sadly, has a body.¹³⁸ How matter affects matter—the physical sensation of pain or pleasure—is morally irrelevant. Since good is internal to oneself, nothing can truly take it away. Therefore, as the Athenian says, in the battle against evil "justice and sensible moderation," the godly virtues, protects man. On the other hand, "injustice and senseless aggression" ruins man.¹³⁹ The more man cultivates justice and moderation, the more his soul imitates the gods', and the less evil affects him. Like the Socrates of the *Symposium*, the virtuous man becomes otherworldly in his immunity to all natural regularities and bodily sensations, such as cold, hunger, drink, lust, exhaustion.¹⁴⁰

Plato strengthens this point in the *Timaeus* when Critias recounts the ancient, forgotten natural and political histories of Greece. "There have been and will be many different calamities to destroy mankind." Nature's regularities cause these calamities: for instance, "at long intervals a variation in the course of the heavenly bodies as they travel around the earth" cause a "widespread destruction by fire of things on the earth."¹⁴¹ During one of the cyclical respites, a war broke out between the unjust Atlantians and the just Athenians. After the Athenians had demonstrated their virtue and won victory, an earthquake destroyed both civilizations. The regularities of nature will be, such that it makes all the difference in the world whether or not a man be virtuous. This response to the natural problem of evil—that the pleasurable or painful sensations assaulting man's body has no bearing on man's good—explains the *Apology*'s (S_{AP}) and (C_{AP}):

¹³⁵ *Gorgias*, 469 and 511-513d.

¹³⁶ *Phaedo*, 67e.

¹³⁷ *Phaedo*, 63e-69.

¹³⁸ *Phaedo*, 115c-116a.

¹³⁹ *Laws*, 906.

¹⁴⁰ *Symposium*, 215a-222a, 223d.

¹⁴¹ *Timaeus*, 22c-d.

(S_{AP}) “a good man cannot be harmed either in life or in death, and...his affairs are not neglected by the gods.”¹⁴²

(C_{AP}) The purpose of a human life is ethically living that life, excluding of any other consideration.

(S_{AP}) appeared unjustified, especially in light of Socrates’ own unjust death. But if one divorces self from the body, then no evil could harm a man, provided he lived virtuously. Indeed, the only harm that could come to a virtuous man would be the self-harm of neglecting (C_{AP}).

For Plato, these considerations mean that man is ultimately responsible for evil. As the *Epinomis*’ Athenian states, given the overall hospitability of the natural world, any evil must be blamed on “humans, for not rightly managing their own lives.”¹⁴³ The *Timaeus* expresses this point through its physics of the human soul. Man can choose to cultivate the divine part of his soul, which “must [make him]...supremely happy.” To nourish this divine part of himself he must bring into conformity the revolutions of his own divine soul with the “harmonies of and revolutions of the universe,” which he accomplishes by “devoting himself to the love of learning and to true wisdom.” Man may foolishly, however, “become absorbed in his appetites or his ambitions and [take] great pains to further them.” Consequently, he will strengthen the mortal part of his soul and will feel keenly the vicissitudes and pains of the material.¹⁴⁴

iii. An Objection and an Answer

It may be replied that this scheme only solves the problem of natural evil. For a vicious man still experiences the evils of nature’s disorder. Vice, moreover, is not always a self-inflicted condition. Timaeus himself refers to how physical constitution and poor education—“two causes both entirely beyond on our control”—can encourage vice within a soul. Since man cannot be blamed for being morally unlucky, *prima facie*, Plato’s divinities must bear the burden of this evil.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² *Apology*, 41d.

¹⁴³ *Epinomis*, 979.

¹⁴⁴ *Timaeus*, 90.

¹⁴⁵ *Timaeus*, 87a-c.

Plato's doctrine of the immortality of the soul allows him to overcome this objection. For Plato, the immortality of the human soul implied the doctrine of reincarnation, which meant that human soul had been and may yet take on many different bodies. In the *Timaeus* human souls come to be after divine souls. They are made *en masse*, prior to the creation of human bodies and thereby man's experience of evil. After having created mortal souls, the Demiurge explained to them "the laws that had been foreordained," including those treating justice and happiness. He did this in order to "exempt himself from responsibility for any evil they might afterwards do." The governing gods do likewise, giving the best guidance for man "without being responsible for any evils these creatures might bring upon themselves."¹⁴⁶ To be virtuous and therefore insouciant to evil or to be vicious and therefore susceptible to it, is a choice residing entirely in mankind's collective sphere. Man bears the full responsibility for evil—both the problem of moral evil, which he does to himself, and the problem of natural evil, which can be experienced as evil only because man cultivates moral evil in his soul.

This would explain why Plato scarcely analyzes the conceptual problem that natural evil presents. After Critias has described the "unbearable day and a night" that destroyed ancient Athens and sunk Atlantis, he does not mention the conceptual difficulty that natural evil—the floods that the gods send to "purge" earth¹⁴⁷—cause with the *Republic*'s own (A3), which argued that the gods could do no harm. Indeed, reconsider (A3)'s three crucial but imperiled premises:

- (13_{A3}) The good of a part of reality harmonizes with the good every other part.
- (14_{A3}) The good of one part of reality is good for all other parts.
- (15_{A3}) The good is such that each part may enjoy it entirely without depriving another part.

Any attempt to disprove these premises with the appeal to natural evil mistakes that, for Plato at least, the human *good* is a good of the soul: to infer from the presence of the experience of natural evil to a conclusion about the disharmony of the world reveals oneself to associate too strongly with the mortal

¹⁴⁶ *Timaeus*, 42.

¹⁴⁷ *Timaeus*, 22d-e.

element of the soul. Responding to such an objection rationally is possible; but it would be abortive since the one who raises it needs moral cultivation before he could identifying with the world soul and see truth. Unfortunately, once the objector orders his soul, he understands from experience that nature's regularities have no bearing on happiness, which resides in the soul. The response to the argument from evil becomes thereby irrelevant or, at most, ancillary to moral education.

D. Conclusions

The discussion thus far allows for four cautious conclusions about piety. First, piety involves a task for which the gods use man. Second, because the gods do not change and enjoy no external_s goods, the end for which they use man is intrinsic to their own nature. Third, the *Laws* suggests that the gods' essential activity is the governance of nature. Therefore, since the gods use man to the achievement of their essential activity, they use man to help govern matter.¹⁴⁸ Fourth, since man possesses soul with the gods, the service that he renders for them is intrinsic to his own nature, the nature that he shares with the gods. Any service man renders the gods as piety, as per (8_{A1}*1), would be with that part of himself that is most characteristic of himself. Since the body is inessential and limiting, like a prison, this part is likely his soul.¹⁴⁹ Hence, man's intrinsic good is the good of soul, his true self. Soul's good, epitomized by the gods, is governance. Since the characteristic activity of the gods is governance and Man like god is soul, then man's characteristic activity is aiding the gods govern—the practice of piety.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, man's service to the gods proceeds from his higher—that is, soul's—nature.

Conclusions three and four are *prima facie* puzzling: how can man help govern the material cosmos of which he is an insignificant part? More troubling, however: to associate man entirely with soul marginalizes those virtues that accrue from his embodiment. These include courage; temperance; and,

¹⁴⁸ *Euthyphro*, 13d-14b.

¹⁴⁹ *Phaedrus*, 205c gives a particularly vivid example: “we saw [the Forms] in pure light because we were pure ourselves, not buried in this thing we are carrying around now, which we call a body, locked in it like an oyster in its shell.”

¹⁵⁰ *Euthyphro*, 13d-14b. It is clear that Socrates understands the answer to (Q1_{A1}), the completion of (8_{A1}*1), as something characteristic of the gods activity like health is the characteristic end of medical practice.

since the gods are of one mind, all civic virtue that accrues from handling political disagreement and debate. The next section will show how Plato approaches these two worries. His second worry is related to a third, which is outside the scope of this thesis. That is, if the goods internal to the soul are man's proper goods, where does this leave those goods like friendship that are external to the soul but internal to a human practice and a necessary corollary to embodiment, political association, and—even more distressing—philosophical dialectic, i.e. learning to cultivate the soul? GRF Ferrari in *Listening to the Cicadas* argues that the *Phaedrus* meditates on this problem.

III. Piety, the gods, and the God

A. *Three Pieties: Consonance or Dissonance?*

Plato's alternative theology posits rational, immutable, and powerful but limited gods. They are an essential but non-material part of nature. They gaze upon the rational forms outside the universe so that they can govern. Because this activity characterizes the gods, it characterizes ideal human behavior.

Recall the *Euthyphro*'s definition of piety, hereafter piety_{S1} :

(8_{A1}*1) The godly and pious is(=) the part of the just that is concerned with serving the gods' for the end of $\Omega\tilde{I}\tilde{Y}$.

The discussion thus far allows the conclusion that $\Omega\tilde{I}\tilde{Y}$ has something to do with governing the world. But the gods do not govern the world for the sake of governing the world. Mark McPherran suggests that the primary Socratic good "is virtue/wisdom," i.e. "goodness." He substantiates this inference from passages like the *Apology* 30a-b, from which (C_{AP}) was abstracted. Later Platonic dialogues suggest a similar conclusion. In *Timaeus* the Demiurge creates in order to make "everything ...good and nothing to be bad so far as...possible."¹ The gods thereby govern to preserve that goodness. McPherran concludes that "since piety as a virtue must be a craft-knowledge of how to produce goodness, [man's] primary service to the gods would appear to be to help the gods produce goodness in the universe *via* the protection and improvement of the human mind/soul."² Hence,

Piety_{S1} is that part of the just that is concerned with service to the gods for the end of producing goodness.

What does helping produce goodness mean? For the gods, this meant governing the material, producing order and regularity from chaos. Lacking power, man's care for the material differs from the gods'. Since Plato suggests a continuum between man and god, (4_{A1}), man produces goodness

¹ *Timaeus*, 30a.

² McPherran, 61.

analogously. Man has sovereignty over only that limited part of the cosmos that is his soul, his body, and—maybe—his political community.³ Socrates in the *Apology* articulated, therefore, his alternative version of piety, (C_{AP}), as primarily ethical action.

The *Laws* lends itself to an expression of piety_{S1}. There, recall the Athenian summarizes the problems of the world: “this vice we’ve named—acquisitiveness—is what is called ‘disease’ when it appears in flesh and blood, and ‘plague’ when brought by the seasons or at intervals of years; while if it occurs in the state and society, the same vice turns up under yet another name: ‘injustice’.”⁴ The same vices that infect the microscopic human world infect the cosmos as a whole. To serve the gods in their project of preserving goodness is to manage acquisitiveness as it appears in the human guise by acting justly, an action that mirrors the gods’ attenuation of the acquisitiveness threatening the goodness of the cosmos at large.

Piety_{S1} has two problems. First, it defines *piety* broadly. Piety_{S1} logically implies that piety is a species of justice distinct from the part of the just concerned with serving non-gods. If man serves the gods by ordering his part of the cosmos and he orders his part of the cosmos by acting justly, then in what sense can piety be a part of the just distinct from that part of the just concerned with serving non-gods? It seems that piety_{S1} is undistinguishable from justice generally. And this seems to weaken the relationship between piety and the gods. If man owes the gods just action to other men, then he owes the gods what he rightly owes man. The gods appear inessential: ethical action relating to the mundane invades ethical conduct pertaining to the divine. Certainly, piety_{S1}, does not explicitly recall the traditional understanding of piety as correct behavior during ritual worship.

Plato, however, may have seen it contrariwise: ethical conduct pertaining to the divine expands into the mundane. Consider how *Timaeus*’ physics of the soul frames ethical action as gaining the so-

³ Recall *Timaeus*’ 42e-44e. discussion of bringing the human soul’s orbits in harmony with the cosmic soul’s orbits; then recall *Phaedrus*’ 245c dictum, all/every soul looks after all non-soul; finally, recall Socrates’ sense of loyalty in *Apology* to the moral betterment of his polis, Athens.

⁴ *Laws*, 906b-c.

called cosmic perspective of the gods by harmonizing with the universe.⁵ In the *Laws*, moreover, the Athenian associates just action with the imitation of God.⁶ He later links man's mitigation of micro-disorder with the gods' mitigation of macro-disorder. These passages are not contrived nods to his culture. Rather, they stem from Plato's cosmology in the *Timaeus*, his metaphysics in the *Laws*, and, even, his implicit use of (4_{A1}) in *Euthyphro*. Acting justly requires becoming like a god; and this expands the role of piety outside of proper conduct during ritual worship and proper language regarding the divine.

Second, piety_{SI} cannot give Plato's full view. Piety_{SI} is, as McPherran has called it, a practical craft. Practical wisdom has as its object two questions: (1) whether or not to *x* and (2) how to *x*. But it does not consider the backdrop against which such questions can be asked and answered. Different visions of the whole inform the nature of wise action. For instance, the Christian saint's practical wisdom differs from the Platonic sage's. The former employs charity; the latter does not. Therefore, one could imagine a situation where the saint acts *x* in which the sage would $\sim x$. Because each ideal person envisions the whole differently, his understanding of rational action differs from the other's. Were the saint to object to the sage's non-charitable behavior by arguing that the sage had acted foolishly, he would beg the question. Presumably, the most virtuous men will possess ingrained, prudential judgments, habits, and intuitions that cash out in the ethical action characteristic of practical wisdom; he must possess the theoretic wisdom that understands the reality in which he acts. The *Republic* makes explicit that, ultimately, the pious man needs to look upon truth, the "single goal at which all their actions, public and private, inevitably aim."⁷ This assertion represents a break with the Socrates of the *Apology*. The practice of virtue, presumes an end with which one must engage. Piety as a practical, elenctic "caring of the soul" becomes unsatisfactory.

While the ambitious philosophical projects of Plato's later dialogues provide the backdrop to much of his earlier Socrates' arguments and beliefs, they cannot be attributed to this earlier character, who eschewed natural theology in favor his own ignorance. Unlike his earlier characters, Plato's later

⁵ *Timaeus*, 42e-44e.

⁶ *Laws*, 906b and 716c-d.

⁷ *Republic*, 519b-c.

characters were impressed with contemporary mathematical and geometric advances, incorporating them into their rational theology. Only the briefest of sketches can be given of this aspect of Plato's rational theology in this essay. The material point for this thesis, however, is that piety_{S1} can account only for virtuous action. It cannot account for the theoretic wisdom that Plato associates with virtuous imitation of the gods. In the *Timaeus* Plato says that the gods gave man sight

so that [he] might observe the orbits of intelligence in the universe and apply them to the revolutions of [his] own understanding. For there is a kinship between them, even though our revolutions are disturbed where as the universal orbits are undisturbed. So once we have come to know them and to share in the ability to make correct calculations according to nature, we should stabilize the straying revolutions within ourselves by imitating the unstraying revolutions of the god.

Plato here assumes, as he does in the *Laws*' (L2), that the heavenly bodies are in fact gods. He makes the inference that the gods' governance displays mathematical, especially geometrical rational truths.⁸ The early neo-Platonic *Epinomis* even explains the "nature of wisdom" by referring to "all the subjects connected with the blessed science [astronomy]." Thus, positive, theoretic wisdom is added to craft knowledge—possessing virtue and being by nature godlike and moderate.⁹ These passages touch on how Plato thought wisdom/knowledge entails virtue and a proper relationship with the divine. The idea seems to be that knowledge of the real forces the self from the material to the spiritual.

In the *Republic* Socrates qualifies the thought: reason/wisdom "never loses its power but is either useful and beneficial or useless and harmful, depending on the way it is turned."¹⁰ Virtue as reason/wisdom is the type of reason/wisdom that turns upward to the heavens rather than downward to matter. Plato uses the conceit of heavens versus mundane and flying versus falling to express the contemplative, cosmic reason, divorced from personal motives and concerned with reflecting upon the whole, in the *Phaedrus*. Since this cosmic vision causes the self to associate with the rotations of the rational and virtuous gods, man becomes himself virtuous. While the nature of this entailment cannot be explored here, it is clear that piety_{S1} is incomplete. Add to it piety_{P2} :

⁸ *Timaeus*, 47a-b.

⁹ *Laws*, 973a. 992c-d.

¹⁰ *Republic*, 518e.

Piety_{P2} is the cosmic reason/wisdom that derives from grasping the whole, as the gods grasp it, and thereby removing oneself from becoming through godly contemplation.

Presumably the contemplative sage of piety_{P2} entails the moral governance and action of the philosopher king of piety_{S1}. But it is not clear that piety_{P2} lends itself to piety_{S1}. In the *Theaetetus* digression, Plato's Socrates says that

in reality only [the philosopher's] body lives and sleeps in the city. His mind, having come to the conclusion that all these things are of little or no account, spurns them and pursues its winged way...throughout the universe...astronomizing, and tracking down by every path the entire nature of each whole among the things that are, never condescending to what lies near at hand.¹¹

The ideal philosopher asks "What is Man" such that he fails "to see his next-door neighbor." Since evil "haunt[s] human life, and prowl[s] about this life...man should make all haste to escape from earth to heaven; and escape means becoming as like God as possible."¹² This ideal figure does not so much cope perfectly with contingency; he flees from it in the attempt to forget that it exists. And this differs not only with the Socrates of the *Apology* and *Symposium* but of the *Theaetetus* as well. In the *Symposium*, recall, Socrates' ability to cope with contingency allows him a super-human ability to overcome without effort the vicissitudes of life. As such, he is an exemplary soldier, campaigner, feaster, drinker, and lover. He is intimately, though eccentrically, involved in the life of the *polis*, even being prosecuted in the *Apology* for his bizarre behavior.¹³ In *Theaetetus* the discussion begins between Socrates and Theaetetus, because Socrates knows Theaetetus—and his family—by reputation.¹⁴ Socrates' example is, by the digression's own standard, an inadequate philosophic life.

A tension seems to appear between piety_{S1}, which is concerned with ethical action, and piety_{P2}, which is concerned with thought. The problem is not that the pious_{P2} man would, recognizing a contingency, act in a way markedly different from the pious_{S1} man: it is that the pious_{P2} man, by fleeing from this world, could hardly be expected to recognize the contingency. Julia Annas quotes Plotinus and

¹¹ *Theaetetus*, 179e-174a.

¹² *Theaetetus*, 174b, 176a-b.

¹³ *Symposium*, 213e-222e.

¹⁴ *Theaetetus*, 144c-d.

John Dillon to the effect that the philosopher of the *Theaetetus* would have all the craft knowledge of piety_{S1} but would not activate it. The philosopher-sage would probably help someone, but it is unlikely he would notice their need to be helped, for his thoughts fly far from the mundane.¹⁵

Plato's Socrates recognized this tension. But he does not attempt to bridge it. In the *Republic VII* he asserts two premises about the transcendent Form of the Good that call into question his preceding discussion of virtues concerned with governing/coping with the contingent:

- (1_G) "anyone who is to act sensibly in private or public must see [the Good]."¹⁶
- (2_G) "it looks as though the other so-called virtues of the soul are akin to those of the body, for they really aren't there beforehand but are added later by habit and practice. However, the virtue of reason seems to belong above all to something more divine."¹⁷

The vision of the Good is the source of theoretic wisdom that makes the dictates of practical wisdom intelligible, as per (1_G). Premise (2_G) has startling implications. It suggests that the virtues that Plato's Socrates had mentioned earlier only approximate true virtue. The ability to cope with the contingencies associated with becoming keeps the moral actor tied to becoming. The soul of a philosopher, however, yearns to leave his humanity, pressing "upwards, eager to spend [his] time above."¹⁸ As a consequence, he neglects to engage with this world, because his virtuous contemplation allows him to "[settle] while still alive in the faraway Isles of the Blessed."¹⁹ The attainment of this living bliss required great labor and city expense.²⁰ Once attained, however, the *Republic* makes it clear that this type of life is the happiest for the individual man.²¹

Within the *Republic* only the philosopher's moral obligation to the ideal city, which has provided the education that allows the bliss that he enjoys, compels him to relinquish his ethereal, solitary happiness and govern. Upon descending, the philosopher governs best.²² Within this context piety_{P2}

¹⁵ Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics: Old and New* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 69.

¹⁶ *Republic*, 517c.

¹⁷ *Republic*, 518d-e.

¹⁸ *Republic*, 517b.

¹⁹ *Republic*, 519c-e.

²⁰ *Republic*, 540.

²¹ *Republic*, 519d-520a.

²² *Republic*, 519d-520.

entails piety_{S1}, as in the *Phaedrus*, in which viewing the whole sustains the gods' governing action. Indeed, like the *Republic*'s philosopher, the gods govern the material, because they have an especial responsibility for it. But this context is especial to the *Republic*'s ideal city. Outside of it, philosophers "stay [looking at the Good] and refuse to go down again to the prisoners in the cave." Such a descent would force "them [to] live a worse life when they could live a better one."²³ Since they attained the philosophic-bliss by themselves, no polity has a claim on their talents.

Even with the uneasy relationship between piety_{P2} and piety_{S1}, another problem appears. Piety_{S1} imitates the governing gods. First, how does the contemplation of rational truth without a corollary obligation to govern imitate the gods, who govern? Second, how does contemplating rational Forms imply a further relationship with the divine? By contemplating the Forms the philosopher thinks the divine's thoughts. But this premise is ambiguous. The philosopher could either

(i_P) contemplate what the gods also contemplate, or

(ii_P) contemplate the thoughts, which the god thinks.

If (i_P), the gods appear at most necessarily instrumental to viewing the Good. That is, man must engage with the rational cosmos, a god, to view the Forms. Once ascended, however, man need not have any relationship with the divine if the Forms are not intimately related to the gods themselves such that viewing them necessarily involves a relationship with the divine. Such a friendship may be likely, since like approves like, but it would be contingent. If option (ii_P), becoming pious_{P2} would require pursuing some kind of union with a divine being: the Forms would be a product of a divine mind. On that account, becoming like the divine could be achieved only by pursuing the divine, rather than the further good that the divine also pursues. In order to answer this second question, one must answer the first. Plato seems to reply that piety_{P2} does not imitate the gods who contemplate so that they may govern well. Instead, it imitates the god outside of the becoming of the cosmos who practices the solitary contemplative rest of pure being.

²³ *Republic*, 519d-e.

B. Plato's Henotheism

Plato's theology hints at the superiority of one God, the Supreme Being spoken of in the discussion of the *Timaeus* above. Plato posited a supreme creator god to solve a problem within his natural theology. The gods as governors of the material could not be perfect, because Plato believed matter corrupting. To have a perfect divinity, Plato needed one with no continuing tie to matter. The supreme god, the Demiurge, in the *Timaeus* solves this problem for Plato. In so doing, however, the Demiurge's example contrasts with that of the gods involved with matter and his distance cannot help but provide a competing or, at least, different ethical example, which appears in piety_{P2}.

It may be objected at the outset that it remains possible that the *Republic*'s Form of the Good has no role to play in the *Timaeus*. Timaeus nowhere explicitly mentions it, and surely, to use the word *good* does not commit oneself to the referring to the Form of the Good. Plato does, however, encourage the reader to see continuity between the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*. The *Timaeus* may have significantly postdated the *Republic*; but within the dramatic time of the dialogues, the *Timaeus* is meant to recall the *Republic*. The *Timaeus* begins by reviewing "yesterday's talk," given by Socrates. The talk was one of political philosophy, analogous in content to Socrates' exposition in the *Republic*.²⁴ Within this review, Plato introduces the ensuing speeches as, first, a repayment for Socrates' own speech and second, as a development of that speech. Socrates says that after speaking himself, he should like to listen to a speech detailing how his ideal city would likely appear.²⁵ Critias obliges Socrates, giving a "follow up speech," that substantiates the *Republic*. "While you were speaking yesterday about politics and the men you were describing," Critias says, "I was reminded [of this story] ...and was quite amazed as I realized how by some supernatural chance...your ideas are in substantial agreement [with it]."²⁶ Timaeus' own speech provides a cosmology to Socrates' treatment of politics. Critias introduces this speech by saying that Timaeus will provide a cosmogony, ending with human nature, which Critias would himself expound.

²⁴ *Timaeus*, 19a.

²⁵ *Timaeus*, 19b-e.

²⁶ *Timaeus*, 25e.

Since Plato has gone to great effort in order to frame Timaeus' cosmogony as a likely development of the *Republic*'s ideas, it behooves the reader to look for parallels with the *Republic*.

Timaeus ascribes the following premises to the Demiurge:

- (1_D) the Demiurge is "supremely good."
- (2_D) the Demiurge created the world, because he "wanted everything to become as much like himself as was possible." That is, "he wanted everything to be good and nothing to be bad so far as that was possible."
- (3_D) the Demiurge created the world by ordering disordered motion, "because he believed that order was in every way better than disorder."²⁷
- (4_D) the Demiurge's nature can be rationally grasped at but is essentially ineffable: "to find the [Demiurge]...is hard enough, and even if... [successful], to declare him to everyone is impossible."²⁸
- (5_D) the Demiurge is the sovereign: in his speech to the newly-created gods, the Demiurge assures them that "whatever has come to be by my hands cannot be undone but by my consent." His will is a "greater, more sovereign bond than those" that bound the gods when created. Therefore, he reasons, the potentially mortal gods will never cease to be in actuality.²⁹ This assurance only makes sense if no greater agency exists over the Demiurge. Or, if he exists completely supports the Demiurge.
- (6_D) the Demiurge is the "most excellent" of causes.³⁰
- (7_D) the Demiurge's characteristic activity is solitary rest, which is withdrawn from interaction with his creation.³¹
- (8_D) the Demiurge's cause is the cause of Intellect as opposed to Necessity.
- (9_D) the Demiurge is "most excellent of all that is intelligible and eternal."³²

²⁷ *Timaeus*, 29d-30c.

²⁸ *Timaeus*, 28c.

²⁹ *Timaeus*, 41a-b.

³⁰ *Timaeus*, 29a.

³¹ *Timaeus*, 42e.

(1_D) and (2_D) do not necessarily commit Timaeus to the conclusion that the Demiurge is the Form of the Good and, by (2_D), based creation upon himself. The Demiurge could somehow exemplify the Good, though he could not do so perfectly, since then he would be indistinguishable from it. Likewise, (8_D) need not imply that the Demiurge is Intellect. (9_D) may imply the Demiurge's precedence among intelligible and eternal things, but this does not necessarily mean, however, that intelligible reality depends upon him or devolves into him as it does with the Form of the Good. Thus far, no conclusive case exists that the Demiurge is the Model and the Good, especially in light of the fact that Plato nowhere explicitly equates them, neither does he cease referring to them separately. Further consideration of the premises ascribed to the Model, suggest otherwise. Consider,

(1_M) the Model is "changeless and is grasped by a rational account, that is, by wisdom."³³

(2_M) the Model is a Living Thing that was not "any of those that have the natural character of a part, for nothing that is a likeness of anything incomplete could ever turn out beautiful."

(3_M) the Model is a "Living Thing of which all other living things are parts, both individually and by kinds. For that Living Thing comprehends within itself all intelligible living things, just as our world is made up of us and all the other visible creatures."

(4_M) the Model is "the best of the intelligible things, complete in every way."

(5_M) the Model is a superior god, superior to the created gods, for Timaeus refers to the created world as a "god that was yet to be."

(6_M) the Model is perfect and intelligible. Since Timaeus infers the solitary nature of the world-god created by the Demiurge from its excellence, the Model likewise is

³² *Timaeus*, 37a.

³³ *Timaeus*, 29a.

solitary: like the world based upon it, it “keeps its own company...[f]or its knowledge of and friendship with itself is enough.”³⁴

(6_M) invites comparison with (9_D) and (7_D). Seven compelling arguments suggest themselves.

First (9_D) and (6_M) invites the following proof, (DM):

(1_{DM}) Demiurge is the “most excellent” of Intelligible Things.

∴(2_{DM}) The Demiurge is better than all other Intelligible Things.

(3_{DM}) the Model is perfect of Intelligible things.

∴(4_{DM}) the Demiurge and the Model are perfect.

(5_{DM}) If multiple things are perfect, then they are either the same thing or *good* references multiple ideals.

(6_{DM}) Plato believes that *good* is one.

∴(7_{DM}) The Demiurge is the Model.

Second, the solitude of the Demiurge and that of the Model imply their oneness. If the Demiurge needs to look upon the Model to create the world he could not stop looking upon the Model: outside of time, he is necessarily immutable.³⁵ Neither rest nor solitude could then characterize him. He could not rest, because he would gaze eternally at the Model. Since he would be eternally involved with the Model, he could not be alone either.

Third, (2_M) and (3_M) suggest that the Model is a Living Thing of which all other Living Things are a part. If the Demiurge Lives as his agency suggests, then he must be the Model or a part of it. Fourth, (4_M) qualifies the Demiurge’s motivations for creating the world. It implies that the Model’s “[comprehending] within itself all intelligible living things,” (3_M), does not entail that the Model excludes intelligible non-living things, because it is “the best of the intelligible things, complete in every way,” (4_M). It would belie the Model’s intelligible completeness if the Model did not include all of the intelligible, including the Demiurge.

³⁴ *Timaeus*, 30-33, 39e.

³⁵ *Timaeus*, 37c-39e.

Fifth, in (2_M) and (3_M) Timaeus asserts that the Model's completeness means that only one created universe exists. Otherwise, the Demiurge could not have created the universe after the Model, because "that which contains all intelligible living things couldn't ever be one of a pair: that would require there be yet another Living Thing, the one that contained those two, of which they would be parts."³⁶ If the Demiurge represents an intelligible thing/agency distinct from the Model, then the Model is partial. A complete mirror of intelligible being would recreate a lesser Model and a lesser Demiurge. Since the Demiurge is an active, creative principle and the Model is a passive, uncreative one, then the lesser Demiurge would look upon the created universe, the lesser Model, as a model for a derivative creation, resulting in an innumerable chain of universes, precisely what Timaeus wished to avoid.

Sixth, the existence of an active, creative principle, the Demiurge, and an inactive, passive Model imputes mutual dependence, incompleteness, and thereby imperfection to both the Model and the Demiurge. (1_D) and (2_D) state that goodness implies an unjealous desire to propagate itself. If the Model be good but does not propagate itself, then it can be neither solitary nor perfect if there is to be a world. If the Demiurge be active, he can never rest. (6_M) jibes with (7_D), (2_D), and (1_D), if the Model is the Demiurge. The Model's perfection in (6_M) entails singularity and oneness. Only the existence of one being, who bases creation upon himself, satisfies this criterion.

If the Demiurge be the Model, then he himself is a super-ordinate being in which and through which all other intelligible universals exist. To pursue the wisdom necessary for virtuous living, one necessarily seeks to think the Demiurge's thoughts, the origin of right reason. Since the Demiurge gives the gods their nature and instructs them to govern, the Demiurge's command/agency founds the soul's essential activity.³⁷

Like the lesser gods, the Demiurge does not resemble the Abrahamic divinity. Jehovah actively involves himself in the cosmos; theologians from these traditions therefore equate God's active creation

³⁶ *Timaeus*, 31-a-b.

³⁷ *Timaeus*, 30a-c, 41a-d.

with his governance. Since the Demiurge does not govern,³⁸ he could not actively create. To preserve his solitude in sempiternity, the Demiurge must have never actively created the world. If he had, he could never stop the action, since he exists beyond time. Therefore, the world emanated from him, like light from the sun. Although Plato calls the Supreme God the Craftsman, i.e. *demiourgos*, his account must be metaphorical. If the premises he ascribes the Demiurge should be taken seriously, then the name, *Dmiurge*, should be taken allegorically.

Just as the *Timaeus* implies that the Creator-God is the Good, the *Republic* hints that Good is the Creator-God. Mark McPherran considers the possibility and its advantages:

[the reader is] encouraged to think of the Good as god in several ways: the Good is said to be (a) the *archê*—the cause of the being—of the Forms (509b6-8) and everything else (511b, 517b-c); (b) a ruler over the intelligible world in the way the sun, a god, rules over the visible realm (509b-d); (c) analogous to the maker (*demiourgos*) of our sense (507c7), the sun, one of the gods of heaven (508a-c [which is an offspring of the Good; 508b, 506e-507a]). This identification can then (d) explain book 10's odd and unique claim that the Form of Bed is created by a craftsman-god, who is—in a sense—the creator of all things (596a-598c). Finally, if the Good were not a god, then (i) the gods of the *Republic* would apparently be the offspring of a non-god (the Good), (ii) the Good would be subordinate to these gods or (iii) the gods would exist in independence from the Good; but none of these possibilities seem to make sense in light of (a-d).

McPherran demurs, because

(1_{MM}) Plato characterized the Good as beyond all being in dignity and power (509B8-10)

(2_{MM}) The Good is “that which makes knowledge possible.”

∴(3_{MM}) the Good cannot be a mind/soul that knows anything (508B-509B).

(4_{MM}) “[F]or Plato a necessary condition for something's being a god is that it be a mind/soul possessing intelligence.”

∴(5_{MM}) the Good cannot be a God.³⁹

Both this argument's inferences—(5_{MM}) from (4_{MM}) and (3_{MM}) from both (1_{MM}) and (2_{MM})—are questionable. First, to infer (5_{MM}) from (4_{MM}) McPherran needs to demonstrate that Plato believes the supreme God would be the same kind of being as the lesser gods and thereby need soul to possess intelligence and thereby knowledge. Otherwise, he equivocates. In the *Timaeus* for instance, the

³⁸ *Timaeus*, 42e.

³⁹ McPherran, 72-73.

Demiurge does not have soul. He creates it, and Plato's characters almost universally accept that if x is more potent than y , x precedes y .⁴⁰ Plato refers to soul as yearning for being while existing in the cosmos of coming to be. Since being supersedes coming to be, it would be strange were Plato to envision the creator God, who possess the state other things strive for, as the same sort of being as the lesser gods.

Second, the inference from (1_{MM}) and (2_{MM}) to (3_{MM}) depends on at least one of three implied premises:

(6_{MM}) Plato believed that that which makes knowledge possible cannot itself know.

(7_{MM}) something possesses intelligence if and only if it possesses soul/mind.

(8_{MM}) if something is beyond all being in dignity and power, it cannot possess intelligence.

None of these premises have textual warrant within the *Republic*. Plato addresses (7_{MM}) obliquely in *Timaeus* when he says that the Demiurge "reasoned and concluded that in the realm of things naturally visible...it is impossible for anything to come to possess intelligence apart from soul."⁴¹ He explicitly qualifies this statement's force by mentioning "the realm of things naturally visible," a realm in which the Demiurge does not reside.

In (1_{MM}) MacPherran assumes that Plato believed (8_{MM}): that if x is beyond all being in power, then x cannot be a being and thereby potentially possess intelligence. But the predicate "beyond all being" need not entail not being. Plato could have meant that the ingenuous attribution of the word *being* would sully the Good's greatness. His diction would then comment as much on the limitations of human language as it would on the Good/God's nature. This reading has two advantages. First, it demonstrates congruity between other works of Plato's such as *Letter VII*, which implies the apophatic nature of Plato's theology. Apophatic theology holds that when man talks in positive terms about the divine his statements are positive in enunciation but negative in meaning. The divine is Good; but man only experiences good. The divine is Rational; but man only experiences the rational. The words *good* and *rational* denote

⁴⁰ For instance, see *Timaeus*, 34b-c; *Laws*, 892.

⁴¹ *Timaeus*, 30b.

mundane goodness and rationality. Man's concepts, like man himself, are adulterated and do not perfectly capture the Universal.

Plato remarks that one needs three things for knowledge of a "real being," i.e. a Form: first, its name; second, its definition; third, its image. Fourth comes knowledge, right opinion, and reason. But "[t]hese things...because of the weakness of language are as much concerned with making clear the particular property of each object as the being of it."⁴² For knowledge and right opinion exist in the mind of the knower and is therefore distinct from the truly real thing. Even if this being is grasped, communicating it entirely to another is impossible. Hence, Timaeus says of the Demiurge that "to declare [him] to everyone is impossible."⁴³ Pierre Hadot says that "the Platonic dialogue does not say everything. It does not say what the Norms are, or the Forms, or Reason, or the Good itself, or beauty; for these things are inexpressible in language and inaccessible to any definition."⁴⁴ Hence, by referring to the Good as beyond being, Plato may not mean that it is not being and thereby not thinking; just that it is not not being and not not thinking. *Thinking* and *being* would provide a definition for the ineffable Good that, if taken too seriously, would prove detrimental to encountering it by tying the ineffable to the adulterations of man's language. This argument demonstrates, secondly, the invalidity of inferring that the Good/God does not know from any premise stating that the Good/God is beyond knowing things or makes knowledge possible. *Letter VII* suggests that Plato would maintain that *knowledge* is a poor analogy for the Demiurge's ability to grasp the real thing itself.

Since the Demiurge is the Good, then piety_{p2} entails (ii_p) and necessarily involves the pursuit of a unity with the divine thought. But—to return to an old problem—how does this relate to piety_{s1}, whose ideal involves not solitary contemplation but thoughtful engagement with the world. Piety_{p2} corresponds with the sage of the *Theaetetus* digression; piety_{s1}, with the governing philosopher king of the *Republic* and the Socrates of the *Symposium*. The difference between these two types of piety is not therefore that one thinks and the other does not. It is, instead, that the pious_{s1} man thinks and contemplates in order to

⁴² *Letter VII*, 342.

⁴³ *Timaeus*, 28C.

⁴⁴ Pierre Hadot, 75.

rigorously engage with the world in imitation of the governing gods, while the pious_{P2} man thinks and contemplates in order to flee from the world in imitation of the Demiurge/Good.⁴⁵ And this is why it seems inadequate to explain the tension between piety_{S1} and piety_{P2} as a simple expression of human inability to act in the world with thought as gods can.

Unfortunately, no easy answer to any of the problems accruing from the two types of piety can be given in the space available. Any future inquiry along these lines should pay attention to the following three problems. First, it should treat the problem of the tension between piety_{S1} and piety_{P2}. This should include, second, consideration of whether or not Plato himself saw the tension as troublesome as modern readers do. As products of a post-Biblical culture, modern readers of Plato may anachronistically read into piety_{S1} notions of charity that had little place in the Greek world until the spread of Christianity four or five centuries after Plato's death. When Annas remarks that the contemplative life of piety_{P2} lacks resonance "as an ethical theory, however much it may strike a chord as an account of certain types of religious life," she seems to assume too much about what Plato thought an active ethical life ought to be and what role service to others has in his ideal character. In the *Laws* and elsewhere, Plato's characters make very clear that an individual man is an insignificant part of the whole, a mere speck. And the gods care for the whole foremost. Perhaps, piety_{P2} actively spreads goodness to the whole in a way superior to piety_{S1}. This may be so, because Plato's *good* does not involve charity. Even according to piety_{S1}'s governing ethic, *goodness* does not entail unselfish service to others. Phillip of Opus' Athenian suggests a potential line of inquiry. Justice and wisdom are "the most important part of virtue," "reverence toward the gods." The end of the *Laws*, he had earlier written, was to teach people to properly "sing hymns to the gods and [thereby] live purer lives."⁴⁶ The relationship between piety, virtue, the divine, and especially man's purification through philosophy is necessary for any account of how man spreads or maintains goodness with his life. Plato treats this subject in the *Phaedo*. The idea of piety_{S1} as coping with the material/physical necessarily ties it with the body. To understand, perhaps, piety_{S1}'s relationship with

⁴⁵ Julia Annas writes that Plato "is torn between conceptions of virtue as...an uncompromising but committed engagement with the world and...a flight from and rejection of it" (70)

⁴⁶ *Epinomis*, 980a-b.

piety_{P2} requires understanding man's relationship with his body. And this includes all of these goods that accrue from embodiment living

Philosophy as purification of the self from the body raises a third line of inquiry. Both piety_{S1} and piety_{P2} are expressed as becoming like a god. This expression frames the ideal human character as not human. Becoming virtuous involves becoming more than a man. It seems that gaining what Ferrari calls the cosmic perspective may threaten the personal, embodied perspective characteristic of human life. Perhaps, then, *virtuous man* becomes an oxymoron. Further inquiry will examine these issues, which are broadly understood as Plato's philosophic understanding of man's nature and his ethics more specifically.

Conclusion

This dissertation has demonstrated the far-reaching implications of Plato's natural theology for his ethics and parts of his metaphysics, thus showing the centrality of the divine in Plato's thought. It has shown that Plato often framed his philosophic innovations as responses to tradition's inadequacies. Thus, the *Republic* and the *Laws* answer the *elenchus* of the *Euthyphro*. In so doing, Plato indicts the culture, which put Socrates for death on grounds of impiety, of impiety itself.

Plato succeeded in creating a systematic natural theology. Plato's cosmos teemed with divinities and the divine presence without which it could not exist. Plato even suggests that the Intelligible Forms outside of the cosmos depend upon the divine. Unsurprisingly, piety becomes central to virtue in Plato's thought. Ultimately, however, what Plato may have meant by *piety* and *virtue* becomes, at least to modern readers, unclear. Is there a tension between two types of piety, as appears, or is that the result of a misunderstanding, caused by anachronistically expecting Plato's ethical ideals to reflect modernity's own biblically inspired ethics? This project has generally moved from Plato's understanding of divinity to Plato's notion of piety and virtue. Answering this question requires shifting the focus from the gods to man.

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Appendix of Arguments

I. Euthyphro

(A1), Euthyphro's attempt to define piety, has several stages. First, Euthyphro justifies his own actions against his father.

(1_{A1}) "Zeus is the best and most just of the gods."

(2_{A1}) Zeus "bound his father because he [committed an injustice]."

(Obs1_{A1}) Euthyphro's father committed an injustice.

∴(3_{A1}) Euthyphro ought to prosecute his own father for his injustice.¹

(4_{A1}) One ought to strive to imitate the gods.

(5_{A1}) The gods, being good and just, exemplify the moral criterion.

Second, Euthyphro gives his first attempts at a definition:

(6_{A1}) "An action or man dear to the gods is pious, but an action or a man hated by the gods is impious."²

(6_{A1}') "on this subject no god would differ from one another, that whoever has killed anyone unjustly should pay the penalty."³

Third, Euthyphro gives his second attempt at a definition. One is referred to as a universal characteristic:

(7_{A1}) "the pious (=P) is what all the gods love (=G), and the opposite, what all the gods hate, is the impious."⁴

Another is referred to as the definition:

¹ *Euthyphro*, 5d-6e.

² *Euthyphro*, 7a.

³ *Euthyphro*, 8b.

⁴ *Euthyphro*, 9e.

(7_{A1}*) “the pious is(=) what all the gods love, and the opposite, what all the gods hate, is the impious.”

This definition has two possible implications:

(7_{A1}*^M) the pious is what the gods love and the impious is(=) what the gods hate, both at time t in world w but not necessarily at t_I in world w .

(7_{A1}*^I) the pious is what the gods love, and the impious is(=) what the gods hate, in world w for all times but not necessarily at world w_I for all times.

Socrates’ argument against (7_{A1}*^I) contains the following steps and distinctions, explained in the paper:

(D1_{A1}) “we speak of something carried and something carrying, of something led and something leading, of something seen and something seeing.”⁵

(D2_{A1}^α) an x -ed thing is something x -ed because it is being x -ed. (**T**ue)

(D2_{A1}^β) an x -ed thing is being x -ed because it is something x -ed.⁶ (**F**alse)

(D2_{A1}^{α*}) an x -ed thing is something x -ed because something or someone x -s it. **T**

(D2_{A1}^{β*}) someone or something x -s an x -ed thing because it is something x -ed. **F**

(D2_{A1}^{α*1}) a carried thing is something carried because something or someone carries it. **T**

(D2_{A1}^{α*2}) From someone x -ing y , it logically follows that x - d thing can be applied to y . **T**

(D2_{A1}^{β*1}) Someone or something carries a carried thing because it is something carried.

F

(D2_{A1}^{β*2}) The reason z x -s y is because y is something x -ed. **F**

(7i_{A1}) The pious is being loved by the gods because it is pious. **T**

(7i_{A1}*) The gods love the pious because it is pious. **T**

(7i_{A1}*1) The reason the gods love the pious is because it is pious. **T**

(7ii_{A1}) The pious is not pious because it is being loved. **T**

(7ii_{A1}*) The pious is not pious because the gods love it. **T**

⁵ *Euthyphro*, 10a.

⁶ *Euthyphro*, 10b-c. Marc Cohen, 5-7.

(7ii_{A1}*1) The reason the gods love the pious is not because they love it. **T**

(7iii_{A1}) The god-loved is god-loved, because it is being loved by the gods.

(7iii_{A1}*1) From the gods' loving y, it logically follows that *god-loved* can be applied to y.

T

(7iv_{A1}) The god-loved is not being loved because it is god-loved. **T**

(7iv_{A1}*1) The reason the gods love y is not because y is god-loved. **T**

(7_{A1}*1)' The reason the gods love the god-loved is due to the fact that it is god-loved. **F**

After this argument, Socrates and Euthyphro assert a new premise:

(8_{A1}) "[T]he godly and pious is the part of the just that is concerned with the care of the gods, while that concerned with the care of men is the remaining part of justice."⁷

(8_{A1}*) The godly and pious is(=) the part of the just that is concerned with "a kind of service to the gods."⁸

Socrates believes that these premises are on the right track but incomplete. He needs the answer to

(Q1_{A1}) "what is that excellent aim that the gods achieve, using [man] as their servants?"⁹

Restating the (8_{A1}*)

(8_{A1}*1) The godly and pious is(=) the part of the just that is concerned with serving the gods' for the end of *Ωῖϋ*.

Euthyphro abandons this line of inquiry and starts a new one:

(9_{A1}) Piety is(=) "knowledge of how to sacrifice and pray."¹⁰

(9_{A1}*) Piety is(=) "a knowledge of how to give to, and beg from, the gods."¹¹

(9_{A1}*1) Piety is(=) a knowledge of, first, how to give honor, reverence, and sacrifice to the gods for the purpose of pleasing them and of, second, how to beg all good things from the gods.

⁷ *Euthyphro*, 12e.

⁸ *Euthyphro*, 13d.

⁹ *Euthyphro*, 13e.

¹⁰ *Euthyphro*, 14c.

¹¹ *Euthyphro*, 14b.

II. Apology

Plato's Socrates in the *Apology* shares the following premise with the Socrates of the *Euthyphro*:

(H_r) Human rationality can speak meaningfully about the divine and thereby about reality.

This is a modification of a traditionalist argument that Adeimantus, one of Socrates' interlocutors from the *Republic*, presents, (A2):

- (1_{A2}) The gods do exist (= G_e) ∨ The gods do not exist (= ~G_e)
- (2_{A2}) ~G_e → Man ought not concern ourselves with them
- (3_{A2}) G_e → The gods care about human affairs (= C) ∨ The gods do not care about human affairs (= ~C)
- (4_{A2}) ~C → Man ought not concern ourselves with gods.
- (5_{A2}) C → Man has "learned all [he] know[s] about [the gods] from the [laws/customs] and the poets who give their genealogies."
- ∴(6_{A2}) Man "should believe [the poets and custom] on both matters [, i.e. the existence of the gods and their nature] or neither."¹²
- (7_{A2}) Philosophical challenges to tradition and common life are nugatory, vain, and idle.

The central ethical contention of the *Apology*:

(C_{AP}) The purpose of a human life is ethically living that life, excluding of any other consideration.

The *Apology*'s only metaphysical/theological contention:

(S_{AP}) "a good man cannot be harmed either in life or in death, and...his affairs are not neglected by the gods."¹³

III. The Republic: Contra Morally Inadequate Gods

A form of rationality in competition with (H_r):

¹² Extrapolated from *Republic* 365d-366a.

¹³ *Apology*, 41d.

(H_{Gr}) Human rationality has the power to forcibly seize control of another's will and convince forcibly. It cannot speak meaningfully about reality or any foundational, certain premises since these neither exist nor, if they do, correspond to reason.

He argues that the gods are good (A3):

(1_{A3}) "[A] god is ... good."

(2_{A3}) "[N]othing good is harmful."

(3_{A3}) "[W]hat isn't harmful [can] do [no] harm."

∴(4_{A3}) A god can do no harm.

(5_{A3}) "[W]hat does no harm [can] do [nothing] bad."

(6_{A3}) "[W]hat does nothing bad [cannot] be the cause of anything bad."

∴(7_{A3}) A god can do nothing bad.

(8_{A3}) "[T]he good is beneficial."

(9_{A3}) "[The beneficial] is the cause of doing well."

∴(10_{A3}) "The good isn't the cause of all things...but only of good ones; it isn't the cause of bad ones."

∴(11_{A3}) A god is responsible only for the good things that happen to us, not everything.

∴(12_{A3}) "The actions of the gods are good and just."¹⁴

This argument is too ambitious. It needs to be moderated thus:

(2_{A3})' Nothing good is ultimately harmful to itself or to the one enjoying it.

(4_{A3})' A god can do no ultimate harm to himself or to one enjoying a specific, conscious instance of his goodness.

(7_{A3})' A god can do nothing bad to himself or to one enjoying a specific, conscious instance of his goodness.

(8_{A3})' The good is ultimately beneficial to the one enjoying it.

To get his more ambitious argument, Socrates needs the following premises

¹⁴ *Republic*, 379-380b.

(13_{A3}) The good of a part of reality harmonizes with the good every other part.

(14_{A3}) The good of one part of reality is good for all other parts. (This ought not be taken to imply, however, that each part of reality is able to enjoy this goodness. The gods may enjoy *x*; man may enjoy a good that approximates *x*; and nature may participate in *x*.)

(15_{A3}) The good is such that the specific good that befits each part of the whole may be enjoyed entirely without depriving another part.

In (A4) Socrates argues against the gods using sorcery:

(1_{A4}) If a god changes his form, then he must “change himself or be changed by someone else.”

(2_{A4}) The best things are least liable to “alteration or change.”

DEM1 of (2_{A4}): “The most courageous and most rational soul is least disturbed or altered by any outside affection.”

DEM2 of (2_{A4}): “whatever is in good condition...admits least of being changed by anything else.”

(3_{A4}) “A god and what belongs to him are in every way in the best condition.”

∴(4_{A4}) A god would least need to change himself.

(5_{A4}) If a god were to change himself, it would be into “something worse and uglier,” because a god is not “deficient in either beauty or virtue.”

(6_{A4}) No one would deliberately make himself worse.

∴(7_{A4}) “Since they are the most beautiful and best possible, it seems that each always and unconditionally retains his own shape.”

∴(8_{A4}) “the gods are unable to change.”¹⁵

(A5) claims that the gods cannot deceive:

¹⁵ *Republic*, 380e-381.

- (1_{A5}) “To be false in one’s soul about the things that are, to be ignorant and to have and hold falsehood there, is what everyone would least of all accept, for everyone hates a falsehood in that place most of all.”
- (2_{A5}) True falsehood is ignorance in the soul of someone who has been told a falsehood.
- (3_{A5}) Falsehood in words “is a kind of imitation of this affection in the soul, an image of it that comes into being after it and is not a pure falsehood.”
- (4_{A5}) Gods and man hate true falsehood.
- (5_{A5}) Falsehood in words is not necessarily deserving of hatred; because it can be useful
- (6_{A5}) Falsehood is useful only in the following circumstances: against one’s enemies or when so-called friends are attempting something bad through madness or ignorance or in the case of ancient events about which we know nothing like Homer and Hesiod’s myths.
- (7_{A5}) A god would not be false for fear of his enemies
- (8_{A5}) “No one who is ignorant or mad is a friend of the gods.”
- (9_{A5}) The gods are not ignorant of ancient events.
- ∴(10_{A5}) There’s no reason for a god to use falsehood.¹⁶

From (A₄) and (A₅) Socrates concludes that

- (1_{A4-A5}) “A god...is simple and true in word and deed. He doesn’t change himself or deceive others by images, words or signs, whether in visions or in dreams.”¹⁷

This is the characteristic argument of *Republic*:

- (1_{R1}) The gods ought to be represented as *X* in order to inculcate moral virtues in citizens.
- ∴ (2_{R1}) The gods are *X*.
- (3_{R1}) the gods are worthy of man’s worship.
- (3_{R1}*) Man ought to worship the gods.

¹⁶ *Republic*, 382.

¹⁷ *Republic*, 382e.

(4_{R1}) The gods are worthy of praise.

(4_{R1}*) Man ought to praise the gods.

(R2) substantiates the traditional Greek belief in the moral duty to show devotion to the gods:

(5_{R2}) Man is such to have certain moral ideals XYZ.

(6_{R2}) The gods are such to have certain characteristics super-XYZ.

(7_{R2}) Man is dependent upon the gods' greater power.

∴(3_{R1}) The gods are worthy of man's worship.

∴(3_{R1}) Man ought to worship the gods.

∴(4_{R1}) The gods are worthy of praise.

∴(4_{R1}) Man ought to praise the gods.

(3_{R1}^{CT}) man has reason to worship the gods.

IV. The Laws: Theologically Inadequate

Two types of moral arguments, (C1) and (C2):

(1_{C1}) It is unjust to lie.

(2_{C1}) If it is unjust to lie, then it is unjust to lie to Denis

∴(3_{C1}) One ought not lie to Denis.

(1_{C2}) It is just for the superior/mighty to rule.

(2_{C2}) If it is just for the superior/mighty to rule, then it is just for Sara, who is superior and
mighty, to rule.

∴(3_{C2}) Sara ought to rule.

(4_{C2}) the end of human life is found in participation “in the laws of [the] city or in the kind of speech one must use to deal with people on matters of business, whether public or private” and in “human pleasures and appetites.”¹⁸

(5_{C2}) “an active life and...a reputation for being intelligent” is antithetical philosophy’s “subtleties,” which is either “just silly or outright nonsense.”¹⁹

The Athenian sees the materialist’s assertion of this premise as a linchpin between materialism and leoninism:

(ΛΣ) “[a]rt, the brain-child of these living creatures, arose [after creation], the mortal child of mortal beings; it has produced...various amusing trifles that are hardly real at all—mere insubstantial images of the same order as the arts themselves.”²⁰

The argument against atheism, (L1):

(1_{L1}) there is “an original cause of change.”

∴(2_{L1}) self-generating motion is the original cause of motion.

∴(3_{L1}) “Self-governing motion, then, is the source of all motions, and the primary force in both stationary and moving objects, and we shan’t be able to avoid the conclusion that it is the most ancient and the most potent of all changes.”²¹

(4_{L1}) “When an object moves itself,” “[i]t emphatically is alive.”

(5_{L1}) “When we see that a thing has a soul...[w]e have to admit that it is alive.”

∴(6_{L1}) Soul is “motion capable of moving itself.”²²

(4_{L1})-(6_{L1}) need to be restated:

(4_{L1}) If an object moves itself, then it is alive ($M \rightarrow A$).

(5_{L1}) If a thing has a soul, then it is alive ($S \rightarrow A$).

∴ (6_{L1}) If a thing has a soul, then it moves itself ($S \rightarrow M$).

¹⁸ *Gorgias*, 484d.

¹⁹ *Gorgias*, 486c.

²⁰ *Laws*, 889c-d.

²¹ *Laws*, 895b.

²² *Laws*, 895c-896a.

(6_{L1}) only follows, however, if we interpret (4_{L1}) and (5_{L1}) as biconditionals. Therefore,

(4_{L1}*) An object is alive if and only if it moves itself ($M \equiv A$).

(5_{L1}*) An object alive is alive if and only if it has a soul ($S \equiv A$).

\therefore (6_{L1}*) A thing has a soul if and only if it moves itself ($S \equiv M$).

(7_{L1}) \oplus (8_{L1}), where

(7_{L1}) If the “whole course and movement of the heavens and all that is in them reflect the motion and revolution and calculation of reason...then clearly...it is the best kind of soul that cares for the entire universe.”

(8_{L1}) If “these things move in an unbalanced and disorganized way,” then “the evil kind of soul is in charge of them.”

(DTA)’s argument depends upon the validity of the following inference, (U):

(1_U) $N(F, G)$

(2_U) $F(x)$

\therefore (3_U) $G(x)$

(DTA) claims that (U)’s validity is seen in (U’):

(1_{U'}) $N(\text{Presidency, Speaker of the House})$

(2_{U'}) p is the president and s is the speaker of the house.

\therefore (3_{U'}) $p \rightarrow s$

With the addition of the following premise (U) becomes intelligible:

(1_G) Matter cannot give a full causal account of itself. It cannot explain the necessitation that holds between particulars in regularities. Only non-material rational agency could explain this necessitation.

Three important premises that Plato uses against (DTA) and ancient materialism:

(1_F) [W]e must begin by making the following distinction: What is *that which always is* and has no becoming and what is *that which becomes* but never is? The former is grasped by understanding, which involves a reasoned account. It is unchanging. The latter is grasped by opinion, which involves unreasoning sense perception. It comes to be and passes

away, but never really is. Now everything that comes to be must of necessity come to be by the agency of some cause, for it is impossible for anything to come to be without a cause...²³

- (2_F) The accounts we give of things have the same character as the subjects they set forth. So accounts of what is stable and fixed and transparent to understanding are themselves stable and unshifting... On the other hand, accounts we give of that which has been formed to be like that reality, since they are accounts of what is a likeness, are themselves likely, and stand in proportion to the previous accounts, i.e., what being it so becoming, truth is to convincingness.²⁴
- (3_F) We shall of course have to study the intrinsic nature of fire, water, air and earth prior to the heaven's coming to be, as well as the properties they had then... We tend to posit them as the elemental "letters" of the universe and tell people they are its "principles" on the assumption that they know what fire and the other three are. In fact, however, they shouldn't even be compared to syllables... for the present I cannot state 'the principle' or 'principles' of all things ... I couldn't convince even myself that I could be right to commit myself to undertaking a task of such magnitude. I shall keep to what I stated at the beginning, the virtue of likely accounts, and so shall try... to say about things... what is no less likely than any."²⁵

Two questions that van Fraassen asks (DTA):

(FQ₁) why is there something rather than nothing?

(FQ₂) why is the world the way it is rather than some other way?

Timaeus' argument for a God, (TK):

(1_{TK}) "now everything that comes to be must of necessity come to be by the agency of some cause, for it is impossible for anything to come to be without a cause"; "that which comes to be must come to be by the agency of some cause."²⁶

(2_{TK}) "the whole universe... has come to be."²⁷

∴(3_{TK}) the whole universe has a cause.

∴(4_{TK}) Since nothing within the universe could cause its own existence, the universe has a cause outside of itself.

∴(5_{TK}) This cause is ultimate and therefore self-moving.

²³ *Timaeus*, 27d-28a.

²⁴ *Timaeus*, 29b-c.

²⁵ *Timaeus*, 48b-d.

²⁶ *Timaeus*, 28a; 28c.

²⁷ *Timaeus*, 28b.

The Athenian's argument associating proving that soul is the gods, (L2):

(L2):

(1_{L2}) If “soul drives round the sun, moon and other heavenly bodies,” it impels each individually.

∴(2_{L2}) The soul drives the sun as it does other bodies.

(3_{L2}) The soul drives the sun in one of three ways: either “(a) the soul resides within this visible spherical body and carries it wherever it goes, just as *our* soul takes us around from one place to another, or (b) it acquires its own body of fire or air of some kind (as certain people maintain), and impels the sun by the external contact of body with body, or (c) it is entirely immaterial, but guides the sun along its path by virtue of possessing some other prodigious and wonderful powers.”

∴(4_{L2}) “Whether we find that it is by stationing itself in the sun and driving it like a chariot, or by moving it from outside, or by some other means, that this soul provides us all with light, every single one of us is bound it as a god.”

∴(5_{L2}) “A soul or souls—and perfectly virtuous souls at that—have been shown to be the cause of all these phenomena, [i.e. heavenly bodies] and whether it is by their living presence in matter that they direct all the heavens, or by some other means, we shall insist that these souls are gods. Can anybody admit this and still put up with people who deny that ‘everything is full of gods’?”²⁸

In (L3) the Athenian proves that the gods care for man:

(1_{L3}) The gods express their perfect virtue by watching over the universe.

(2_{L3}) The gods' perfect goodness implies that they possess reason and moderation and courage.

²⁸ *Laws*, 888c-889b.

- (3_{L3}) A rational creature can neglect one's job for one of three reasons. He "[a] thinks it makes no difference to his job as a whole if he neglects the details, *or* [b] important though they are, he nevertheless lives in idleness and self-indulgence and neglects them." Alternatively, [c] he is ignorant.
- (4_{L3}) The gods "know and see and hear everything, and...nothing within the range of our senses or intellect can escape them."
- (5_{L3}) The gods "can do anything within the power of mortals and immortals."
- (6_{L3}) Sloth and self-indulgence springs from vice.
- (7_{L3}) No god suffers from vice.
- ∴(8_{L3}) No god suffers from sloth and self-indulgence.

(L4) is second argument in support of (L3):

- (1_{L4}) "[h]uman life has something to do with the world of the soul, and man himself is the most god-fearing of all living creatures."
- (2_{L4}) "[W]e regard all mortal creatures as possessions of gods, like the universe as a whole."
- ∴(3_{L4}) "whether you argue these possessions count for little or much in the sight of the gods, in neither case would it be proper for our owners to neglect us, seeing how very solicitous and good they are."²⁹

V. Piety, the gods, and the God

The two definitions of piety:

Piety_{SI} is that part of the just that is concerned with service to the gods for the end of producing goodness.

²⁹ *Laws*, 902.

Piety_{P2} is the cosmic reason/wisdom that derives from grasping the whole, as the gods grasp it, and thereby truly becoming godly—removed from becoming—through godly contemplation.

The *Republic*'s two premises about the Form of the Good:

- (1_G) "anyone who is to act sensibly in private or public must see [the Good]." ³⁰
- (2_G) "it looks as though the other so-called virtues of the soul are akin to those of the body, for they really aren't there beforehand but are added later by habit and practice. However, the virtue of reason seems to belong above all to something more divine." ³¹

Two ways to think about what Plato may mean by piety_{P2}: the philosopher could either

- (i_P) contemplate what the gods also contemplate, or
- (ii_P) contemplate the thoughts, which the god thinks.

The premises that Timaeus attributes to the Demiurge in the *Timaeus*:

- (1_D) the Demiurge is "supremely good."
- (2_D) the Demiurge created the world, because he "wanted everything to become as much like himself as was possible." That is, "he wanted everything to be good and nothing to be bad so far as that was possible."
- (3_D) the Demiurge created the world by ordering disordered motion, "because he believed that order was in every way better than disorder." ³²
- (4_D) the Demiurge's nature can be rationally grasped at but is essentially ineffable: "to find the [Demiurge]... is hard enough, and even if... [successful], to declare him to everyone is impossible." ³³
- (5_D) the Demiurge is the sovereign: in his speech to the newly-created gods, the Demiurge assures them that "whatever has come to be by my hands cannot be undone but by my consent." His will is a "greater, more sovereign bond than those"

³⁰ *Republic*, 517c,

³¹ *Republic*, 518d-e.

³² *Timaeus*, 29d-30c.

³³ *Timaeus*, 28c.

that bound the gods when created. Therefore, he reasons, the potentially mortal gods will never cease to be in actuality.³⁴ This assurance only makes sense if no greater agency exists over the Demiurge.

(6_D) the Demiurge is the “most excellent” of causes.³⁵

(7_D) the Demiurge’s characteristic activity is solitary rest, which is withdrawn from interaction with his creation.³⁶

(8_D) the Demiurge’s cause is the cause of Intellect as opposed to Necessity.

(9_D) the Demiurge is “most excellent of all that is intelligible and eternal.”³⁷

The premises that Timaeus attributes to the Model in the *Timaeus*:

(1_M) the Model is “changeless and is grasped by a rational account, that is, by wisdom.”³⁸

(2_M) the Model is a Living Thing that was not “any of those that have the natural character of a part, for nothing that is a likeness of anything incomplete could ever turn out beautiful.”

(3_M) the Model is a “Living Thing of which all other living things are parts, both individually and by kinds. For that Living Thing comprehends within itself all intelligible living things, just as our world is made up of us and all the other visible creatures.”

(4_M) the Model is “the best of the intelligible things, complete in every way.”

(5_M) the Model is a superior god, superior to the created gods, for Timaeus refers to the created world as a “god that was yet to be.”

(6_M) the Model is perfect and intelligible. Since Timaeus infers the solitary nature of the world-god created by the Demiurge from its excellence, the Model likewise is

³⁴ *Timaeus*, 41a-b.

³⁵ *Timaeus*, 29a.

³⁶ *Timaeus*, 42e.

³⁷ *Timaeus*, 37a.

³⁸ *Timaeus*, 29a.

solitary: like the world based upon it, it “keeps its own company...[f]or its knowledge of and friendship with itself is enough.”³⁹

(DM) is a proof that attempts to show the Demiurge is the Model:

(1_{DM}) Demiurge is the “most excellent” of Intelligible Things.

∴(2_{DM}) The Demiurge is better than all other Intelligible Things.

(3_{DM}) the Model is perfect of Intelligible things.

∴(4_{DM}) the Demiurge is perfect.

(5_{DM}) If multiple things are perfect, then they are either the same thing or *good* reference multiple possible ideals.

(6_{DM}) Plato believes that *good* is one.

∴(7_{DM}) The Demiurge is the Model.

Mark McPherran’s argument that the Good is not God (MM):

(1_{MM}) Plato characterized the Good as beyond all being in dignity and power (509B8-10)

(2_{MM}) The Good is “that which makes knowledge possible.”

∴(3_{MM}) the Good cannot be a mind/soul that knows anything (508B-509B).

(4_{MM}) “[F]or Plato a necessary condition for something’s being a god is that it be a mind/soul possessing intelligence.”

(6_{MM}) Plato believed that that which makes knowledge possible cannot itself know.

(7_{MM}) something possesses intelligence if and only if it possesses soul/mind.

(8_{MM}) if something is beyond all being in dignity and power, it cannot possess intelligence.

∴(5_{MM}) the Good cannot be a God.⁴⁰

³⁹ *Timaeus*, 30-33, 39e.

⁴⁰ Mark McPherran, 72-73.