

Platonic Prophecy and the Possibility of Philosophy

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Abstract

In this thesis I explore the question of the possibility of philosophy. Initially I frame this question in response to Aristophanes' portrayal of Socrates in his *Clouds*. According to Aristophanes, Socrates' philosophical way of life is comedic, in so far as he is unable to distinguish the serious from the trivial. It is also dangerous, because in placing the serious and the trivial on the same foundation, Socrates liberates what was bound by way of traditional practice. Philosophy, according to Aristophanes' accusation, is ignorant of everyday life, for it is concerned with the theoretical and insubstantial.

The question of the possibility of philosophy is, I argue, central to how Plato might be understood. If philosophy is nothing more than culture and history, if it is really nothing, then Plato's dialogues might only be read as historical fiction. I will argue that to read Plato with this assumption is to anachronistically limit what can be known by way of philosophical practice. Consequently, I argue that we must approach Plato in the spirit in which he writes, in so doing giving up on those assumptions which might preclude us from understanding philosophy as a way of life.

Having thus outlined my interpretive credo, and opened up the debate around traditional practice and philosophical theory, I move on to examine the foundation of the religious tradition – divine wisdom. Bringing divine wisdom back from the past into the present is the religious prophet who, along with the philosopher, seeks to live not just according to tradition, but according to truth. An examination of the religious prophet is also, therefore, an examination of the limits of

philosophy. With an interpretation of Plato's *Euthyphro* I show that the foundational speech of the religious prophet – Euthyphro – is rooted in his distorted philosophical desire; a desire sated in eternity only with the perversion of history. In all, Plato shows that it is a lack of self-knowledge, brought about a pious devotion to history, which separates the prophet from the philosopher.

Turning to Plato's *Phaedo* I explore Plato's understanding of the possibility of philosophy. In this dialogue Socrates, on the day he is to be put to death, tells his friends that philosophy is a practice for dying. He fears not his own death, he says, for the soul is immortal. Philosophy, it would seem, is founded on prophecy. In the *Phaedo* we come to see the nature of this prophetic insight. In the first half of the dialogue Socrates introduces death as in a cycle with life and argues, from this position, of the ongoing existence of the soul. Yet, as I will show, in making the soul immortal Socrates denies death and thereby calls into question the practice of philosophy. After disagreements from his friends he approaches the question of the soul's immortality from within the circumference of his own life. From here, death does have significance. Death, we come to see, both defines our temporality and is the path through which we approach eternity. Philosophy is possible, according to my interpretation of Plato, because our soul attains itself through the intelligibility of the lifeless things-in-themselves, such intelligibility itself providing the foundation to our own existence – a foundation inaccessible to philosophical analysis.

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CONTENTS

<i>Abstract</i>	iii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	v
CHAPTER 1: RECOVERING PHILOSOPHY	1
The Possibility of Philosophy	4
Aristophanes' <i>Clouds</i>	5
Plato's <i>Euthyphro</i>	6
Plato's <i>Phaedo</i>	7
Concluding Remarks	9
CHAPTER 2: READING PLATO	11
Introduction	11
The Dialogues as Dramatic Philosophy	12
Interpretation and Understanding	18
History and Unity	20
Where to from Here?	25
Preliminary Remarks on Reading the Dialogues	27
Socratic and Platonic Dialogues	28
The Philosophical Drama of Socrates' Life and Death	33
CHAPTER 3: DIVINE AUTHORITY IN ARISTOPHANES' <i>CLOUDS</i>	35
Natural Philosophy	35
The Clouds	40
A Mismatched Marriage	43
The Speeches	45
Speech and Practice	50
Divine Justice	52
Aristophanes' Socrates	54
CHAPTER 4: PIETY AND PROPHECY IN PLATO'S <i>EUTHYPHRO</i>	57
Tradition and Truth	57
Philosophy and Prophecy	58
Reading the Euthyphro	62
Euthyphro	63
Why does Socrates Speak to Euthyphro?	65
Meletus	69
The Euthyphro	70
Gods and Human Practice	77

An Idea of Piety	80
Divine and Human Love	82
Silent Speech	87
Piety and Justice	89
The End of Justice	95
Divine Justice	98
An Ignorant Socrates	100
CHAPTER 5: DEATH AND THE SOUL IN PLATO'S <i>PHAEDO</i>	102
Introduction	102
According to Nature	104
Aurelius	104
Nietzsche	107
Living Truly	110
The Phaedo: Part 1	112
Phaedo Remembers	115
Liberation and Death	119
Liberating Socrates	122
Philosophy and Liberation	129
Who Cares for the Soul?	135
The Good Life and the After-Life	139
Separating the Soul	141
The Dead Philosopher	149
Proving our Divinity	153
The Eternal Cycle	155
Recollecting Death	159
What is Soul?	170
Soul Boundaries	176
The Phaedo: Part 2	178
Simmiias: The Body in Harmony	181
Cebes: The Creator	182
Socrates is Dead	183
Dead Arguments	186
If the Body is Death, What of the Soul?	190
Socrates' Search	198
Socrates' Second Sailing	210
Origins of Understanding	212
Moving by Way of Hypothesis	215
Being both Eternal and Temporal	221
Origins of the Soul	227
True and Fated Death	235
To the Underworld	237
The After-Life	240
Socrates' Death	246

CHAPTER 6: THE POSSIBILITY OF PHILOSOPHY	250
Practising Philosophy	256
BIBLIOGRAPHY	261

Chapter 1: Recovering Philosophy

According to Aristotle philosophy begins with wonder.¹ To this we might add that philosophical wonder finds its end only with the whole of existence. For it is the desire to know what is *fundamental* which distinguishes philosophy from all other theoretical sciences.² Philosophy is not just a wondering about how to do this or that, or the composition of this thing or that thing, it is a wondering about the significance of *all* things. Hence, only when a theoretical science aims at an account of the whole can we say that it is philosophical. The physicist who desires to know the mathematical rules which best describe the material cosmos and the biologist the organic structure of life are, for example, philosophising only when these explanations seek to describe the *essential* nature of things, and not just an aspect.³ And thus philosophy is, according to Aristotle, the only science which approaches self-sufficiency.⁴ It is, says Aristotle, the most divine of human endeavours, for it accords with the life most likely led by the gods.⁵ Still and all, we are not gods.

What then of those who aspire to supreme self-sufficiency, who aspire to become god-like? Are they not at once both magnificent and a little ridiculous?

Aristotle says as much:

...it is said that men like Anaxagoras and Thales have theoretical but not practical wisdom: when we see that they do not know what is advantageous to them, we

¹ *Metaphysics*, Alpha, 982b (translations are from Aristotle, 1998).

² See *Metaphysics*, Alpha 2.

³ For this reason, Thales has been credited with being the first (western) philosopher, as he sought the essence of all (which according to him is water).

⁴ According to Aristotle: "...what is usually called 'self-sufficiency' will be found in the highest degree in the activity which is concerned with theoretical knowledge". *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 10, 1177a.

⁵ *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 10, 1177b.

admit that they know extraordinary, wonderful, difficult, and superhuman things,
but call their knowledge useless because the good they are seeking is not human.⁶

Practical wisdom – *phronesis* – is what brings philosophy back down to earth, enabling the philosopher to practise a virtuous life. It is, says Aristotle, “...concerned with human affairs and with matters about which deliberation is possible”.⁷ And so Aristotle separates philosophy into its theoretical (or contemplative) and practical aspects, in accordance with the virtues of different parts of our soul.

We could say that Aristotle separates the question of necessity or what could in no way be other than what it is – the object of theoretical wisdom – from the question of the virtuous or the good life. With this he preserves his theology from the vagaries of humanity. Nonetheless, this objectivity, while it might make his metaphysics more robust, does come at a price. With such a separation philosophy teeters on the brink of falling apart: into the objectively metaphysical on one hand and the merely practical on the other. Taken to the extreme, philosophy splits into an inhuman seriousness (based on abstract universal truths) and a subjective triviality (following one’s own philosophy⁸ or wisdom, rather than what might be truly wise).

This extreme situation – the disintegration of philosophy – exists today. We find that philosophy is called into question by people in opposing camps, each claiming that the other side is blind. Wisdom is really just unrecognised choice, cry one side from their meta-philosophical vantage point. They see that our lived experience – our practice – encompasses and so precludes the objectivity promised

⁶ *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 6, 1141b (translations are from Aristotle, 1962).

⁷ *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 6, 1141b.

⁸ Every area of life now seems to have a philosophy – the philosophy held by different business leaders, the philosophy of the local sporting coach etc. Philosophy in these cases is no different to ideology.

by metaphysics (or philosophy narrowly understood).⁹ On the other side, practice is relegated to the sidelines, and the job of separating the logically legitimate from nonsense is carried on unimpeded. From this perspective, what those in the other camp are saying is, not surprisingly, deemed nonsense.¹⁰

Sadly, I believe that neither side is wrong. What they share is a particular understanding of philosophy. For both camps, philosophy stands or falls with the truth or visibility of metaphysics.¹¹ And this truth, following modern science, is rendered meaningful under the paradigm of mathematics. The absolute *internal* coherence of mathematics ensures the validity of the proofs required by the metaphysicians and the same internal coherence which sets an *absolute* boundary to mathematics (outside of which is our lived experience) provides the anti-proofs offered by the meta-philosophers. By the lights of mathematics there is only absolute necessity or the void, and judged from the perspective of philosophy broadly understood (as the love of wisdom) both paint our lives in the same way – as profoundly meaningless. The only path out of this predicament is to step once more back into our own lives and recover the proper place of theory within practice. Thankfully, we are not alone in our travels. For the path, as I will argue in this thesis, has been lit up for us with the dramatically luminous philosophy of Plato.

⁹ As followers of Nietzsche and Heidegger would say.

¹⁰ Those who place themselves under the “stereotypical” umbrella of analytic philosophy would espouse these beliefs *vis a vis* philosophy.

¹¹ Consider Nietzsche’s assertion that there might be a metaphysical world; yet, even so, such a world would be an “inaccessible and incomprehensible being-other; it would be a thing with negative qualities” (Nietzsche, 1996, s. 9). Any metaphysics that could be understood by us is therefore not the “true” metaphysics. Philosophy (as understood by Nietzsche) is in no position to uncover such a metaphysics; hence Nietzsche’s praise of the artist-prophet.

The Possibility of Philosophy

In this thesis I will explore the possibility of philosophy broadly understood; the possibility of a profound connection between ourselves and eternity. I will do this by considering in the first instance Aristophanes' *Clouds* and then two of Plato's dialogues – the *Euthyphro* and the *Phaedo*. Weaving its way through these works is a shared theme: the question concerning the nature of the divine. This question, because we ourselves are not our own creation, is inextricably tied to other questions about our own nature – Who are we really? Where do we come from? What is our end? How can we know ourselves? The question of the nature of the divine is ultimately a question concerning reverence and our own perfection.

In the following chapters I argue that Aristophanes' *Clouds* presents the case for tradition: piety is the subjection of ourselves to the wisdom of our fathers and, ultimately, to that of the historical gods. Plato, as I will show by contrast, takes the question of piety to be philosophical. Thus Desjardins, in an introduction to her study on the Good, says

In its exploration of Plato's defence of Socrates and the philosophic life, this inquiry will take seriously his primary interpretation of piety as the right relation of the human to the divine, noting that pursuit of the question of piety in an early dialogue like the *Euthyphro* leads in later dialogues to an increasingly explicit account of the divine as its source and goal. Encompassing all other virtues, piety will, in the long run, define what it is to be human. And for Plato, to be most fully human turns out, ironically, to be most godlike.¹²

Fleshing this out I argue that Plato's *Phaedo* begins where the *Euthyphro* leaves us, and that the *Euthyphro* begins from within the controversy opened up by the

¹² Desjardins (2004, p. 2).

Clouds. This controversy hinges on what Aristophanes sees as the dangerous ambiguity of theoretical wisdom; for *without* theoretical wisdom Aristophanes himself stands on nothing substantial. It will be a guiding assumption of this thesis that because Plato's philosophy, as he presents it, does not clearly separate theory and practice¹³ we can return to it to discover how "living one's life truly" is possible.

Below I present these ideas in a little more detail and discuss what will be argued in the following chapters of the thesis.

Aristophanes' *Clouds*

The possibility of philosophy is first called into doubt when, as Aristophanes portrays it in his *Clouds*, it shows itself to be a hopelessly inadequate enterprise for living one's life. Philosophy might be fine as natural science, but as soon as it steps into the territory occupied by tradition and custom it breeds all kinds of disorder. With a focus on abstract truths the philosopher is blind to all the things around him worthy respect. The religious tradition plainly shows what is to be respected, while philosophical contemplation disrespects the tradition and replaces it with the emptiness of sophistry – its foundation is the void.

Nonetheless, while Aristophanes pokes fun at the political dangers of philosophy as it stands against the relative sanity of the religious tradition he has, in moving outside the tradition, inescapably placed himself within the realm of philosophy. The question of how to live has, in other words, been laid open. And thus, I argue, the truth of the religious tradition (its implied understanding of humanity and nature) becomes paramount. If, like Aristophanes, we wish to remain

¹³ See, e.g., Griswold (1996, pp. 230-241); Rosen (1987a, pp. xlviii-lvii); and, Strauss (1946, pp. 347-348).

within the tradition, then truth distinguishes itself from history through the words of the religious prophet; for it is prophecy which lies at the foundation of the tradition, and it is prophecy which brings the tradition back to life, as a true speech because sanctified by the gods. This, I argue, is what Aristophanes must uphold, if he is to stand by the teachings of his drama.

Plato's *Euthyphro*

The disagreement between tradition and philosophy is taken up in Plato's *Euthyphro*. This dialogue between Socrates and the religious prophet Euthyphro shows the ground shared by prophecy and philosophy, as well as their differences. By making the speech of the gods visible once more, the prophet shares with the philosopher the desire for foundational speech. What separates them is the way each goes about satisfying this desire; thereby showing how they diverge on their understanding of wisdom. For the religious prophet, wisdom is attained directly, through communion with the divine (and the gift of a divinely sanctified speech). Such a path, as we find out in the *Euthyphro*, is an image of philosophy, in that it naively exposes what Aristophanes wouldn't – the historical truth of tradition. With this exposition we are shown the tension between custom and philosophy, hiding within the tradition itself. Philosophy must be suppressed at all costs; yet the foundation or truth of the tradition – the eternal speech of the gods – cannot itself be thought of as rooted in custom, for it is justified according to wisdom, and so can only be defended philosophically.

By way of this "philosophical" defence, we come to see that it is a lack of self-knowledge which separates Euthyphro from Socrates (and leads Euthyphro to

misunderstand Socrates – imagining that they are the same). Euthyphro's lack of self-knowledge, his ignorance of his separation from the gods is, ironically, a symptom of his philosophical desire for foundational speech. Remaining within the tradition Euthyphro finds eternity only with the transformation and perversion of history. This path, with its misrepresentation of what is eternally divine and what is historical, dissolves the separation between theory and practice. Just as the gods are rendered ahistorical, so too is truly just and wise practice. In the end, and by this account, we come to see that just practice is unknowable. What can only be known for certain is circular: the dissolution of what separates men and gods (in the case of tradition: history) as recast through a misunderstood philosophical desire. With this, the *Euthyphro* sets the scene for greater reflection on the prophetic or theoretical foundation of the philosophical way of life. Such a reflection is to be found in Plato's *Phaedo*.

Plato's *Phaedo*

In the *Phaedo* Socrates puts it to his friends that philosophy is nothing other than to practice for dying. He says this to them on the day he is about to be put to death for impiety. He is not afraid of dying, he tells his friends, because the soul itself is immortal. With these words Socrates brings together philosophy and prophecy. He foretells his own future in the afterlife, while leading us to believe that such a foretelling, including his prophetic powers, is delivered by way of his philosophical practice. The *Phaedo* is, for this reason, a profound reflection on the foundation of philosophy.

In exploring the foundation Socrates must partly transcend philosophy and speak prophetically. He must speak of more than what he could know. And it is in this manner he argues that the soul is immortal, coming at it in the first half of the dialogue from the perspective of the body – from the outside, as it were. From this perspective, as I will show, death is rendered temporal, as the after-life. Socrates, in putting forward his case for the immortality of the soul does, in this way, render death, as a *condition* of temporality, insignificant. This amounts to showing that our souls are only immortal when death does not exist. As a practice for dying, philosophy would not seem to have much to practice for beyond life, thereby. And thus, I will suggest, this shows the impossibility of exhibiting philosophically the foundations of philosophy. For such an exhibition always transforms death, or non-existence, into existence.

In the second half of the dialogue Socrates, after sharp critiques from two of his friends, comes at the question of the soul's immortality from a different perspective; this time, from within the circumference of his own life. From here we come to see that only from within the circumference of soul, from within our own lives, does death have any significance. Socrates shows that in seeking out the limits of this existence we do, at the same time, unify ourselves and *become* "eternal". This seeming paradox – a becoming eternity – is, as my interpretation of the dialogue shows, the result of our human condition, wherein death both defines our temporality and is the path through which we approach eternity.

And thus the two perspectives on death (the first temporal and the second limitless) are, as woven together in the *Phaedo*, not incompatible. They come together in showing the possibility of philosophy, as sanctified by what we share with eternity

and temporality. The possibility of philosophy is, as Plato presents it, shown by reflecting on the limits of our own lives. These limits, because they appear only against the profound otherness of death, are from the perspective of theory, prophetic. Philosophy, as a purely theoretical enterprise is, therefore, impossible. And so too ourselves: only in death might we exist truly, and yet in life the reality of death brings to us the truth of our own existence. Philosophy cannot, in the end, be denied without also denying the conditions which make possible our own existence.

Concluding Remarks

In this thesis I will explore by way of Plato the question of how philosophy is possible. This question also concerns how a philosophical text might be interpreted. Without philosophy there can be no philosophical interpretations of philosophical texts. There can only be, at best, accurate interpretations. And yet without going beyond accuracy and entering the realm of philosophy we cannot understand a text for what it is. It may very well be that in the absence of philosophy an accurate interpretation of a “philosophical” text would show it to be saying more than is possible. We would count it as a false text, in other words. But false according to what? Such an interpretation already presupposes philosophy; not as a practice, but as a theoretical account of our own limits. Philosophy as a way of life has already been rendered false by a philosophical position concerning ourselves and our place in the world.

In the next chapter I will argue that to read Plato faithfully we must do more than read him accurately. Indeed, with Plato it would seem that no accurate interpretation of his texts is possible without at least allowing the possibility of a

comprehensive philosophical interpretation. That is to say, reading Plato accurately demands that we meet ourselves and the world with the same openness as demanded by the profundity of his dialogues.

Chapter 2: Reading Plato

If you do not expect the unexpected, you will not find it, since it is trackless and unexplored.¹⁴

The one wise thing is to know, in sound judgement, how everything is guided in every case.¹⁵

Introduction

Reading Plato is not a simple matter. Neither is reading Kant, Wittgenstein, or Heidegger, one might add. On the face of it this is true. Kant, to take just the first example, is difficult to understand. His ideas are complex and mostly move in the abstract. Nonetheless, despite struggling to come to grips with what he is saying we know that there is a terminus to our reading. It is, despite the difficulties, possible to understand Kant as he himself wanted to be understood. Kant's ideas may be complex but they are also explicit. The same can't be said for Plato.¹⁶ Sure, there can be no mistaking what is said and meant by each character (from the perspective of the character) in the dialogues. Opinions are explicitly and comprehensively presented by Plato. But despite, or because of this, reading a Platonic dialogue leaves us with the sense that we will never fully grasp Plato's philosophy. Within the dialogues any positive doctrine which we might gather from what Socrates says is invariably undermined by fundamental flaws in his own arguments, the views of his conversation partners, or by an ironic inversion present in the drama of the dialogue

¹⁴ Heraclitus (Clement, *Miscellanies*, 2.17.4.4-5 Stählin/Früchtel), in Waterfield (2000, p. 38).

¹⁵ Heraclitus (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 9.1.7-8 Stählin/Früchtel), in Waterfield (2000, p. 38).

¹⁶ Tigerstedt (1977, p. 13) puts it nicely: "What some scholars regard as a faithful picture of Plato the man and his philosophy, is to other scholars an outrageous caricature or a pure invention. The dispute between the various schools of Platonic interpreters is not confined to judgement and evaluation but concerns the very essence of Platonism".

itself. And yet if we come to the radically sceptical conclusion that there is no truth to be found anywhere and all is a human construction, this is itself undermined.¹⁷ In this way the dramatic and dialogical expression of philosophical practice presented in the dialogues seems to point to what are Plato's own views on the *elusiveness* of philosophical understanding.¹⁸ This elusiveness, I will argue in upcoming chapters, is unavoidable, as it arises with reflection on what is possible for us to know as beings *searching* for the nature of our own existence.

The Dialogues as Dramatic Philosophy

The elusiveness of philosophical understanding is part and parcel of our everyday lives. Within the everyday it shows itself with the fact that we first appear to ourselves from within the context of political or communal, not universal, speech.

Stanley Rosen says that

Since it is the human condition to dwell, even as philosophers, within the domain of opinion, an accurate portrait of philosophy must reflect its context, or the manner in which it emerges in human life...By portraying the emergence of philosophy from opinion, the dialogue imitates the whole of human existence, which is to say it imitates the whole simply.¹⁹

The differing opinions which arise from within the political terrain of everyday life are what first lend importance and relevance to any philosophical reflection and discussion, for these opinions express how life is and how it should be

¹⁷ See, e.g., the *Parmenides* which critiques what is the foundation of a reconstructed Platonic metaphysical doctrine – the “theory of Forms”, and the *Theaetetus* which examines among other things Protagoras’ idea that “man is the measure of all things”.

¹⁸ Gonzales (1995, p. 157) says “...a necessary connection can be worked out which, if attributed to Plato, would allow us to see a necessary connection between Plato’s philosophy and the dialogue form without denying this philosophy positive content...The conception proposed here involves attributing to philosophy the following three characteristics: (1) it is “reflexive” in the sense that its content is not *objectifiable* as a *result* separable from its method; (2) it is mainly practical (knowledge-how) rather than “theoretical” (knowledge-that); (3) the knowledge it provides is nonpropositional”.

¹⁹ Rosen (1987a, p. 1).

lived. Only as a resident of this terrain might we ourselves understand and judge the opinions of others. Yet, in coming to understand these opinions, in coming to understand what these opinions presuppose about the world, we ourselves must move within a more comprehensive terrain. Our movement is possible because what is *implied* by common opinion is a more fundamental or unified understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. In Plato this is shown by way of the various characters within the dialogues, whose opinions are, as unified expressions, limited in some way or another. Each character speaks what they believe is the truth. These truths, however, fall short of an account of the whole; they variously show perspectives which misconstrue human nature, along with perverting the possibility of understanding.

Because it is by way of opinion that philosophy shows itself, as the evaluation of various perspectives on life and how it should be lived, the literary aspect of the dialogues is of crucial importance. By means of the dramatic *personae* we ourselves are able to identify not only with the opinions of the characters, but also enter into their way of life. For it is their way of life which exposes for us the consequences of their opinions, and by entering into it we can empathise with the significance of their actions and more fully appropriate their self-understanding. Who of us, after all, has not lived as if we believed that pleasure was the greatest good, or that a supernatural wisdom was our gift alone? In coming to see the world from the inside of these opinions, as it were, we partly situate ourselves *within* a conversation with Socrates. Participating in the conversation,²⁰ we experience the travails of Socrates' conversation partners and thereby take a step towards imitating the philosophical

²⁰ See Tigerstedt (1977, p. 6).

awakening of which Plato speaks in his Seventh Letter.²¹ We experience the dialogues almost first-hand and enter into them in a spirit open to the possibility that “philosophy is a human experience that remains the same and that characterises the human being as such, and that there is no progress in it, but only participation”.²²

Not only are we presented with characters, though. Each of the dialogues takes place within a dramatic *setting*. We cannot *simply* identify with one of the characters or each of them in turn, for that matter. The dialogues are more than just conversations. Plato even goes so far as to present some conversations within an *outer* dramatic frame. In the *Symposium*, for example, the speeches given by Socrates and his friends are reported by Apollodorus to an unnamed friend of his. Apollodorus wasn't himself with Socrates when the speeches took place, but heard about them from Aristodemus, who *was* there on the occasion. We thus enter into the dialogue already twice-removed, and for this reason cannot simply engage with the conversation in denial of the drama.²³ In other dialogues Plato makes reference to characters that don't participate yet nonetheless dramatically taint the views of those in conversation. In the *Philebus*, for instance, the conversation is between Socrates and Protarchus, yet it explores the character and opinions of the silent Philebus.²⁴ As others have persuasively argued, we cannot just discount the setting as mere window dressing.²⁵

²¹ “For this knowledge is not something which can be put into words like other sciences; but after long-continued intercourse between teacher and pupil, in joint pursuit of the subject, suddenly, like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled, it is born in the soul and straight away nourishes itself” (341c6-d1).

²² Gadamer (1986, p. 6).

²³ See also the *Theaetetus*, the *Parmenides*, and the *Phaedo*. Other dialogues are narrated by Socrates himself: the *Euthydemus*, the *Protagoras*, and the *Republic*.

²⁴ The character Meletus in the *Euthyphro* is another example.

²⁵ For comprehensive and persuasive arguments see, e.g., the “Introduction” chapters of Griswold (1996) and Rosen (1987a).

And so we engage with the dialogue as a whole; which is to say we enter into a living conversation replete with action, tension, comedy and tragedy. This means that we must be awake to the dramatic irony which holds in creative and philosophical tension the opinions of the characters and the broader drama in which they move. To quote Stanley Rosen again:

Even without entering into any theoretical reflections on Platonic dialectic, it is clear that we cannot take the dialogues seriously as expressions of Plato's thought unless we take seriously the extraordinary complexity of their literary form... *Only by the recognition of irony as the central problem in the interpretation of Plato, do we honour the demands of rigorous and sober philosophical analysis.*²⁶

What Rosen's stratagem demands is that we approach the drama of the dialogues with full *philosophical* seriousness.²⁷ Where we find a conflict between the speeches and the drama, for instance, we are not to presume that it is an *accident* of dramatic events. This would be to divorce the form of the argument from its content. We should, rather, respect the fact that Plato crafted the drama as a movement within the dialogue as a whole, that he recognised the form of what he was crafting and so crafted it appropriately.²⁸ To imagine otherwise is to reduce Plato's dramatic sensibilities to someone not capable of what are actually presented in the dialogues:

²⁶ Rosen (1987a, p. xlii, italics in original). See also Klein (1965, pp. 5-9).

²⁷ See also Ausland (1997, p. 373).

²⁸ Sayre (1995, pp. 27-28) says "As any person beyond the sophomore year in college should know, a serious study of any worthwhile text requires active participation on the part of the reader. One must maintain constant effort to confront the text with relevant questions, to distill from one's reading the best available answers, and all in all to retain a clear view of where the text is heading and how it gets there from where it was previously... When one is seriously engaged with a text of philosophy, moreover, the level of active involvement is likely to be even higher, if for no other reason than the complexity of the material... Although Plato's writings are not the only texts to which one might turn for illustration, needless to say, there probably are no other writings within our philosophic tradition of which the remarks above are more palpably true. That is, there are no other writings we are likely to encounter that are more responsive to an active reading".

profound insights into the best opinions of an age extraordinarily rich both artistically and philosophically.

To read the dialogues is, thereby, to read on multiple levels at once, and also to move out of the world of Plato's fiction and into our own world. Only because we can do this, only because our world is not *essentially* (or philosophically) different from the world of Socrates and his conversation partners, can we recognise in Plato's drama not only fiction but philosophy. Only by trying to make Plato's world our own can we appreciate its full philosophical significance. As Tigerstedt aptly puts it:

What Socrates says, he says to a certain person in a certain situation, and we cannot simply apply it to ourselves. But – and that is the paradox of the Platonic Dialogues – neither can we refrain from doing so. We follow the discussions as if we took part in them. To read a Platonic Dialogue means silently to participate in a discussion.²⁹

The dramatic irony of the dialogues, as well as what seem to be inconsistencies, faulty arguments, bizarre mythical elements, and irrelevant asides, set in motion our own philosophising: we wonder what Plato could have meant by all this. Certainly there are no historical signposts to which we might turn to explain the design of the dialogues. History might make significant the historical details but it can only erase, not unify the intentions of an author. We don't seek the unity of Shakespeare's vision by placing him within a generalised account of other authors of his age; we seek it by carefully reading and reflecting upon his plays. And so too with Plato. We cannot refrain from participating *philosophically* because the dialogues set us to wondering what it is that Plato is driving at, and only by trying to speak

²⁹ Tigerstedt (1977, p. 98). See also Klein (1965, pp. 6, 9) who says that "Everything about Socrates' irony depends on the presence of other people who are capable of catching the irony, of hearing what is not said... Our role as participants in the dialogue is fundamentally not different from that of Plato's own contemporaries who may have listened to somebody reading them aloud. There is no question that we share with them views commonly held by many people at all times".

where Plato has remained silent, only by trying to make connections where none seem to be offered, can we hope to see as Plato did.³⁰

We do this by initiating our own philosophical practice, following the path laid out for us by Socrates. Interpreting the dialogues is, in a sense, doing this philosophical practice. That we cannot just *ape* Socrates, though, is made clear by him in the dialogues³¹ and is forced upon us by the dramatic space between ourselves and Socrates; a space which is given philosophical significance by Plato's dramatic irony. Platonic irony makes itself visible within this space when we, because of our vantage point, become aware of what none of the characters themselves could realise; as, for example, in the *Phaedo*, wherein Socrates' conversation about the eternity of the soul is retold to us after he is dead.³² The irony that this evokes cannot be mistaken. We are forced to confront the reality of death, despite Socrates' equanimity on the day he is to die: Socrates' conversation takes on another dimension for us, but in doing so it is not thereby transformed into something else. It is, rather, made existentially significant by the reality of our own finitude. When we examine the truth of the dialogues it is up to us to reflect on a whole of which they are a part – our own lives.³³ Entering into the dialogues, encountering Socrates and his conversation partners within, leads us by way of their dramatic distance to encounter ourselves and the world on the outside.³⁴

³⁰ Ausland (1997, p. 384), with nice insight, says that the dialogues are "...a literary version of Socrates' irony. Just as Socrates induces certain listeners to contemplate factors beyond the ken of his interlocutors, so Plato's dramatic irony directs attention beyond the limits imposed by a given fiction".

³¹ See, e.g., *Phaedo* 91c1-2.

³² See also Hyland (1995, p. 18) who notes the importance of place – the prison – in the *Phaedo*.

³³ See Ausland (1997, p. 392).

³⁴ Bowen (1988, p. 64) says: "...since the Platonic philosophy I have described is neither a doctrine Plato held nor idle philosophizing but the reader's thinking by way of question and answer as directed by what Plato writes, its touchstone is not the text itself: this is the criterion of philology. Rather, in criticizing philosophical claims, we should assess both the importance of the questions they answer and

We are invited to examine ourselves in such a way, says Griswold, as to improve ourselves. The dialogues, he says, are both phenomenological and protreptic.³⁵ The purpose of Platonic irony he says “is to encourage us to become philosophical by rightly appropriating for ourselves the dialogic search for knowledge. In this event irony would reflect not the absurdity of the cosmos but the limitations of the human ability to understand it”.³⁶ If this is true, then the irony of converting Plato’s unspoken philosophy into a written monologue is a legitimate part of the philosophical enterprise, even if not the whole of it. Plato’s philosophy is, at its core, incomplete and ongoing – there can be no ultimate separation of *theoria* from *praxis*. Each interpretation offered thus attempts to capture the heart of Plato’s speech *without* the subsequent irony. Nonetheless, each interpretation seeks what with a reflection on our own *praxis* will acknowledge that irony.

Interpretation and Understanding

What I have been saying is that interpretation and our understanding of Plato are intimately linked. And so despite all attempts to render the drama philosophically coherent, it is still the case that there is enough ambiguity in the dialogues for the drama to be differently illuminated by interpretations of what we understand to be Plato’s ideas about things. (One need only hark back to the fate of the Academy which, after Plato’s death, split into “dogmatic” and “sceptical” camps.) Taking this view I run the risk of implying that our understanding of Plato

whether the answers are successful. Accordingly, although we may find theories about the nature and extent of the world of Forms interesting, insightful, or useful, and believe that they illuminate the text of Plato, that is, that they help our own reflection on the text; such theories are to be evaluated in the same way we evaluate Plotinus’ metaphysics or Aristotle’s”.

³⁵ Griswold (2002, p. 101).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

is the *same* as our interpretation; that, in the end, there could be a limitless number of readings because our understanding is not ultimately a reflection of Plato but of ourselves. Under this scenario our understanding and our interpretation would be circular: if Plato is understood in a certain way, then each opinion in the dialogues has x or y significance, such that x or y significance of this opinion supports what is understood of Plato. This circle is broken only with the possibility that we can access Plato's thoughts as he thought them.³⁷ If Plato's thoughts were just a function of his historical milieu then, of course, the collusion of interpretation and understanding would amount to nothing more than an empty spinning of the wheels, for there would be no way to distinguish the insights of one interpretation from another. Each interpretation would be a function of its own time and so only itself rendered insightful with respect to the historical claims of its day. The *accessibility* of Plato's *own* understanding is obviously of central importance; and it is only this accessibility (and, contemporaneously, the accessibility and so essential equality of his "world" and ours) which can save our backward fall into the abyss of historicism. I argue that this accessibility is only open to us when we ourselves take up the mantle of philosophy.

This is a weighty topic. It is, though, an important concern for this thesis, and so I will present what I hope is sufficient to convince the reader that the questions posed by Plato are just as significant for us as they were for him.

³⁷ If Plato were writing fairy tales then obviously understanding his thoughts would amount to nothing more than making sure his dialogues all made sense *internally*. Because Plato is not creating fantasy worlds, but writing about how the world is, or how we might go about understanding it, understanding his thoughts presupposes that the metaphysical possibilities open to us are the same as those that were open to him. To understand Plato's thoughts as he thought them is to take seriously his understanding of the world. It is to allow for the possibility of philosophy, the possibility of an understanding not wholly limited by history.

History and Unity

Modern hermeneutics, as Gadamer says in his masterpiece – *Truth and Method*

– arose with the historical consciousness:

The art or technique of understanding and interpretation developed from analogous impulses along two paths – theological and philological. Theological hermeneutics, as Dilthey showed, developed from the reformer’s defense of their own understanding of Scripture against the attack of the Tridentine theologians and their appeal to the indispensability of tradition; philological hermeneutics developed as instrumental to the humanist claim to revive classical literature. Both involve a rediscovery: a rediscovery of something that was not absolutely unknown, but whose meaning had become alien and inaccessible. Classical literature, though constantly present as material for humanistic education, had been completely absorbed within the Christian world. Similarly, the Bible was the church’s sacred book and as such was constantly read, but the understanding of it was determined, and – as the reformers insisted – obscured, by the dogmatic tradition of the church...By applying specialized techniques, hermeneutics claimed to reveal the original meaning of the texts in both traditions – humanistic literature and the Bible.³⁸

Theological hermeneutics, to the extent that it is the predecessor of contemporary hermeneutics is, according to Gadamer, based on the scriptural principles of the Reformation.³⁹ Luther’s aim was to circumvent the encrustations of tradition and bring to light once more the origin. Beginning with the assumption that Scripture forms a unity, Luther interpreted particular passages in light of the whole of Scripture, which itself arose through interpretation of particular passages. When judged from the eighteenth century’s historical point of view, however, Luther’s strategy did not go far enough in overthrowing the dogma of tradition. He still held

³⁸ Gadamer (1989, p. 174).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

to the dogmatic prejudice that the Bible itself is a unity.⁴⁰ And thus the impetus for a more thoroughgoing hermeneutic arose from the desire to crack through the historically coloured rendition and see things as they are in themselves. This led to Scripture being interpreted in light of the different perspectives of its various authors, each seen as belonging to a particular historical context.⁴¹ Unity was thereby established with reference to the historical conditions: it was from *within* history works were written and it was from *within* history works were understood both by the author and others. History thus stabilised and so provided the context for unification of meaning.

This way of reading a text had as its first principle not only the word of God, therefore. History was itself on the path to becoming a universal hermeneutic: the ongoing desire to ascertain with ever greater certainty the meaning of texts led to world history becoming the context through which all thoughts of the past were to be interpreted. And thus historical research modelled itself on philology.⁴² Moreover, as Gadamer notes, it was not only in theology that this historical consciousness arose. History asserted itself with the famous “quarrel between the ancients and the moderns”, lasting from the periods of French classicism to the German classical. Ultimately history (and modern method) triumphed, and with it quashed claims that the ancients were, without qualification, exemplary.⁴³

With the modern historical consciousness, hermeneutics came to be concerned less with seeking the unity of an unqualified understanding (be it Scriptural or classical), and more with the unity of understanding itself. For if history

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 175

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 176.

⁴² Ibid., p. 177.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 178.

is taken seriously, if only *it* is the ground of understanding, then there is only ever an ongoing *illusion* of unity; for history is grounded in the denial of itself: it is the antithesis of stability. The birth of *theoretical* (or universal) hermeneutics, as a result of reflection upon what is the significance of history was, thereby, also the death knell of the possibility of universal understanding (along with being the substitution of *theoria* with method). Instead of bringing a prior understanding (be that Scriptural or classical) to unify and so reconcile the thoughts of an author with history, the thoughts themselves were seen to be historical. All we could hope to understand were the thoughts of the day. Such an “historically conscious” unity was what Schleiermacher hoped to uncover.

The problem for Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was one of understanding the thoughts of others not as they stood in relation to an understanding shared by the interpreter (e.g., the truth of the Scriptures or the nobility of the ancients), but as they stood in relation to the interpreter himself. History was, in this way, treated by Schleiermacher with full philosophical significance. In contrast to the philologists, who sought unity with the aid of history, Schleiermacher held the assumption that history *destroys* unity. History not only dissolves how thoughts are expressed; it dissolves understanding.⁴⁴ Consequently, only the thoughts of the author can, as extracted *from* history, legitimately unify and so deliver meaning. To get at these

⁴⁴ Gadamer (1989, p. 179) has this to say: “Schleiermacher’s idea of a universal hermeneutics starts from this: that the experience of the alien and the possibility of misunderstanding is universal... Schleiermacher’s extending the hermeneutical task to ‘meaningful dialogue’, which is especially characteristic of him, shows how fundamentally the meaning of alienation, which hermeneutics is supposed to overcome, has changed in comparison to the task of hermeneutics as hitherto conceived. In a new and universal sense, alienation is inextricably given with the individuality of the Thou”.

thoughts, all dogmatic assumptions about what counts as truth or revelation must be suspended.

On interpreting Plato he has this to say:

For of all philosophers who have ever lived, none have had so good a right as Plato, in many respects, to set up the only too general complaint of being misunderstood, or even not understood at all...[Plato's philosophy] can only be understood by an ability duly to estimate the pervading presence of a *purpose* in the connexion of his writings, and, as far as possible to divine it when not obvious at first sight...it cannot be denied, that besides the ordinary difficulties in the province of Philosophy of thoroughly understanding any one except a sympathetic thinker, a peculiar and additional cause exists as regards Plato, in his utter deviation from the ordinary forms of philosophical communication.⁴⁵

The unity which Schleiermacher sought, and that which he divined in Plato, is psychological.⁴⁶ By entering into the mind of Plato his thoughts can be understood as he thought them. From this position it is possible, says Schleiermacher, to understand Plato's own thoughts better than Plato himself did.⁴⁷ Understanding Plato, as well as the literary context in which he wrote, we expose both his thoughts and the historical limits of his thoughts. Plato's thoughts can be constructed from the inside, as it were, and then from the privileged position of the future the full *philosophical* significance of his words can be plumbed. Gadamer puts it thus:

...every act of understanding is for Schleiermacher the inverse of an act of speech, the reconstruction of a construction...the ultimate ground of all understanding must

⁴⁵ Schleiermacher (1973, pp. 4-5).

⁴⁶ Gadamer (1989, pp. 186-187).

⁴⁷ See Schleiermacher (1973, p. 5).

always be a divinatory act of con-geniality, the possibility of which depends on a pre-existing bond between all individuals.⁴⁸

The recognition of history *as* history made it possible to engage with what was believed to be truly human: the poetic (or unifying) imagination bound (and thereby separated from us) by an historical literary context.

But what of the historical position that Schleiermacher himself occupied? How was it that his “divination” was able to escape the tangles of history which prevented Plato’s philosophy from rising beyond the poetic? These are properly philosophical questions, for they strike at the heart of *what* it is possible to understand. If all understanding is radically historical then there is no access to any whole which could unify and make present to us the full significance of the thoughts of ancient authors: Nature is historical all the way down; and understanding *itself*, at the deepest level, is rendered no different to interpretation.

And here we find Heidegger, who transforms hermeneutics into ontology. With this, hermeneutics becomes the fundamental condition of our existence. Such a “hermeneutical ontology”, according to Rosen,

...treats the text, whether a philosophical essay, a work of art, or a dream, as a sign, not of its own sense, but of some comprehensive theory of human existence, even of Being...Ontological hermeneutics treats the text as indirect evidence of a general doctrine of Being, or in other words, as data to be transformed, and hence replaced by a theoretical artefact.⁴⁹

Under such an ontological “theory” – which is thoroughly hermeneutical – the unity of the text arises when we correctly render it as an illusion of

⁴⁸ Gadamer (1989, pp. 188-189).

⁴⁹ Rosen (1987a, p. 168).

understanding. What we can understand is the structure of the illusion and nothing more.⁵⁰

And with this we might say that hermeneutics can go no further. We might also wonder, given what is now our own dissolution into the backside of history: have we been hoodwinked by hermeneutics and our increasingly subtle desire for absolute certainty?

Where to from Here?

Along with the hermeneuticists, I hold the view that the world cannot be realised as a theoretical unity. Nonetheless, I also understand the world to be more than essentially theoretical. Thus the impossibility of an ontological unity need not render unity and history itself equal. By shifting perspectives from the theoretical to the everyday we can see this. From within the everyday we notice that the cosmos is unified despite there being no unifying ontology. Indeed, the activity of seeking a unifying ontology (whether absurdly hermeneutical or otherwise) only makes sense within a world which already shows some unification. The impossibility of a unifying ontology does not, thereby, dissolve unity; it merely shows the impossibility of its completeness. This incompleteness, to put it briefly, shows itself as the ambiguous distinctions which we make in everyday life, distinctions which gain unity when we move closer to distinguishing true from false.

If we are to remain open to the possibility of being enlightened by others from different times and places, if we are to read others without the arrogant assumption that we ourselves epitomise wisdom, then we must at least give others

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 168-174.

the chance to speak to us as they wanted, and with this entertain the possibility that their world is not *fundamentally* different to ours.

And so I agree with Hirsch who says that

To say that men of different eras cannot understand each other is really to say that men who exist in significantly different situations and have different perspectives on life cannot understand each other. If it is right to think that all men exist in situations that are significantly different from one another and that all have different perspectives, then the historicist dogma reduces to simple psychologism: men in general, being different from one another, cannot understand the meanings of one another...If the former [understanding between people of the same period] can be bridged, as Gadamer and Heidegger admit, then so can the latter, for the historicity of understanding is, in its fundamental significance, merely an instance of the multiplicity of persons...What I deny is not the fact of difference [between past and present culture] but the asserted impossibility of sameness in the construing of textual meaning.⁵¹

In sum, I believe that we can understand Plato as he himself wanted to be understood, and that in understanding him we ourselves must philosophise. Since the dialogues present us not with a theoretical system, but philosophical reflections on the structure of everyday life, whatever meaning we might gather from them is found not through the historical or cultural context, nor the impossibility of unity given a comprehensive theory of existence but, rather, through the unity of everyday life itself. And thus Plato's dialogues make sense (or not) only with our own philosophical activity, an activity which takes place within the ongoing present.

⁵¹ Hirsch (1967, pp. 256-258).

Preliminary Remarks on Reading the Dialogues

Although the collusion (but not the equivalence) of interpretation and understanding means that no appeal can be made to external (and alien) methods of interpretation we can, as others have persuasively argued and shown, approach the dialogues with some initial discrimination.

Since each dialogue forms a natural unity, the dialogue itself is the whole through which we interpret the significance of its parts – the myths, arguments, etc.⁵² This has important implications for how we reconcile conflicting passages or find support for particular interpretations. If it is not the corpus as a whole to which we refer, then we cannot simply use arguments from one dialogue to support an interpretation in another (or, if the arguments conflict, to criticise Plato for his lack of acuity). Our frame of reference is always bound by the dramatic space of the dialogue under interpretation.⁵³

Since some of the dialogues occur within a broader dramatic movement, however, we can keep them in the background, as it were, without disturbing our interpretative principles. For instance, the *Phaedo* and the *Euthyphro* – the two dialogues I explore in this thesis – are (along with other dialogues such as the *Apology*) dramatically framed by Socrates' trial and death. The themes explored by way of these dialogues, congruent with their dramatic setting, naturally fall together.

⁵² See Griswold (1986, p.15).

⁵³ Cf., Griswold (1999a, pp. 365, 393) who says: “Yet if Plato had a teaching – call it ‘a philosophy’ – presented through the dialogues taken together, it must be admitted that he went to great lengths to keep it from his readers. For the fact of the matter is that the dialogues give us very few indications as to how they are to be taken together as a coherent body of thought...Nonetheless, it may very well be that after working through individual dialogues appropriately, a pattern of reasoned commitments will emerge...I would certainly concur that there is such a thing as a Platonic philosophy at least in the sense of an interconnected group of questions, a basic paradigm of philosophic inquiry as *dialegethai*, and tentatively held answers”.

However, since the *Euthyphro* and the *Phaedo* fall into what might be described as different genres of Platonic dialogue – the first “Socratic” and one of the so-called “early” dialogues and the second “Platonic” and a so-called “middle” dialogue – I believe that a brief discussion on the significance of this in terms of Plato’s philosophical vision is warranted.

Socratic and Platonic Dialogues

In trying to unify the Platonic corpus, various scholars have sought to classify Plato’s philosophy according to the “developmental” stages of his thought.⁵⁴ Indeed, stylistic and “dramatic” differences between the dialogues seem to lend support to an interpretation along these lines. The group of dialogues which have come to be known as the “Socratic dialogues” – the *Euthyphro*, *Laches*, *Charmides*, *Hippias Major*, *Lysis*, *Ion*, *Hippias Minor*, *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and *Meno* – show Socrates asking “what is?” questions:⁵⁵ the “what is courage?” question of the *Laches*, for example. This, we can be certain, is what the historical Socrates actually did. In his *Memorabilia* (of Socrates), Xenophon says that Socrates held discussion not about the cosmos or the nature of the physical world, but about human things. The questions he pursued were always concerned with such stuff as the nature of piety and impiety, courage and cowardice, and honour and dishonour.⁵⁶ Because these dialogues invariably end in *aporia*, they have been taken as a demonstration of Socrates’ particular way of examination and sceptical inquiry – known as the *elenchus*. What positive doctrine

⁵⁴ See the Introduction by John Cooper to Plato (1997a).

⁵⁵ See Vlastos (1991, p.46) who says: “I have been speaking of a Socrates in Plato. There are two of them. In different segments of Plato’s corpus two philosophers bear that name. The individual remains the same. But in different dialogues he pursues philosophies so different that they could not have been depicted as cohabiting the same brain throughout unless it had been the brain of a schizophrenic”.

⁵⁶ Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, s. 1.1.16 (translations are from Xenophon, 1923).

has been gathered from the dialogues is seen as reflecting Socrates' own beliefs – for example, his particular understanding that the virtues are one (as wisdom). And so, the comment that these dialogues are to be viewed as “interesting less for their philosophical import than for their portrayal of Socrates”⁵⁷ is not unexpected from within this school of thought.

The later dialogues – classified into Plato's “middle” and “late” periods – are seen to be the work of a maturing Plato, one who has started to put together some of his own thoughts. He continues making use of Socrates, but now dramatically, as a mouthpiece for his own views, and in some cases not at all. In the *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, *Parmenides* and *Protagoras* Socrates no longer just carries on with his sceptical questioning. Rather, according to this school of thought, a metaphysical system is proposed by Plato via Socrates – the famous “theory of Forms” – and with it a comprehensive account of the soul, becoming and eternity. In Plato's “late” period – which includes the *Timaeus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Philebus* and *Laws* – Socrates' role is diminished, and so too is the “theory of Forms”. Examinations of logic, metaphysics, cosmology, and politics are presented, often without the active participation of Socrates – he doesn't appear at all in the *Laws*.⁵⁸

Although seeming to explain the disparities and similarities amongst the dialogues, this way of approaching Plato's thought precludes us from fully entering into the philosophical merits of each dialogue on its own terms. This is because the significance of each dialogue has already been predetermined based on some arbitrary classification uniting dramatic presentation and philosophical

⁵⁷ Introduction by Jane O'Grady to Plato (1997b, p. xii).

⁵⁸ See the Introduction by John Cooper to Plato (1997a, p. xiii).

development. The problem is that such a classification tends to reduce rather than expand our understanding. Shorey has noted, for example, that the “developmental” thesis leads scholars

...to assume that Plato was capable of producing a masterpiece like the *Protagoras* before his most characteristic philosophical and ethical conceptions had taken shape in his mind, and that throughout the period of his maturest writings his leading ideas were in a state of Heraclitean flux, or were being casually developed from year to year.⁵⁹

And further that “[t]he dogmatism of his later works has been as much exaggerated as the Socratic doubt of the minor [early] dialogues”.⁶⁰

Of concern is the questionable, because circular, strategy of *seeking* the historical Socrates (within the “early” dialogues) on the assumption that Plato’s purpose in writing the dialogues was merely to *exhibit* Socrates thus. Following this method, interpretation is bound to a predetermined assumption about Plato, and what facts gathered to support this assumption could only be treated as factual *by way of* this assumption. If we give up this circularity we are liberated to view the dialogues in a more comprehensive light, and thereby gain a greater insight into the significance of what Socrates says and does within each of the dramas. Only *after* we have done this can we make a judgement as to whether there is nothing more to them than Socratic *elenchus* and the proposition that the virtues are unified. On this score, I will argue that when we look to the dialogues themselves we find that their separation into historical and philosophical categories is too strict, despite the fact that these dialogues *are* separable by genre.

⁵⁹ Shorey (1980, pp. 3-4).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Support for this argument is furnished by the philosophical position presented in the “early” dialogues which, according to the evidence I will present, does not preclude the position presented in the later dialogues, and vice versa. On this score Desjardins argues that

...a major difference between Plato’s earlier and later dialogues lies not so much (or not primarily) in the content of discussion, but rather (and especially) in the degree to which he moves from implicit to explicit – appreciating the ironies and ambiguities that carry his message, whereas in the later phases of his writing he becomes increasingly explicit in elaborating such ambiguities and ironies...Like many of the early dialogues, the *Euthyphro* exploits indirection, oblique suggestion, and dramatic tension, while a later dialogue like the *Sophist* tends to present itself as starkly explicit.⁶¹

And so others, by way of an unprejudiced reading, have found in the “early” dialogues more than just a combination of Socratic doubt and undemanding beliefs (such as the unity of the virtues, or a conventional religious outlook). Griswold, in his study of the *Protagoras*, for example, is convincing in showing that Socrates puts it to his conversation partner – Protagoras – that the virtues are unified in order to refute Protagoras’ “virtue-neutral” understanding that courage is not at all the same as the other virtues.⁶²

And even some of those who hold to the “early, middle, late” thesis cannot fully reconcile the “Socratic” Socrates with the reality of the dialogues. In her study of the *Euthyphro*, Weiss argues that holiness (or piety) is presented in the dialogue as distinct from the other Socratic virtues, as it precludes wisdom. In order to square

⁶¹ Desjardins (2004, pp. 162-163).

⁶² Griswold (1999b, p. 283).

this with what she takes to be Socrates' belief about the virtues, she offers the explanation that

Only if Socrates entertains another model of virtue, one in which the attainment of full-blown moral expertise is not a necessary condition for virtue, can the unity of the virtues be restored. I believe that Socrates does set forth an alternative to the knowledge-centred model of virtue, an alternative more accessible to ordinary human beings, a model that emphasizes moral inquiry and health of the soul.⁶³

With her philosophical appreciation of the *Euthyphro*, Weiss steps beyond the historical Socrates. Her attempt to reconstruct what Socrates must have believed is, despite all her wishes, a literary and philosophical reconstruction and is, thereby, an account not just of Socrates himself, but of Plato. Through her efforts to reconcile the dialogues with the notion that it is merely a historical Socrates presented in the "early" dialogues, Weiss shows just the opposite: Socrates only comes to view through the dialogues, and through the dialogues we *cannot* find a simple rendition of the virtues and wisdom.

I will close this section with some further remarks by Shorey:

Assuming that Plato undertook to illustrate in brief dramatic discussions the ethical logomachies of the day, he would by hypothesis as a rule abstain from Pythagorean myths, criticism of pre-Socratic thinkers, demonstrations of immortality, psychological or physiological digression, and dogmatic developments of his own philosophy. It may be argued that such dramatic dialogues form as a whole an earlier group. It cannot be maintained that they mark the stages of Plato's own progress. The definitions of the virtues proposed in the fourth book of the *Republic*, interpreted by

⁶³ Weiss (1994, p. 281).

their context, meet the dramatic difficulties of the *Laches*, *Charmides*, *Protagoras*, and *Meno*.⁶⁴

The Philosophical Drama of Socrates' Life and Death

In the *Euthyphro* Socrates speaks to a religious prophet about piety in order, so he says, to learn its true nature. He does this under the shadow of his upcoming trial, where he is being charged with impiety and injustice.⁶⁵ These charges have been brought by a group of young politicians who, as Socrates explains, are able to broach them because of the bad reputation propagated by his "first accusers", amongst whom he makes specific mention of Aristophanes.⁶⁶ The *Euthyphro* thereby presents itself as a philosophical defence of sorts, against the caricature painted by Aristophanes in his *Clouds*.⁶⁷

As a defence, though, it makes its point only negatively. *Euthyphro* rushes away at the end of the dialogue, confused and unwilling to discuss the matter further; for no definition of piety was offered which didn't in some way pervert history. The aspiration of the prophet, his aspiration to attain a perfect vision of the gods, was shown to be frustrated by his pious devotion to historical gods made eternal. We too are left feeling slightly irritated. The dialogue, with its focus on gods and definitions, remains frustratingly tied to the abstract. In fact, no mention is made of *souls*, as has been pointed out by others.⁶⁸ We are, thereby, left at the point where a defence of philosophy should begin.

⁶⁴ Shorey (1980, p. 15).

⁶⁵ *Apology* 24b8-c1.

⁶⁶ *Apology* 18a7-d2; 19c2-6.

⁶⁷ See Howland (1998, p. 100) who says that the *Euthyphro* in some ways reproduces the plot of Aristophanes' *Clouds*.

⁶⁸ Blits (1980, p. 19); Strauss (1996, p. 20).

Such a defence begins with the drama of a dead Socrates, having his story retold – from the grave, as it were – by another. The *Phaedo* is, both in drama and the words of Socrates, a philosophical prophecy.⁶⁹ It thus takes off where the *Euthyphro* left us. Indeed, it is a philosophical prophecy not about gods *per se*, but about the divinity of souls.⁷⁰ That the question of the soul's immortality is worthy of some consideration, that in fact there could be nothing more significantly personal for us, is expressed by Socrates in the dialogue with reference to Aristophanes; whom he says could not accuse him of just babbling or speaking about things which do not concern him.⁷¹ In making fun of Aristophanes' comic portrayal of him meddling in silly inquiries and other people's affairs, he defends the gravity of philosophy. His defence in the *Phaedo*, we might say, addresses the accusation at the point where philosophy and religion meet – the ethical.

With these interpretative considerations in mind I will now turn to Aristophanes' *Clouds* and present a close reading of the play, showing the deficiencies of the philosophical life as understood from the perspective of the traditional civic religion. I will also show that the *Clouds* in defending tradition does thereby surpass it, at once exposing and dissolving its own origins. A return to these origins is only possible by way of the religious prophet who, in recreating the origins of traditional religion, brings it within the realm of philosophy.

⁶⁹ For example: Socrates has a recurring dream at the beginning of the dialogue urging him to make music, whereby he subsequently composes a hymn to Apollo – the god of prophecy (60c6-c1); see his “theory of recollection” which describes the phenomenon of recognising what we knew when we were dead (72e2-76d3); and, Socrates says that he is no less prophetic in nature than the swans which belong to Apollo, who, because they can see into their future death, sing and rejoice on their death-day (84e3-85b7).

⁷⁰ The dialogue was known to the ancients with the descriptive title “On the Soul”.

⁷¹ 70b8-c1.

Chapter 3: Divine Authority in Aristophanes' *Clouds*

Whenever the truth is uncovered, the artist gazes enraptured at whatever covering remains, but theoretical man takes delight and satisfaction in the covering that has been cast aside, and takes his greatest delight in a process of uncovering that is always successful and always achieved by his own efforts. Science would not exist if it were concerned only with that *one* naked goddess.⁷²

Aristophanes is perhaps the best point of reference if we wish to understand the criticism of philosophy from the perspective of civic religion. In this chapter I will present an interpretation of Aristophanes' *Clouds*, and with this show what, according to Aristophanes, are the deficiencies of philosophy. I will begin this interpretation by drawing a distinction between the first philosophers – the natural philosophers and sophists – and the religious tradition. I will also present what I see as the relevant connections between natural philosophy and sophistry; connections which I believe are relevant to understanding Aristophanes' critique of philosophy.

Natural Philosophy

It may well have been that natural philosophy and religion could co-exist peacefully as long as natural philosophy did not concern itself with the whole truth. For if gods and the natural world remain separate then it is rightly the domain of religion to guide human affairs. I would argue, however, that it was not peace but truth which the natural philosophers desired; and if the natural world is the touchstone of truth it is not long before the world of the gods is exposed as merely a human fabrication. This is so even if it is conceded that the traditional gods do not

⁷² Nietzsche (1993, s. 15).

need to be true in the same sense as the natural world; if, for example, it is argued that the traditional religion, because it precedes or transcends us, already defines for us the truth concerning *human* affairs. And thus, I believe, that when the natural philosophers sought the truth they sought not just the truth of the natural world, but the truth which *is* Nature. This directly challenged the traditional poets' proclamations that the desire for knowledge is futile and dangerous.⁷³ More to the point, it challenged tradition itself, for the desire to know the natural world arises with the doubt that tradition is sufficient for human happiness. Such desire is, I believe, inseparable from the desire to know the cosmos as a whole: the nature of what is supposed to be the highest things is called into question.

And thus we find, for example, Xenophanes, taking to task commonly accepted beliefs about the gods:

...if cows and horses or lions had hands,
Or could draw with their hands and make
things as men can, Horses would have drawn horse-like gods,
cows cow-like gods,
And each species would have made the gods' bodies just like their own.⁷⁴

The traditional divinities are, by Xenophanes' account, nothing more than the gloss of convention. Only by stripping back this gloss can we see what the divine might be – “He remains forever in the same place, entirely motionless...”⁷⁵ He is, when all is said and done, unknowable.

With some effort, however, humans can know the *natural* things; and hence Xenophanes believed that “The gods did not intimate all things to men straight

⁷³ For example, Sophocles' *Oedipus* (1906, p. 154): “Pride is the germ of kings; Pride, when puffed up, vainly, with many things Unseasonable, unfitting, mounts the wall, Only to hurry to that fatal fall...”

⁷⁴ See Clement (*Miscellanies*, 5.109.2 Stählin/Früchtel) in Waterfield (2000, p. 27).

⁷⁵ See Simplicius (*Commentary on Aristotle's 'Physics'*, CAG IX, 23.11-12, 20 Diels) in Waterfield (2000, p. 27).

away, But in time, through seeking, their [i.e., men's] discoveries improve".⁷⁶ The natural world is knowable, because with study its true nature can be discerned. We could say that the natural world is not *inherently* concealed, as are the gods, but merely *conventionally* concealed. Such a distinction does, I believe, lie at the heart of natural philosophy. To understand it we must return to the beginning – to Thales.

Thales is commonly regarded as the first Western philosopher. He argued that the *true* essence of the cosmos is water. To us this realisation may not seem profound, but as Nietzsche has zestfully stated:

When Thales says, 'Everything is water,' man is startled up out of his wormlike mauling of and crawling about among the individual sciences; he divines the last solution of things and masters through this divination the common perplexity of the lower grades of knowledge.⁷⁷

The question which springs to my mind when I enter Thales' thought is: if water is the essence of the whole, and the changes we see before us in the everyday world are merely different aspects of water, what stands within the whole to effect change? How are plurality and change possible when in reality the whole is universal? This is an important question, because with this question the natural philosophers must attribute movement within nature to the divine. Thales was thus said to have commented that the soul was the principle of all movement, and that all things were full of gods.⁷⁸ Thus the *supernatural* is required in so far as it is the source of creation within the natural whole. This understanding of the divine is obviously very different to the traditional understanding, in that movement rather than

⁷⁶ See John of Stobi (*Anthology* 1.8.2 Wachsmuth/Hense) in Waterfield (2000, p. 30).

⁷⁷ Nietzsche (1911, s. 3).

⁷⁸ Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 405a, 411a (translations are from Aristotle, 1986).

stability is seen as the essence of creation.⁷⁹ Whereas the traditional gods were regarded as the source of eternal speech, and the vicissitudes of nature could be understood in terms of this eternal speech – as divine justice – Thales’ gods do not speak, they merely order. Devoid of all conventional clothing, the stability of the traditional gods is dissolved into the eternity of natural movement.

Later natural philosophers, such as Anaxagoras and Empedocles, developed more satisfying theories, though without ever overcoming the sense that our existence is merely the phantasm of some greater material or metaphysical being. Anaxagoras invoked Mind to explain the creation of things from the initial mixture of all with all. Empedocles explained the cyclic nature of creation, by breaking it down into the attraction of like (Love) and the repulsion of unlike (Strife) – thereby accounting for the unification and separation of things. Both Mind and Love and Strife stand at the beginning of creation, *within* the material stuff of the cosmos. Mind we can obviously place alongside Thales’ gods, because only movement or a *chance* order is presented to us; Mind is thus unknowable in itself. Love and Strife, however, appear to present something more than just chance, for each is the source of a particular movement. The cycle of unification and separation suggests a limit not present, for example, in Mind. Love and Strife explain movement or change *within* limits.⁸⁰ Nonetheless, for this to be more than chance we would have to have some understanding of a broader limit, of that which gives shape to Love, and with its absence delivers Strife. Without knowing this limit, our vision or understanding

⁷⁹ I use “creation” here in the Greek sense, as an appearing or arising, and not in the Christian sense of something coming to be from nothing.

⁸⁰ And so Empedocles said that “...no mortal thing has a beginning, nor does it end in death and obliteration; there is only mixing and then a separating of what was mixed. But by mortal men these process are named ‘beginnings’” Aëtius (*Opinions* 1.30.1 Diels) in Waterfield (2000, p. 145).

would extend only so far as movement towards unity and away. Understood as the ground or source of movement the divine is thus wholly enigmatic. It is present, yet unknowable. With this, the natural world is separated from the moral. And with this scientific understanding the stage is set for the sophists, who will present these new insights in light of the political.

I argue that Socrates is presented by Aristophanes in the *Clouds* as part natural philosopher and part sophist. Aristophanes is able to weave these archetypes together to fabricate the persona of Socrates because, as I contend, the absence of the *human* in the divine is the thread which connects natural philosophy to sophistry. In this sense, the natural philosophers *qua* natural philosophy are unconcerned about themselves, and what it means to live well. Indeed, the sophists are testament to the fact that based on natural philosophy one cannot even distinguish between better and worse lives. If the gods are only made visible by human fabrication, if the gods cannot be understood except as genesis, then divine speech is collapsed into human perspective. Better and worse lives are not naturally better or worse, merely conventionally better or worse. Thus the sophist Protagoras argued that man is the measure of all things.⁸¹ The distinction between nature and convention is for the natural philosophers the path to truth. And thus I contend that the sundering of speech from truth allows the sophists to argue *both* that speech is its own judge and that speech cannot be judged. Hence, Protagoras argues that all perspectives are true, because we are in no position to judge. All human speech is false from the perspective of the divine, and all true from the human perspective. Human and divine are, I believe, irrevocably separated in the accounts of both the natural

⁸¹ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1062b.

philosophers and sophists. It is this separation which I believe Aristophanes sees as dangerous, a separation which comes about with the denial of the sanctity of tradition.

The Clouds

In the *Clouds*⁸² we first come to know Socrates as a natural philosopher. Through the words of a student we see Socrates wondering how many of its own feet a flea could jump. He solves the puzzle by dipping two of the flea's feet in wax, stepping-out the distance in wax flea-feet slippers. Such magnificent displays of insignificance continue; for Socrates has also solved the question of whether a gnat hums through its mouth or backside (144-164). Its backside! Socrates brilliantly deduces. We can't help but giggle at Socrates' silliness. His unconcern with the common or everyday prevents him from seeing what we see. Unable to see what is comic, he is unable to distinguish between the important and the trivial.

Strepsiades, an old-fashioned, frugal, and rather simple country bumpkin, has come to Socrates' *Thinkery* to learn how to get out of paying his debts – debts which were brought about by the extravagant lifestyle of his son, Pheidippides. He wants Pheidippides to learn how to defeat his creditors with the “winning” speech.

Upon Strepsiades request for help, Socrates conjures the Clouds. The Clouds are able to take on any form they please: they are nothing more than their nature, which is ever-flowing (275).⁸³ The unsteadiness of the Clouds is stabilised somewhat

⁸² Translations are from West and West (1998).

⁸³ Consider Anaximenes as commented on by Simplicius (*Commentary on Aristotle's 'Physics'*, CAG IX, 24.26-25.1 Diels) in Waterfield (2000, pp. 17-18): “Anaximenes of Miletus... shares his [Anaximander's] view that the underlying nature of things is single and infinite; however, unlike Anaximander, Anaximenes' underlying nature is not boundless, but specific, since he says that it is air, and claims that it is thanks to rarefaction and condensation that it manifests in different forms in

by the nature of the witness. In exposing the nature of the witness, the Clouds appear differently for different people, and tend to show up what is in their character shameful or base. For example, Socrates says that the Clouds in the presence of Simon, a plunderer of public property (351), made his nature apparent by becoming wolves (352). In Socrates' case, the Clouds are seen as providing us with notions, dialect, and mind, (317), along with providing nourishment to the sophists and "...men who are impostors about the things aloft..." (333). They excite in Strepsiades the urge to fart and defecate, and to quibble about smoke (293-295).

Socrates prattles (he is a priest of nonsense talk (359)); Strepsiades farts. On this point, Marianetti⁸⁴ states that the Clouds respect Socrates because they call him the best "sophist-of-the-things-aloft" (see 360). This interpretation misses Aristophanes' sarcasm, though. The Clouds call Socrates a priest of subtlest babble (see 358) immediately before they proclaim that they would not listen to any of the other sophists-of-the-things-aloft (i.e., he being the best). Socrates' description of the Clouds and Strepsiades' farts are, I believe, despite what appears to be obvious differences, in essence the same.⁸⁵ At first glance, the crudity of Strepsiades seems on an altogether different plane to the babbling of Socrates. Surely mind, dialect and notions are worthy visions? However, when we consider the *real* nature of the Clouds as outlined by Socrates, we realise that these visions are more like fantasies. Socrates argues that the Clouds come not from Zeus but from the "ethereal vortex"

different things...[Anaximenes] too makes motion eternal, and in his view motion is the cause of change as well".

⁸⁴ Marianetti (1992, p.82).

⁸⁵ O'Regan (1992, pp. 49-66) presents persuasive and insightful arguments addressing this point among others.

(379); from nothing, as it were. The farts of Strepsiades are in fact a more candid or honest response to the Clouds than Socrates' visions.

Initially, Strepsiades was unable to see anything *but* clouds – mist, dew and smoke (330) – nothing more than raw material. It is Strepsiades who in fact sees what Socrates' assertions amount to – that the Clouds are insubstantial, that they can appear as anything because they are nothing. Strepsiades, in his traditional outlook, has always imagined that the rain was Zeus pissing through a sieve (373). The clouds were really nothing other than Zeus. Without Zeus, though, the clouds are no more than receptacles for the natural things they produce – if not the divine piss of Zeus, then merely rain. It is his sophistication, and not his insight, which allows Socrates to create the substance of the Clouds from nothing. Thus the farts of Strepsiades are the crude yet more honest analogue to Socrates' sophisticated mental cunning. Philosophically, the differences between Strepsiades and Socrates are not real. Aristophanes has seen through the fancy dress of Socrates, so to speak, and underneath the garment of words is nothing but hot air.

Aristophanes does give us some idea of what is the right way to view the Clouds. The Clouds themselves proclaim what is their part within the traditional cosmic whole:

Lofty guardian, great
Zeus, tyrant of gods,
I first call upon to join the Chorus;
and the great-strengthened director of the trident,
wild heaver of
earth and salty sea;
and our great-named father,

Aether most revered, life-nurturer of all;
and the steerer of horses, who
covers with rays exceedingly bright
the plain of earth, a daimon great
among gods and mortals (563-574).

The Clouds belong to a hierarchy based on tradition or parental authority. They thus praise the traditional practices of Athenian piety as expressed by way of sacrifices, myths, and religious festivals.⁸⁶ It is not to Strepsiades that they present themselves thus, but to the audience. The audience, we might imagine, is being brought back to their senses. The traditional account is being reinstated so that we may understand the full import of both Strepsiades' and Socrates' behaviour.

A Mismatched Marriage

Strepsiades, who loves the simple life of the farmer, married a girl from town; she who loves luxury and the good life (41-52). This mismatched marriage, so Strepsiades realises, is the cause of his present problems. His son, Pheidippides, rather than following in his father's footsteps, is drawn to the extravagant lifestyle of his mother (68-74). Strepsiades cannot control his son's spending, nor was he initially able to make his son join the Thinkery. Harriot⁸⁷ argues that the vital issue here is parental authority. I argue that this is merely one aspect. For when Pheidippides is at last persuaded by Strepsiades to visit the Thinkery, the authority that Strepsiades exercises points in the "wrong" direction. Strepsiades' authority points Pheidippides toward Socrates, and to the dissolution of tradition – against parental authority. It is not only parental authority which is the vital issue, therefore, but also what binds or

⁸⁶ Marianetti (1992, pp. 81-82).

⁸⁷ Harriot (1986, p. 169).

holds the city together. If Strepsiades had married a girl like himself, a simple girl, then he would be in no such predicament. A harmonious marriage of like minds would have meant that Strepsiades would not have to fight to maintain the affairs of his house; these affairs would have been preserved as a matter of course. The traditional ways would have preserved Strepsiades from his own defects, as it were. As it stands, Strepsiades has passed beyond the point where tradition can offer suitable moral guidance; outside those bounds he resorts to vulgar and rapacious means: he wants Pheidippides to argue against his creditors (110-115). In sum, I argue that Strepsiades when he finds himself *outside* the tradition, which in this case was brought about by a mismatched marriage, is reduced to vulgarity.

It is at this point in the drama we encounter another mismatched pair of characters: personified as Just Speech and Unjust Speech. These are brought together by Socrates to demonstrate for Pheidippides the art of sophistry. Socrates is, it seems, also a matchmaker. He is not the only one, though. It is no coincidence that it is also a matchmaker whom Strepsiades believes is behind his current woes; for Strepsiades makes reference to the matchmaker behind his own marriage. He curses: "Oh, would that the matchmaker might perish evilly, she who stirred me up to marry your mother!" (41-42). Presumably Strepsiades would not have been aware of his own ambition were it not for the matchmaker; he would have been satisfied with what he knew, his rustic life, and simple ways. On this, Marianetti⁸⁸ argues that Strepsiades' fascination with the matchmaker's proposal shows that he was not all that pleased with his rustic way of life. I think we should keep in mind, though, that Strepsiades' desire may have been fulfilled when all he knew was simplicity. Ambition only

⁸⁸ Marianetti (1992, p.85).

arises for Strepsiades as the desire to *return* to the simple life; his traditional way of life. This unity, the unity which would have arisen from a simple marriage, is impossible with his current unstable matrimonial mix. The mismatch with his partner initiates an ambitious and escalating desire to re-harmonise. And maybe Socrates' matchmaking is equally as liberating and dangerous.

The Speeches

Just Speech stands for respect for tradition, respect for what is older, because the ancients were wise. Unjust Speech argues that if we judge the behaviour of the gods by the traditional understanding of justice then we must judge them to be unjust; and since the gods are by the traditional account the standard by which we judge what is just and unjust, justice does not really exist (901-905). On this immoderate account, and with the shameful uncovering of the gods (see 908, 911), Just Speech takes issue. Irreverence is the ground of what is base and ignoble in the city, and thus the attitude of Unjust Speech reflects the lack of respect for everything that is traditional, and hence worthy.

Even though Just Speech is referred to as the stronger speech, the so-called weaker, Unjust Speech, wins the debate. Unjust Speech appeals to what is the nature of the public advocates, orators and indeed the greater number of Athenians (1097) – they being passive homosexuals (1099) so concedes Just Speech – to secure victory (1096-1104). Just Speech appeals to moderation, to the distinction made by what is shameful. And this, I argue, is why he loses. Just Speech's final stab at defeating Unjust Speech shows the path of his descent (1083-1085):

What if he [Pheidippides] has a radish stuck up his rear end and has his hair

plucked out with hot ash because he obeys you [the Unjust Speech]?

By what argument will he be able to say that he's not buggered?⁸⁹

Shame, because it is dependent on public agreement, is only a valid appeal if in fact the public are not shameless; that is, if the public value moderation. Just Speech is forced to argue in favour of tradition from a position which could only be understood for what it is by those who are traditionalists. As the dispute between Unjust Speech and Just Speech shows, whenever the traditional is exposed as merely one way of life amongst others, and forced to argue for its own value, then such debate already moves beyond the boundaries of tradition. Just Speech is in the end forced to join Unjust Speech or, as he puts it, to desert his position and camp with the Athenian debauchees (1102-1104).

Opposition to tradition, or just plain opposition, is admitted by Unjust Speech to be his ultimate weapon, for it can destroy all speeches (1038-1042). The home advantage of Unjust Speech is displayed on the eristic battlefield, where the only weapon available to either side is speech. This advantage is gained because a defence of tradition in speech can only be successful *as* a speech if it is directed towards those who already value what is valued by the tradition. A defence of tradition can only point to what is already presumed to be dear to anyone with common sense. Hating the marketplace, foregoing hot baths, being ashamed of the shameful, and respecting one's elders are instances of what is for Just Speech appropriate conduct (989-999), and appropriate or modest conduct leads to good health and a well-balanced sexual appetite (1003-1023). Good health and a well-balanced sexual appetite are, of course, characteristic of a moderate kind of life; and who would not want the bright

⁸⁹ West and West (1998, n. 181) note that Just Speech is pointing out that Pheidippides will be infamous if he follows the advice of Unjust Speech.

complexion (1012) promised to us by Just Speech? The ends which circumscribe the appeals of Just Speech do not, thereby, move beyond the body; they only show themselves in practice, not in theory. Just Speech, I argue, praises a way of life where the good body can only be evaluated *with* reference to the body. Tradition is guidance by way of what over the ages has secured the safety of the city – restraint of bodily desire. And, as we shall see, once bodily desire has been let loose, tradition is in no position to close the gate, for the mere appearance of a gate is tantamount to its dissolution.

It is the divine soul to which Unjust Speech appeals in liberating the argument. Relevant to this, Nussbaum makes the valuable point that "...the opposition between *nomos* and *physis* must either be concealed or denied if *nomos* is to continue to offer its benefits".⁹⁰ This observation of Nussbaum's makes explicit what is the fatal position of Just Speech. Using the body as the arbiter of nature, Just Speech can only hold his position if he can equate the body with what is good by nature. The welfare of the city is, however, shown by Just Speech (e.g., 916-917) to be the limit of the kinship between the body and what is by nature good. Hence it doesn't take much effort for Unjust Speech to transcend the city and expose Just Speech's ill-fated, because conventional or "untrue", pleadings. And so Unjust Speech begins with the premise that the body is characteristically human relative to the divine; hence the soul is characteristically divine. It is through the soul, therefore, that the gods expose their divinity. Excellence in soul (1048-1049), courage or manliness (1052), and the life of pleasure are congruent with the life orientated by the gods, he argues. Moderation is, then, antithetical to greatness: the gods are hubristic,

⁹⁰ Nussbaum (1980, p. 58).

and hubris is concurrent with divine pleasure. Not only this, hubris is natural. In fact, any behaviour which is necessary by nature (1075), such as sexual desire – the cause of adultery – can be shown to be not unjust. To desire and succumb to the charms of women is indeed the lot of both gods and men, so argues Unjust Speech. In condemning the adulterer one is attempting to transcend what is the natural state of affairs, both divine and human. Adultery is the natural expression of desire, and what is natural can be neither just nor unjust.⁹¹ Justice is a conventional or merely human interpretation of nature, as is true of the traditional account. Since the traditionalist cannot but argue that the gods are the supreme natural beings, any differences in understanding between the human and divine must, argues Unjust Speech, be seen as a false rendering of nature. And a false rendering of nature indicates that we as mortals could render nature more beautifully than nature itself, that we are greater than the gods.⁹² This is the charge brought by Unjust Speech against the traditionalists.

Unjust Speech's argument is, I argue, built on the collapse of the distinction between the human and the divine.⁹³ If Mount Olympus is no different to Athens, then all men are free to become gods. And because the gods are not constrained by convention, because whatever the gods do is by nature good (presuming, as does Unjust Speech, that humans can know what is good for the gods; that the human and divine good is equivalent), mortal/divine desire is self-sanctifying. It is by this route that Unjust Speech shamelessly takes advantage of the traditional account, wherein the hubris of the ancient gods lends religious law its authority. By the traditional

⁹¹ O'Regan (1992, p. 96) points out that adultery breaks down the traditional familial relationship, thereby "asserting the priority of the needs of the body".

⁹² See 1081-1082.

⁹³ See Strauss (1966, p. 31) for a similar observation.

account, if religious law is to be followed because it is right then the ancient gods must engender respect, and also fear. Hence, the hubris of the gods is both respected and feared; Zeus is at once magnificent and terrible.⁹⁴ Unjust Speech plays on respect, while obscuring the fear which separates the hubris of Zeus from the compliance and submissiveness of mortals. Dover notes that

To criticize the divine genealogies propounded by the poets and to attribute the working of the universe to impersonal physical forces uninterested in human behaviour was to lift [it] from the ingenious and the aggressive fears which were believed to have constrained them to obey the law.⁹⁵

Unjust Speech does, however, maintain, in part, the traditional link between gods and humans. By obscuring the fearfulness of the gods, their souls are rendered human-like (or human souls are made divine-like). With this, Unjust Speech can make reference to the gods in a way which is different to, but cannot be entirely rejected by, the traditionalist. Unjust speech “plays” within the conventional understanding to better his own position: he says what he does not truly believe. Without fear, the power of Zeus’ behaviour is reduced to the bodily concerns of mortals: Zeus is merely an adulterer, but still to be respected because ancient. Whereas Just Speech does not move beyond the body, Unjust Speech elevates the soul and so liberates the body. It is hedonism and not wisdom which motivates Unjust Speech.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Hesiod in his *Theogony* describes Zeus thus: “And now Zeus no longer held back his strength. His lungs seethed with anger and he revealed all his power. He charged from the sky, hurtling down from Olympus in a flurry of lightning, hurling thunderbolts one after another, right on target, from his massive hand, a whirlwind of holy flame” (690-695); and in *Works and Days* “The Son of Kronos has laid down the law for humans. Fish and beasts and birds of prey feed on each other, since there’s no justice among them. But to men he gave justice, and that works out all to the good” (318-320). All translations are from Hesiod (1993).

⁹⁵ Dover (1972, p. 112).

⁹⁶ See Nussbaum (1980, p. 64).

We had previously wondered about Socrates' skill at matchmaking. What are we to make of it now? Socrates' skill is exhibited by his bringing together unlike Speeches as if they were alike. Or, more correctly, Socrates forces an appearance of likeness by personifying the "old" and the "new" in speech. It is the "old" which is made to wear – and is suffocated by – the garments of the "new". Socrates, who does not look beyond the cloak of speech, is thereby a visually impaired matchmaker. This impairment, we may assume, is a consequence of his vantage point, from where he looks down on the gods (226-229). One imagines that such a vantage point would bring with it an enlarged vision; however, just as the eye cannot focus on things which are close *and* things which are far away, Socrates' vantage point promotes not greater vision but long-sightedness – or hypermetropia, which literally means "beyond measure". Socrates cannot see what is right in front of his nose, and so the differences between the "old" and "new" in speech do not represent their true differences. As my interpretation of the *Clouds* has shown us, the dangers or problems which arise when we bring together "old" and "new", or unlike, become apparent when we look to everyday life. Such a mismatch is, I argue, confused in speech but exposed by the body.

Speech and Practice

When Pheidippides is debating his father later in the dialogue, he allows Strepsiades to choose either the stronger or weaker speech (1336-1338). Pheidippides knows that any appeal to tradition that his father may invoke is neutralised by debate. Tradition is killed when it becomes just another speech: only in practice is tradition maintained.

Pheidippides does not help his father outwit his creditors, as Strepsiades had hoped. He beats him instead. Appealing to nature, on the one hand, and the contradictions of tradition on the other, Pheidippides is easily able to counter the pleadings of his simple father. According to Pheidippides, speech supports his actions (see 1336). Hence, Pheidippides has been corrupted not only by Unjust Speech. He has been corrupted because Socrates allowed Unjust Speech to defeat Just Speech. Socrates showed Pheidippides that it is on the eristic battlefield that tradition can always be defeated. Justice is thus equated with the winning speech. And the winning speech is not settled by age, but by the cunning of the debater. Beating one's father and mother thus finds support in a speech which wins. As readers of the play, we can appreciate the comedy and also the inappropriateness of Pheidippides' behaviour: we can see that the practice of parental beating is wrong irrespective of the argument. This is, I believe, Aristophanes point: speech is not bad, but speech which transcends good and bad practice is dangerous. Good practice is safe practice, and conservative guidance by the gods or ancient wisdom is safer than the audacity of human argument.

Just as the Clouds reflect the baser aspects of character, so too does the speech of unchecked debate. Under the "traditional" way of life, human practice follows ancient speech, and any debate moves within divine speech (e.g., interpreting Apollo at the Delphic Oracle); that is to say, within the tradition. To debate this tradition is to follow Prometheus. Prometheus gave divine fire to humans; the sophists do the same with divine speech. In following Prometheus, though, the sophists collapse the distinction between divine and mortal. No mortal could ever steal fire from the gods, but speech can be wrestled from the mouths of gods by mortals if the gods speak

mortal words. That the Athenian gods speak mortal words is the thesis of the natural philosophers, and this is the thesis which Pheidippides follows when he states that the traditional law is not divine but conventional (see 1421-1424). All speech is a-natural. Indistinguishable from shameless mortal speech the “better” loses on balance of self-interest and so the shameful comes to rule the everyday world. Even though it is the practice of sophistry which destroys tradition, it is villainous or shameful desire which ultimately brings about ruin. The body if unregulated is no different to chaos. Sophistry sets free the body, thereby liberating self-interest. The setting-straight of self-interest, rather than confronting sophistry head-on, is thereby the path to reinstating the good way of life. Thus the leading Cloud implies that sophistry is in the end not the true culprit, rather it is the shameful practices which sophistry liberates, and which, because of just punishment from the gods, lead to our ruin (see 1444-1461). A liberated body causes the suffering of all in the end. Respect for the ancient gods, on the other hand, maintains the distinction between better and worse ways of life, and is therefore the basis for the shaping of bad character into good.

Divine Justice

Newell argues that we should not understand Aristophanes to be showing that Socrates is justly punished when his Thinkery is burnt down. Rather, “[Aristophanes] was having fun with Socrates’ unique educational approach by showing the ludicrous extremes to which it might go when faced with an uneducable and corrupt individual”.⁹⁷ He presents a number of arguments to support this

⁹⁷ Newell (1999, p. 119).

conclusion: (1) Strepsiades and not Socrates is the protagonist; (2) it is Unjust Speech and not Socrates who corrupts Pheidippides; (3) Socrates' irony precludes us from attributing to him any stable teaching (just like the Clouds); and, (4) Strepsiades is not a "clear-sighted champion of piety" and so how could we imagine that he was defending justice by burning the Thinkery?

I believe that many of Newell's premises are correct, but I cannot say that I agree with the conclusion that he draws. It is precisely the ambiguity of Socrates' teachings – his presentation of both Just Speech and Unjust Speech as if they were equal – which is shown to be merely a sophisticated or illusory version of Strepsiades' crudity. Strepsiades' liberated urges are the accompaniment to Socrates' empty theory. That Strepsiades is the protagonist does not stop us from drawing out what is the connection between his overtly crude behaviour and the more subtle behaviour of Socrates: Strepsiades (the protagonist) leads us to Socrates. The burning of Socrates' Thinkery by Strepsiades is in this sense, as pointed out by Newell, not retribution by a "clear-sighted champion of piety"; but neither has it nothing to do with piety (as Newell argues). It is the natural (or, more correctly, fate willed by Hermes – see 1508-1509) consequence of Socrates' teachings. Strepsiades has, in the end, returned to the natural order of things; he is bringing about the will of the gods and has not, as Newell argues (incorrectly I believe), wreaked havoc solely because of his own corruption.

It is Socrates who is in the end seen running from the Thinkery, pursued by Strepsiades. Socrates is justly punished for forgetting the gods. The Thinkery, where natural philosophy and the art of sophistry are practised, cannot remove itself entirely from the everyday world. The natural philosopher cannot distinguish

between the better and the worse and this means that the serious and the comic cannot be understood rightly. Aristophanes shows us that Socrates is unaware of the danger of his own teachings. He treats the insignificant with as much reverence as the significant – he puts the gnat next to the divine. Socrates' way of life is comic because he does not understand what is truly serious. Tradition, so says Aristophanes, is best at designating for us what is important in human affairs. That Socrates and his Thinkery is something to be laughed at may not cause much concern if his ideas were kept from the likes of Strepsiades and Pheidippides. But Socrates cannot see his own comic nature. Socrates represents, by Aristophanes' account, the comedy of natural philosophy, which is also the danger of sophistry. By showing the comedy and danger of Socrates' philosophy, Aristophanes shows how sensible and true to the good life is tradition.

Aristophanes' Socrates

One may, after having read the above account, dismiss Aristophanes' rendition of Socrates as unfair. Wasn't Socrates more than just another natural philosopher/sophist? Nussbaum⁹⁸ has, I think, put forward a strong case that Aristophanes does not mistake the nature of Socrates nor deliberately present him as someone that he was not.⁹⁹ Her perspective is somewhat different to Murray's¹⁰⁰ who also argues that Aristophanes "understands" Socrates. Murray believes that Aristophanes understood Socrates in the same way as Plato. Thus, he is not really presented in the *Clouds* as a sophist. The *Clouds* is all about poking fun at Strepsiades,

⁹⁸ Nussbaum (1980).

⁹⁹ Of course, this does not mean that Aristophanes did not present a caricature of Socrates – he was, after all, trying to make us laugh.

¹⁰⁰ Murray (1968, pp. 95-100). See also pp. 46-50.

contrasting his “low-brow” manner with Socrates’ “high-brow”. The *Clouds* does not actually offer any sharp critique of Socrates as such.

However, if this were true, Aristophanes’ understanding of Socrates would be inconsequential; for the play (so it would go) does not really engage Socrates himself, but merely his sophistication. If this were our view then we would have to conclude, wrongly I believe, that Aristophanes has nothing at all to say about Socrates.

Nussbaum is, I believe, more persuasive. She argues

(1) that, in respects essential to the play, the assimilation of Socrates to some of his contemporaries suggests an interesting criticism of his thought; (2) that the interesting criticism can legitimately be found in the play; and (3) that, far from being irrelevant to our understanding of the Platonic Socrates, the *Clouds* anticipates the main lines along which Plato, in the *Republic*, modifies the Socratic program of moral education.¹⁰¹

The gist of Nussbaum’s argument does not then hinge on the theoretical truth of philosophy, but rather its political or educational aspirations: philosophy may be deficient *despite* its truth.¹⁰² Aristophanes favours practice over theory because theory is too dangerous, too ambiguous. Although there is the potential for the alignment of practical and theoretical wisdom – for practical wisdom to know itself, as it were – this potential does not in any way counter the likelihood that theoretical wisdom will degenerate into sophistry. Tradition is safe in a way that philosophy can never be. The very blindness of tradition, what is from the perspective of philosophy its defect, is what holds or binds the city together.

¹⁰¹ Nussbaum (1980, p. 50).

¹⁰² Rosen (1987, p. 127) notes that Aristophanes is aware of this tension between theory and practice. He recognises that “the highest allegiance of theory is to logos rather than to justice”.

So despite our concerns, it could be that Socrates was open to critique as if he were just another natural philosopher/sophist. Theory cannot fully account for good practice; theory must be enacted, it does not enact. Indeed, theory is potentially blind to all distinctions which show themselves in practice.

The truth of this critique does not, however, sanctify Aristophanes' position; the blindness of tradition and the body could just as well produce corrupt practice – we would never know if we limit ourselves to the body. What has been shown to us throughout the *Clouds* is that the traditional religion is unable to comment on itself, without transcending and so dissolving its foundation. Only by speaking about the tradition can Aristophanes hope to show its value, but in so speaking he moves beyond tradition. Aristophanes, if he were to be consistent, would have to argue that practical wisdom could only come from the body which, under the guise of traditional religion, would amount to the theoretical blindness of religious prophecy. In the following chapter I will show, by way of Plato's *Euthyphro*, the shape of this theoretical blindness; a blindness which is unable to do justice to the divine because of the prophet's pious subordination to history.

Chapter 4: Piety and Prophecy in Plato's *Euthyphro*

And what makes us completely incapable of knowing things is that they are simple and we are composed of two opposite natures, different in kind: soul and body...Who would not think, to see us give all things a mind and a body, that we thoroughly understood this combination? Yet it is the very this that we understand least. Man is to himself the most miraculous object in nature. For he cannot conceive what matter is, still less what is mind, and least of all how a body can be joined to a mind. This is his supreme difficulty, and yet it is his very being...¹⁰³

Tradition and Truth

In the last chapter I discussed Aristophanes' *Clouds* – his critique of philosophy and defence of tradition. Aristophanes showed that philosophy was an inappropriate guide to living, and could even be dangerous, because it lends support to a way of life where “anything goes”. The religious tradition, by contrast, does not. With its unquestioned discipline, religious tradition necessarily points to only one way of life. Nonetheless, despite what would seem to be the weakness of philosophy and the strength of tradition (in practice), the question of *truth* remains open. The debate has not been settled, in other words. We could even say that it *begins* with questions about the value of tradition.

Tradition, we might say, enters the realm of philosophy when we question and seek out the source of its legitimacy. But surely, we might also ask ourselves, is this not a perversion of tradition? For tradition necessarily excludes reflection upon itself, its “truth” lies in its practice: its truth is not philosophical but authoritative. What then of truth? Don't we need to settle the question of the value of truth *before*

¹⁰³ Pascal (1961, pp. 55-56).

we attempt to ask of tradition something it is in no position to provide? The problem is, though, that in so doing we *already* find ourselves outside of the tradition, and the question of the value of truth becomes not something we can judge, but something we have stepped into. It would seem that our only guide to the value of the tradition, the value of the past as a foundation for the present, *is* truth – whatever we might mean by this. There is no position beyond truth into which we might step.

Why all this fuss about tradition, then, if we are bound to seek truth in any respect? To put it bluntly: either we find ourselves within a tradition or on the outside and make our way accordingly. But, is it this simple? Are we ever *fully* outside of a tradition? Don't we wrestle with tradition at each and every moment? We are, whether we recognise it or not, the "historical" animal. Tradition, or convention, defines us where nature has not. We speak historically tinged languages, our relationships with others have their own local flavour, and even our understanding of tradition is itself conventionally preconditioned. The real question is, then, not one of tradition and philosophy, but of the proper place of tradition. This question, it must be admitted, only arises with philosophy – when we begin to wonder, as Aristotle has said. Nevertheless, philosophy arises out of tradition because it is *natural* to wonder and hence questions concerning the truth of tradition are not *just* about tradition, they are questions about *us*.

Philosophy and Prophecy

That the religious tradition cannot completely separate itself from philosophy (and thereby, despite its own protestations, shows itself to be always more than just a practice sanctified by sacred law) we can deduce from the many examples of

religious prophecy. As a bridge between the past and the present, the religious prophet (seer or *mantis*) makes *visible* the foundation of the religious tradition. He is able to do this because although tradition is founded on the historical speech of gods, the gods themselves are not historical. The religious prophet makes the speech of the gods present once more; he brings the eternal gods back into history. In this way he would seem to be like one of the men from Hesiod's Golden age:

Golden was the first race of articulate folk
Created by the immortals who live on Olympus.
They actually lived when Kronos was king of the sky,
And they lived like gods, not a care in their hearts,
...they were dear to the gods.
And sure when Earth covered over their generation
They turned into holy spirits, powers above ground,
Invisible wardens for the whole human race.
They roam all over the land shrouded in mist,
Tending to justice, repaying criminal acts...¹⁰⁴

Aiming to deliver the divine in speech, the religious prophet is the philosopher's second cousin. The religious prophet brings religious tradition into the domain of philosophy because he exposes the *roots*, as it were, of tradition. He claims to be wise because his understanding is divine. Even if the philosopher might not make the same claims, he nonetheless shares the same aspiration: to possess wisdom. Despite their different understanding of tradition, therefore, both seek communication with the divine so as to found practice.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ *Works and Days*, 130-145.

¹⁰⁵ Roth (1984, pp. 68-69) says that "...Heraclitus, Parmenides, Empedocles, and Socrates, either adopted a prophetic persona or believed themselves possessed of prophetic powers. It is evident that there was hardly a hostile and untraversable gulf dividing seers and intellectuals..." And on the nature

This desire for the immediacy of understanding via a return to the origins, which is shared by the seer and the philosopher and which distinguishes each of them from the traditionalist, is shown to us in the writings of Xenophon. He notes that Socrates

...offered sacrifices constantly, and made no secret of it, now in his home, now at the altars of the state temples, and he made use of divination with as little secrecy...He was no more bringing in anything strange than are other believers in divination, who rely on augury, oracles, coincidences and sacrifices. For these men's belief is not that the birds or the folk met by accident know what profits the inquirer, but that they are the instruments by which the gods make this known; and that was Socrates' belief too.¹⁰⁶

If we are not convinced by this, thinking that Xenophon's observations show merely the "common" façade of Socrates' nature, we can look to Plato for further support. In the *Apology*¹⁰⁷ we find Socrates proclaiming that he has been ordered to examine "wise" men by the god, through divinations and dreams. And in the *Phaedrus*,¹⁰⁸ Socrates explicitly refers to himself as a seer or *mantis*, and says that the soul itself is prophetic. He then goes on to evaluate different kinds of madness, making the claim that the *manic* or mad art of the prophet is finer than predicting the future using birds and other signs. Madness as a gift of the god is better than mere human self-control he concludes.¹⁰⁹

of prophecy, Lloyd-Jones (2001, p. 460) argues that "[Zeus's] will was inscrutable to mortals, who did not live long enough to observe the workings of his justice. Through oracles, particularly Apollo's oracle at Delphi, and through seers, men might get particles of knowledge from the gods, but these were known to be often misinterpreted by them".

¹⁰⁶ Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, s. 1.1.2-3.

¹⁰⁷ 33c4-7.

¹⁰⁸ 242c-244d.

¹⁰⁹ Socrates will, from this point in the dialogue, describe the philosophical quest for self-knowledge as best pursued with a dialectic weaving together prophetic madness and philosophical self-control (Griswold 1996, p. 155).

Finally, Aristophanes, who saw the danger of philosophy, also regarded the seer as a potential radical. In the *Peace*, for example, the seer Hierocles puts his religious authority behind the precarious political position favouring war.¹¹⁰ If we believe, like Aristophanes, that tradition binds the city because it favours discipline and self-restraint, then the seers and philosophers in speaking dangerously deny the traditional authority and invoke the madness of “understanding”.

In the following interpretation of the *Euthyphro* I will explore the relationship between piety and philosophy. As I show, it is best understood as ironic.¹¹¹ This irony surfaces with the ambiguity of what we mean by piety, which draws its sacred legitimacy from the eternal divinity of the gods while manifesting itself as a particular political practice sanctified through tradition. Socrates’ philosophical mission is, because of this ambiguity, both pious and impious. He desires what is already claimed by the religious prophet: direct insight into the divine (and the subsequent practical and political ends which, as proclaimed by the tradition, are a virtuous life and a just city). With such reverence he acts with an uncommon piety. Nonetheless, from the perspective of tradition he is a revolutionary; by casting doubt on the *truth* of sanctioned practice he shamelessly flaunts his impiety: he *seeks* but does not thereby *proclaim* the words of the gods.

The *Euthyphro* shows us how it could not be otherwise – as we will see by way of the religious prophet, Euthyphro. Remaining bound to the tradition while

¹¹⁰ See Smith (1989, pp. 144-145).

¹¹¹ Cf., Metcalf (2004, p. 149) who notes the irony of Socrates, in the *Apology*, “...defending himself against the charge of impiety by portraying his subversive philosophical activities as nothing other than the most pious devotion to the god Apollo”. This is an instance of “Socratic” irony – a politically motivated irony which serves to protect Socrates from the opinions of the Athenians. I will argue that in the *Euthyphro* we also encounter Platonic irony; a philosophical irony which shows the tension between the divine and our understanding of it. With this, my argument will be that Socrates’ philosophical mission is rooted in the divine, and is thereby truly pious.

proclaiming also to truly understand piety, Euthyphro (1) perverts the traditional understanding of practice and (2) renders the heart or divine foundation of piety absurd. This is because under traditional practice true insight is tantamount to the prophet's divine vision, yet such a divine vision is only sanctified when the tradition is dissolved with its transformation into eternity. At bottom is the conflict between the desire for truth and a pious subordination to history; such conflict only being resolved with the unsatisfactory perversion of each. And so it is that in the *Euthyphro* we learn that only with the impiety of the philosopher, with his awareness of the limits of history, can we hope to uncover the truly pious.

Reading the Euthyphro

Desjardins remarks that the *Euthyphro* is an extraordinarily sophisticated example of an attempt to clarify "piety" – a word which with "conventional usage carries with it a kind of radical ambiguity".¹¹² If we were hoping to find in the *Euthyphro* a simple resolution of this ambiguity we will surely be disappointed. The clarification presented in the *Euthyphro* is itself extraordinarily ambiguous.

Once again it is worth quoting Desjardins:

Pointedly situating the conversation at the time and place of Socrates' indictment for *impiety* Plato swiftly seduces us into a network of ambiguities and that entangle any would-be talk of piety or impiety...if the same words can mean different things depending on their context, then manipulation of the dramatic context will make it possible to control meaning in determinate ways...When, however, the device is used in such a way as to provide simultaneous application to *different* dramatic contexts and thereby to point up simultaneous but different interpretations of the same words,

¹¹² Desjardins (2004, pp. 142-143).

the result will be built-in dramatic control of verbal ambiguity...one of the cleverest things about this innocent-seeming little dialogue is the way in which it leads us from the relatively straightforward ambiguity and irony of the *dramatic* situation to ever subtler levels of ambiguity and irony in *philosophical* understanding.¹¹³

Following Desjardins I believe that we can only come to understand Socrates' position in the dialogue once we appreciate the playful and ironic exchange of positions amongst and between him and the other characters. Throughout the rest of this chapter I will explore the philosophical significance of these exchanges. The landscape to be covered includes: (1) the intimate connection between the dialogue of Socrates and Euthyphro, and the silent Meletus, (2) the implications of Meletus' speech as constructed and "spoken" by Euthyphro and Socrates, and (3) the similarities which the self-proclaimed champion of piety, Euthyphro, sees between himself and Socrates (who has been charged with impiety).

As I will argue, the ambiguous nature of the characters as well as their exchanges only makes sense when we come to recognise the inherently ironical nature of piety. In the next section I introduce the characters of the dialogue, in the first instance by drawing them out against the backdrop of the drama, and then by seeking out how they stand to Socrates and, ultimately, to philosophy.

Euthyphro

In the *Euthyphro*¹¹⁴ we are presented with a religious prophet who claims to know the truth concerning the divine things. Socrates falls into conversation with this religious prophet – Euthyphro – because of their common connection: each is at

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 144.

¹¹⁴ Translations are from West and West (1998).

the portico of the religious law courts in the “precinct of Dionysus”¹¹⁵ because of some transgression of piety. Socrates has been brought before the King Archon (the chief religious official), by Meletus, on an indictment¹¹⁶ charging him with corrupting the young (2a-3a). Euthyphro, meanwhile, is bringing a lawsuit¹¹⁷ against his father. His father carelessly allowed a labourer of his to die from starvation and cold. The labourer was bound hand and feet by the father because of a murder he had committed. He died while the father was waiting for advice from the *exegete*, an official interpreter of the sacred laws. Euthyphro, with the lawsuit, is cleansing himself of the “religious pollution” brought about by his father’s murderous act (4a-d).

The ensuing discussion of piety is embraced by this drama. Adding to this embrace is the dramatic setting: the law courts. Housing the stone tablets upon which the sacred laws of the city are inscribed, the law courts throw into dramatic relief the unorthodoxy of the prophet Euthyphro. As has been pointed out, it seems strange that Socrates and Euthyphro carry on with their discussion when in front of them is the orthodox and definitive guide to how one should act towards the gods and city.¹¹⁸ Only if we imagine that Euthyphro is an orthodox representative does this seem like an absurd situation. It makes more sense, and is supported by the evidence, to view Euthyphro as a spokesperson for a “mystical” unorthodoxy.

The mystical tendencies of Euthyphro are part and parcel of what appear to be his Orphic inclinations: (1) Euthyphro is preoccupied with ritual purification

¹¹⁵ The court faced the altars and temples of the god Dionysus, and was adjacent to the sacred gateway of this god. See Klonoski (1986, p. 130).

¹¹⁶ This literally means “writing”. (West and West, 1998).

¹¹⁷ The literal meaning is “justice”. (West and West, 1998).

¹¹⁸ Klonoski (1986, p. 131).

characteristic of Orphics and their worship of Dionysus (4c), (2) he grew up on the island of Naxos, which was known as one of the key places of Dionysian worship¹¹⁹ and, (3) in keeping with his foreignness and somewhat ambiguous status within Athens,¹²⁰ he claims to have esoteric, divine knowledge (6b7-8) – such being distinctive of those initiated into the Orphic mysteries.¹²¹ Supporting this is the *Cratylus*, wherein Socrates says (in reply to Hermogenes who compares him to a prophet inspired to deliver oracles) that he mostly blames Euthyphro for his sudden inspiration and that “...he [Euthyphro] must have been inspired, because it looks as though he has not only filled my ears with his superhuman wisdom but taken possession of my soul as well”.¹²² A little later he makes direct reference to the followers of Orpheus, including Euthyphro amongst them.¹²³

Having established that Euthyphro is somewhat of an unorthodox mystic, there still remains the question of why Socrates speaks to such an outsider. To this question I now turn.

Why does Socrates Speak to Euthyphro?

Why Plato has Socrates speak to an unorthodox representative of Athenian religion is a central question and cannot properly be answered without interpreting the dialogue as a whole. I will, nonetheless, offer a few comments in order to distinguish my position from the arguments presented by others.

First up is Klonoski, who sees Euthyphro as a character out of step with the orthodox traditional religion. According to him Euthyphro represents a degenerate

¹¹⁹ Klonoski (1986, pp. 133-134).

¹²⁰ See also Rosen (1968, p. 107).

¹²¹ Lloyd-Jones (2001, p. 459).

¹²² 396d2-8. See also 399a1, 399e4, 409d1, and 428c6.

¹²³ 399e-400c.

version of the traditional religion, dramatically showing where religion, at the time of Plato, was heading. As he puts it: "Plato perhaps saw the seer Euthyphro as representing this coming regression to the primitive, as representing the seed from which this tree of decadent religious belief would grow".¹²⁴ This interpretation eschews philosophical engagement and settles for an historical explanation, and because of this cannot account for the whole dialogue. For, if we ask ourselves, "what was the real value of the religion from which Euthyphro's has degenerated?" how then do we make sense of the fact that this is the same religion under whose laws Socrates is being brought before the courts on a charge of corruption? Surely Plato would not seriously entertain the thought that religion was at or near its zenith around the time Socrates was charged. Moreover, given the similarities between the prophet and the philosopher, both in their own way "degenerate" from the perspective of orthodox tradition, imagining that Euthyphro gives us a premonition of decadence is also to imagine a similar thing for Socrates. For sure, many of the Athenians would have imagined or believed this, but certainly not Plato. That the point of a dialogue is historical comment should not, as I have discussed earlier, be our final presumption when reading Plato.

Others, like McPherran,¹²⁵ maintain that Socrates speaks to Euthyphro in the spirit of therapy.¹²⁶ According to this argument, Euthyphro is on the path towards philosophy but suffers from a muddle-headed understanding of tradition because he mistakes his own hubris for wisdom. He is a "religiously hubristic patient" who

¹²⁴ Klonoski (1986, p. 136).

¹²⁵ McPherran (1996, p. 35).

¹²⁶ Cf., Rosen (1968, p. 108).

requires a good dose of Socratic *elenchus* to set him right. Here we can see the point of divergence with Socrates, and the motivation behind Socrates' engagement.

Despite what is my general agreement with McPherran's interpretation, I believe that there is a deeper philosophical problem lurking here, one which is not exposed by an exclusive focus on Euthyphro's hubris. This problem also concerns the similarities between Euthyphro and Socrates which McPherran points out. Such similarities, I argue, are more than simply idiosyncratic. What Plato hints at, and I argue this further throughout the chapter, is not just that there is an historical similarity because of their unorthodoxy. It is not just that Socrates and Euthyphro are united as heretics. Their relationship is indicative of the ironic relationship of piety to philosophy. To question the nature of piety, we must remember, is already to doubt the orthodox tradition and so it is an impious act. Philosophy is thus *inherently* impious. To what extent piety is at its heart philosophical we discover by way of its "true" representative – the religious prophet – who seeks to distinguish piety from the *merely* traditional. Only with his "true" perspective – an *impiety* – can orthodox piety justify itself as divinely sanctioned.

This is to take a Platonic perspective (philosophical, not historical like Klonoski's). Socrates talks to Euthyphro for reasons above and beyond his own historical persona, in other words. As I will argue, he speaks to Euthyphro because by having him do this Plato can show that orthodox piety cannot return to its origins, nor proclaim its truth, except by way of philosophy.

With this, my position can be distinguished from those who are of the opinion that Socrates speaks to Euthyphro because he is the best representative, or at least the most literate exponent, of the orthodox religion (or of what piety might be in

general). Under this assumption some have discovered what they believe to be Socrates' own definition of piety, or his intention to show that piety cannot be defined, or that piety is an empty concept best replaced with a secular understanding of virtue.¹²⁷ In all, the beliefs attributed to Socrates reflect either his traditionalism or his scepticism. By talking to Euthyphro Socrates is seen to be either working his way towards a definition which embraces his own pious practices¹²⁸ or else, on philosophical grounds, jettisoning altogether the concept of piety.¹²⁹

Absent from these accounts is recognition of the tension between Euthyphro's "truth-revealing" prophecies and the traditional lineage of the orthodoxy, and how an analysis of this might point us towards Plato's understanding of philosophy.

Rabbas¹³⁰ does, to be sure, recognise the tensions that Euthyphro's position encompasses. I therefore agree with him on this point. Nevertheless, these tensions he views as inherent to the tradition itself (e.g., tradition holds that there is one principle of justice for humans and gods *and* that the gods transcend principles observed by humans). Hence Euthyphro is unconventional yet still a traditionalist; for he expresses these opposing strands of tradition concurrently.¹³¹ I will diverge from this interpretation by showing that what Euthyphro and Socrates share is a *separation* from the tradition. With this I will argue that the tension which Euthyphro exemplifies is not within the tradition as such, but is itself a distorted reflection of philosophy – a perverted wisdom, as it were.

¹²⁷ For a summary of the arguments see McPherran (1985). For more recent examples see Dimas (2006) who offers a definition of piety "reconstructed" from the dialogue and Rabbas (2005) who argues that the dialogue shows the fundamental incoherence of piety as a practical virtue; although Rabbas does argue that Euthyphro is no ordinary traditionalist (see p.295).

¹²⁸ See, e.g., Dimas (2006).

¹²⁹ See, e.g., Rabbas (2005).

¹³⁰ Rabbas (2005).

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 295-296.

Meletus

Meletus makes no personal appearance in the *Euthyphro*. This is not to say that he is merely an extraneous character though; for he is referred to by Socrates at many key junctures throughout the dialogue.¹³² Indeed, it is because of Meletus' indictment that Socrates is at the law courts, and it is also because of Meletus that Socrates says he speaks to Euthyphro.¹³³ We should thereby assume that Meletus' character is philosophically significant. Over the following pages I argue that Meletus, in making a political defence of the tradition, brings to the fore the inherent tension between traditional practice and any justification it might make of its own integrity. These tensions arise because tradition is unable to justify itself without opening the door to its nemesis – philosophy. Resolving these tensions is Euthyphro, who brings a philosophical vision within the realm of tradition. Such a resolution is, as we will see, incoherent both in theory and practice.

We know something of Meletus from the *Apology*. In this dialogue he is introduced along with Anytus and Lycon. Each accuses Socrates of doing “injustice by corrupting the young, and by not believing in the gods in whom the city believes, but in other *daimonia* that are novel”.¹³⁴ Meletus, in this accusation, represents the poets, Anytus the orators, and Lycon the craftsmen. And yet, Meletus is not a poet. His stomping ground is the law courts, and his audience popular prejudice. Consonant with this distinction, Socrates, in the *Apology*, points out that Meletus has never had any concern for the young or about the things for which he has brought

¹³² 2b-3a; 5a-d; 12e; 15e-16a.

¹³³ 5a3-b8.

¹³⁴ *Apology* 24b8-10.

him to trial.¹³⁵ He also describes Meletus as a *self-proclaimed* patriot;¹³⁶ in other words, one who “loves” the people only because it serves his interests. And thus he is described by Socrates as being motivated by “insolence, violence and youthful zeal”.¹³⁷

In sum, Meletus presents as one who cares for the tradition not because it is valuable but because it is useful. He wraps himself in the cloak of tradition and proclaims its virtues because it is politically expedient. With this he must defend the tradition, not as one with religious authority, but with an appeal to the populace. His rhetoric thereby panders to fear – exposing not just the unorthodoxy of Socrates’ beliefs but also the danger. Philosophy corrupts the foundation of the city, so he claims. Meletus thus defends the tradition against the political implications of philosophy. In so doing he lets loose questions concerning the good life and just political communities, making us wonder how tradition itself might go about defending its path as the best to follow.

The Euthyphro

Central to my interpretation is the connection between Meletus and Euthyphro. This connection is, of course, mediated by Socrates, and thus shows itself both philosophically and politically. The political dimension is the *fact* of Socrates’ separation from the tradition, and hence his indictment by Meletus on a charge of impiety. This charge, considered along with Euthyphro’s own separation and subsequent understanding of himself as the most pious of men (as I will present

¹³⁵ *Apology*, 25c1-3.

¹³⁶ *Apology*, 24b4-5.

¹³⁷ *Apology*, 27a1-2.

below), exposes for us the philosophical dimension. The political dimension is thus interwoven with the philosophical, which we see as the impious discussion of piety between the impious Socrates and the “truly pious” Euthyphro – each designated as such because of their separation from the tradition.

From the beginning of the dialogue we see that Euthyphro’s position is ambiguous. On the surface, he is acting *piously*, as traditionally understood, by taking action against the religious pollution brought about by the “murder” perpetrated by his father. However, because his father didn’t commit what could strictly be called a “murder” and, on top of this, because he behaved in the customary way when dealing with a murderer, we are hard-pressed to define Euthyphro’s actions as pious. Moreover, he is acting *impiously* by not honouring his father – honouring one’s father being one among the three major traditional virtues (the others being honouring the gods and honouring the common laws of Greece).¹³⁸

Euthyphro’s impiety, as we will come to see, is bound up with his prophetic or “truthful” relationship with the gods. And this impiety – this wholly truthful piety – is, as I argue, equivalent to the manifestation of Meletus’ hidden foundations.

In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates describes Meletus as a youngster (with straight hair, not much of a beard, and a hooked nose: 2b9-13). He compares him to a child running to his mother: an analogy of him bringing his charge to the courts and to the Athenians (2c6-7). Children run to their mothers in the spirit of accusation because they know they’ll be defended. They recognise that their mothers hold dear their welfare. So too Meletus runs to the city. Meletus knows that any charge of corrupting the young will be taken seriously by his fellow Athenians.

¹³⁸ Mikalson (1991, pp. 168-171).

Not only this, Socrates implies that Meletus must have a real understanding of the ends towards which the education of the young should be directed.

Immediately following the “running to mother analogy” he says to Euthyphro that Meletus is like a farmer taking care of the young sprouts (2d3-3a1). This analogy completes what was only hinted at initially: Meletus is playing the part of both youngster *and* elder. Politically he defends the distinction between youth and age. Not being old himself, though, his political defence undercuts the ground upon which he himself stands. Having said this, we might ask ourselves what, then, does he stand on?

Bringing to the surface Meletus’ unexposed foundations is Euthyphro.¹³⁹ Euthyphro’s “divine wisdom” transcends experience, and so too does the foundation of Meletus’ *political* claim. Underneath Meletus’ hubristic aspirations to maturity¹⁴⁰ is the shadow of philosophy. If wisdom arises through experience, and the tradition is the culmination of this experience,¹⁴¹ then the wisdom of the young and inexperienced Meletus must be supernatural or eternal.¹⁴² Yet Meletus must deny the possibility of eternal wisdom when making the claim that it is strictly *tradition* which is our guide to living wisely. And so here he diverges from Euthyphro, who concedes not to history, but to the gods.¹⁴³

For this reason we could say that Meletus implicitly equates history with truth. Only implicitly though: for if truth is historical, then by rights it does not exist.

¹³⁹ Strauss (1996) argues that Meletus and Euthyphro are similar in that their accusations are both of young men against old. I would also add that Euthyphro’s accusation of his father would place him alongside Socrates, in the eyes of Meletus, because it shows a disregard of the traditional familial bonds.

¹⁴⁰ See *Apology* 26e7-9.

¹⁴¹ See Xenophon, *Apology*, s. 20 (translations are from Xenophon, 1923).

¹⁴² See also Howland (1998, pp. 103, 112).

¹⁴³ And hence we find that Euthyphro, far from counting himself as one of the common lot, flaunts his distinction from the many (see 5a1-2).

Resolving this tension between the spoken and unspoken is Euthyphro who, with his claim that he *knows*¹⁴⁴ piety (see 4e11-5a2), makes the equation of history with truth possible by way of direct revelation. In so doing Euthyphro presents himself to us as Meletus' only philosophical defence against Socrates. And yet, on this very point where he might act as a bridge between Meletus and Socrates, he places a barrier between himself and Meletus. The barrier is the philosophical nature of Euthyphro's claim – his claim to know the truth. Just as Meletus avoids any sort of philosophical discussion with Socrates, so too he must steer clear of Euthyphro, who would expose what must be kept hidden if tradition is to hold sway. Euthyphro and Meletus are thus bound to each other by what it is they cannot acknowledge. Meletus cannot concede that behind any political denial of philosophy is nonetheless the *imitation* of philosophy, and Euthyphro, likewise, cannot acknowledge that the "true" gods are rooted in history.

This ironic connection between the prophet and politician is uncovered when we examine *why* Socrates continues talking to Euthyphro. Socrates, after Euthyphro has told him that he understands *precisely* the doings of the gods, and so the pious and impious things, says

Then, wondrous Euthyphro, wouldn't it be best for me to become your student and, before Meletus' indictment comes to trial, to challenge him on these very things? I would say that even in time past I regarded it as important to know the divine things, and now, since he asserts that I am doing wrong by acting unadvisedly, and making innovations concerning the divine things, I have become your student. 'And, Meletus,' I would say, 'if you agree that Euthyphro is wise in such things, then hold that I too believe correctly and drop the lawsuit. But if not, then bring a lawsuit

¹⁴⁴ Euthyphro says he has "exact knowledge" (5a2).

against him, my teacher, instead of me, on the ground that he is corrupting the old, me and his own father, by teaching me and by admonishing and punishing him.'

And if he isn't persuaded by me and doesn't give up the lawsuit or indict you instead of me, shouldn't I say in the law court these very things on which I challenged him? (5a3-b8).

Euthyphro agrees emphatically, with an oath to Zeus, and adds that the "...speech in the law court would turn out to be much more about him than about me" (5b9-12). Socrates plays on what Euthyphro believes to be the separation between himself and Meletus, a separation which is true enough in practice, but which does not hold at the foundations.

The "hidden connections" between Meletus and Euthyphro which underlie Socrates' brilliant move would, if explicated, go something like this: When Meletus says that Socrates makes new gods, he is also saying that the Olympic gods are not merely historical but eternally true, that despite the fact that these gods reign now because they overthrew others (i.e., the Titans), they themselves cannot be surpassed. Meletus would transform Hesiod's *Theogony* into the *Theology*. He would immortalise history. Thus, if communion with the gods was once possible (e.g., at the time of Hesiod) then it is possible at all times. To deny the theology under which Euthyphro practices his art, therefore, would also be to deny the immortality of the gods: they would become historical and may, because of this, be surpassed. Accordingly, Meletus must agree that Euthyphro's prophetic ability is at least possible, if he is to argue that the gods are eternal.

It could be argued that I am making too much of Meletus. He does, after all, merely play the card of the patriot. He does not claim to be wise. He acts the loyal

citizen who has witnessed Socrates' transgressions, and for the love of his city wants the perpetrator punished. Running to his mother, to the city, Meletus merely mouths *her* understanding: piety is essential to justice. Piety is the expression of his loyalty to the city; it is reverence for the guidance of the *nomoi*.¹⁴⁵ And so we could say that Meletus' charge, if it is not experience but reverence which counts towards justice, is not prey to the same contradictions described previously. However, by removing this contradiction Meletus cannot claim that he *understands* the necessity of piety for justice. And so the problem is merely moved back a step: the city must now justify herself, for justice and piety are simply one with loyalty. "Why be loyal?" we might ask. With the city as his only point of reference Meletus' argument would be circular: the *nomoi* are good because the city says that they are good.

In sum, if he is to defend himself, Meletus can either claim to understand what is wise *despite* the tradition or as the mere patriot plead ignorance. Not wanting to place himself in the same shoes as Socrates he would be unlikely to make the first claim. But in making the second claim he, along with the rest of the Athenians, is unable to make *any* defence for the tradition. Bound to philosophical silence as he is, the only way out of his dilemma is provided by Euthyphro.¹⁴⁶ For Euthyphro reveals the universal "wisdom" hidden in, yet anathema to, traditional Athenian piety. Euthyphro makes explicit the implicit claim of Meletus: Athenian piety is good in all times and all places. It is Euthyphro who claims to have the wisdom of piety, a wisdom which comes not from experience but from an uncommon reverence (see, e.g., 5e7-6a6). Piety is for him the only foundation of justice, and justice is not merely

¹⁴⁵ Lewis (1984, p. 226).

¹⁴⁶ Euthyphro can provide the teaching that Socrates wishes from Meletus (*Apology* 26a2-8).

the regeneration of the *nomoi* of the city, but a matter of direct insight. He does, in other words, transform Meletus' speech from politics into truth. He indicts his father because he asserts that it is what true justice (and piety) demands (4b7-e4). Meletus meanwhile, justifies his indictment against Socrates with reference to the *nomoi*.¹⁴⁷

As the "true" citizen, revering the foundations and not the familial bonds, Euthyphro is akin to Socrates. He brings the gods into the present and so denies the traditional bonds of the city.¹⁴⁸ Ironically, Euthyphro sees himself as the most pious of all Athenians (4e11-5a2). What's more, the supernatural wisdom which he believes separates Socrates and himself from the common folk (3b5-c6) leads him to imagine that Socrates' piety is akin to his own.¹⁴⁹ Thus he comes to the conclusion that the Athenian's beef against Socrates is rooted in envy (3b5-c3). In what is an astounding misunderstanding of his fellow Athenians, Euthyphro, we must assume, imagines that Meletus is indicting Socrates because he is jealous of Socrates' piety! It comes as no surprise that the Athenians find Euthyphro laughable (see 3c3). Unlike Socrates who dissolves the tradition with a zealous curiosity, Euthyphro's madness is an extreme or "timeless" version of the orthodox religion: he acts like the gods instead of following them.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, his prophetic art emulates the mythical abilities of the gods.¹⁵¹ And yet, unlike Socrates, he doesn't transcend the tradition.¹⁵² It is to the law

¹⁴⁷ See Xenophon, *Apology*, s. 20.

¹⁴⁸ Brouwer (2002, p. 51) says that "Euthyphro emerges as an ambiguous figure, both the inverse of Socrates and the subtle repetition of Meletus himself". I think that this is on the right track but doesn't do full justice to the relationship between these characters. The important point is, as I have shown, that Euthyphro exhibits all that Meletus must keep hidden, or deny. Euthyphro, because he lacks an awareness of the human things and so cannot see his own foundations, blithely exposes what are the true implications of making piety a sufficient condition for justice.

¹⁴⁹ Blits (1980, p. 20).

¹⁵⁰ Strauss (1996, p. 13) and Saxonhouse (1988, pp. 289-291).

¹⁵¹ See Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, where Cassandra says that she can foresee the future because she was introduced by Apollo to his prophetic gifts (1.1205-1210, translations are from Aeschylus, 1984).

¹⁵² And hence Socrates comment that the "Athenians don't mind so much someone they suppose to be clever, what they do mind is the teaching of one's wisdom" (3c8-10).

courts of the city that Euthyphro turns to purify himself; Socrates, by contrast, has been brought before the law courts. Euthyphro, as I have been arguing, is the tradition made true.¹⁵³ He is thus, in contrast to Meletus, a willing partner in conversation with Socrates.¹⁵⁴

The definitions of piety¹⁵⁵ which Socrates will coax from and partially formulate for Euthyphro show by their various inadequacies the untenability of Euthyphro's divine wisdom. Throughout the rest of the dialogue Socrates will show that Euthyphro's divine wisdom – his knowledge of piety – which unifies the divine ways of the gods and just human practice, must be (1) in the form of a divine measure accessible to men, and that (2) this measure cannot be both divine and accessible to men, and (3) that Euthyphro's wisdom is divine, by his understanding, only if it is circular and thereby unconcerned with human justice.

Gods and Human Practice

After questioning by Socrates, Euthyphro initially defines the pious with the absolute conviction of someone to whom the gods present themselves simply and without duplicity. Euthyphro says that "...the pious is just what I am doing now: to proceed against whoever does injustice regarding murders or thefts or sacred things, or is doing wrong in any other such thing" (5d9-e1). Supporting his definition of the pious is a "proof". The god considered by many to be the best and most just, Zeus,

¹⁵³ See the *Cratylus*, where Roth (1984, p. 65) notes that "The nature of the etymologies cited as produced through the seer's influence suggests that Euthyphro and his school held that words do not derive from convention, but express an absolute truth about the individual being or concept named".

¹⁵⁴ Cf., Burger (1999, p. 41) who says that "...it is an altogether comic lack of self-understanding of his own radicalism that Socrates discloses in Euthyphro step-by-step".

¹⁵⁵ In the Euthyphro "piety" is denoted by two words similar in meaning: one refers to god-given law and justice and the other emphasises the reverence and fear which one feels before the gods (see West and West, 1998, p. 46). Most often "piety" refers to the god-given law; however, where appropriate I will point out where the meaning relates to reverence and fear.

bound his father after he swallowed his children, and Zeus's father castrated *his* father for similar reasons (5e5-6a4). The Athenians contradict themselves, so says Euthyphro, when they regard Zeus as the best and most just of gods, but then castigate him, Euthyphro, for aping Zeus (5e7-6a6).

Considering this, we can see that if Euthyphro is right, then the Athenians must believe that the actions of Zeus can be judged in the same way as Euthyphro's actions; as a contradiction only arises if the Athenians think gods and men are equal. No such contradiction arises if the gods are divine and men are not, for Zeus's actions would never be the guide for mortals.¹⁵⁶ In this case, his commands, and not his actions, would be what should be followed. Clearly, Euthyphro misunderstands how the Athenians view him. This misunderstanding is part and parcel of his understanding of Athenian religion.

Euthyphro goes on to say that he knows many strange things about the gods, implying that he is privy to private godly conversation. He knows wonderful things that most people know nothing of (6b7-8). He understands more about the gods than other Athenians. He is in a better position to know what godly behaviour is (4e11-5a2). He is a prophet, after all. In saying that the Athenians contradict themselves, though, he would like to think that they understand the gods just as he does. They know the gods in the same way, but choose not to act on this knowledge. They are hypocrites. Euthyphro, it seems, not only imagines that gods and men are equal, but that there is no man equal to himself. Thus, Euthyphro can only separate himself from the Athenians by perverting what it is he shares with them. Their impiety is the wilful denial of his wisdom. Euthyphro's separation from the common lot is based

¹⁵⁶ Lewis (1984, p. 254).

on a supernatural wisdom which at its heart unifies the gods with the practice of men. He is separated from all other men because it is only he who has not let bad habits divert him from the truth. The Athenians contradict themselves because they follow the tradition and not the gods. They separate history or practice from the foundations, when in truth, they should be one. Euthyphro himself is testament to this.

To imagine that the foundations have been separated is of course to imagine that these foundations are themselves properly eternal, not historical. It is to equate the foundations with truth and not history. If the Athenians believe that we are separated from the gods historically, that history is the path from gods to men, then there is no question of the separation of foundations and practice because the foundations are not accessible in the present. All that can be said is that the foundations sanctify what should be put into practice; that is, the laws of the city, and its customs and rituals.

In making this separation possible Euthyphro, unlike the Athenians but like Socrates, must ultimately justify himself *outside* the law courts, outside the seat of orthodox traditional practice. In this sense he is *unlike* the gods who, by the fact of their divinity, need not justify themselves; they themselves are the union of theory and practice: what they say or do *is* necessarily true. Euthyphro, not being a god, must be able to justify his practice with *knowledge* of piety or of things divine (see 4e11-5a2; 6c5-8). He must know more than just the practice of the gods in other words. To be just in the world of men Euthyphro must possess knowledge of the divine.

An Idea of Piety

To plumb Euthyphro's understanding of the divine, Socrates pushes him for the *idea* which will serve as a standard or pattern to determine in advance, by gaze, the "piousness" of some action (6e4-7). Following Socrates' prodding Euthyphro gives the definition that what is dear to the gods is pious, and what is not dear to them is impious (6e10). This initial definition is quickly qualified by Socrates. Bringing up a previous point on which Euthyphro claimed to have knowledge (see 7b2-5); that is, that the gods are often times at war over what they hold dear (6b9-10) – which is, despite Euthyphro's estimation of his own wisdom, merely a truism of traditional piety as spoken of by the poets and represented on sacred objects (see 6b10-c4) – Socrates shows that the traditional gods are human-like in their individual loves and desires (7d1-12). Euthyphro's affirmation of all this (8a7) along with his prior claim that he knows other things which will astound Socrates (6c5-4) shows his confused understanding of the traditional religion, as well as his misunderstanding of the significance or foundation of his own wisdom. By pushing Euthyphro to provide a definition which is free of internal conflict – a universal definition – Socrates is looking to bring into the open Euthyphro's misplaced confidence in his own abilities.

Socrates' discussion of calculation and judgement (see 7b6-7c8) is the first step on this path, and brings to light what is necessary if we are to claim divine status. By showing that we do not fight over what is larger or smaller because we can refer to an independent judge – measurement – Socrates points to *our* pacification, and so our "divine-like" understanding through calculation. However, when it

comes to things like the just and the unjust, the beautiful and the ugly, and the good and the bad, we show our full humanity, and fight because we each see things differently (7d1-6). If we were to be gods, or to know what the gods know, then we would have to show for the just, the beautiful, and the good what we can show for the larger and the smaller.

The *allure* of a universal human wisdom is what makes calculation, with its offer of objective certainty, an *analogy* for divine judgement, and which also makes us run the risk to transform the analogy into reality. Euthyphro's claims about his own wisdom push him in this direction (see, e.g., 4b3); and Socrates pushes him even further. In the hope of eliciting from Euthyphro a universal definition, Socrates asks him about disagreements in "the world of men" (8b10).

Among men, according to Socrates, disagreements arise not over the value of justice, but over what is just or unjust *in particular*. In the law courts men argue not that wrongdoing should *not* be punished but about "...who the doer of injustice is, and what he did, and when" (8d6). The same is true of Euthyphro's human-like gods. Their quarrels about justice and injustice arise because although the gods believe in the sanctity of justice, they disagree on how it should be brought about. Euthyphro's gods, no less than men, hold different ideas about the *realisation* of justice.

To overcome the deficiencies of the previous definition, to help Euthyphro on his way, as it were, Socrates suggests that "...whatever all the gods hate is impious, and whatever they love is pious, but whatever some love and others hate is neither or both?" (9d3-5). This definition, by making the holy subject to objective, universal agreement, follows the form of calculation. In so doing Socrates pushes Euthyphro to

make fully visible his wisdom of divine things, a wisdom which, potentially, is wholly visible to *all* men. Euthyphro is being provided by Socrates with what is, ostensibly, a measure – the idea – which can be referred to by men, but which is, at the same time, also the measure used by the gods.¹⁵⁷ Such a measure would put a stop to Meletus' accusations once and for all, for no one could argue with what is transparently and universally divine wisdom. The impossibility of discovering such a measure would, though, take it even farther. For it would show that the charge brought by Meletus against Socrates is, at bottom, incomprehensible.

Divine and Human Love

Examining now Euthyphro's "divine measure" Socrates returns with the following dilemma: is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious? Or is it pious because it is loved by the gods? (10a1-3). This dilemma makes explicit the confusion within Euthyphro's own understanding. I will go on to explain with support from the text, but first I will say that the confusion arises because Euthyphro, if he is to understand like a god, must make the gods love like humans; he must, in other words, make the gods both human and divine.

¹⁵⁷ Lewis, (1985, pp. 36, 40) says: "Following Socrates, let us call the objects of rational inquiry 'ideas.' Now, if the 'ideas' are prior to the gods, they preclude disagreement among the gods, who can be presumed perfect in their apprehension of the 'ideas.' But if the gods make the 'ideas,' they are bound to disagree, nor can they find a nonarbitrary basis for resolving their differences...the belief in warring gods thus presupposes the priority of the gods to the 'ideas.'" And: "The new definition seems to imply that, other things being equal, an action increases in holiness with the number of gods who love it. There is strength in numbers, but also in size and weight. Must Euthyphron be able to count, measure, and weigh the gods arrayed on different sides of a dispute in order to make good his claim to have precise knowledge of what is holy and unholy (cf. 7b5-c8)? Or would it be sufficient for him to know the will of Zeus (cf. 5e6)?" I agree with what Lewis has to say regarding the priority of gods and ideas, however I think that he misses the significance of the link between this and the definition that "what all the gods love is holy". The important point, as I have argued, is that Euthyphro can only satisfy Socrates' wish to convince Meletus' of his understanding by providing sure knowledge which is both at once a reference for the gods and for men. Only with this certain knowledge can Socrates attain Meletus' agreement that he is wise in these matters, and have the case against him dropped (5a9-b2). For, as Socrates says in the *Apology*, his so-called impiety could only be rectified by wise instruction (*Apology*, 26a).

Given the obscure presentation of the dilemma it is not surprising that Euthyphro doesn't at first get what Socrates is driving at. To explain, Socrates says that there is a real difference shown by verbs in their active and passive voice (10a5-8); for example, being carried and carrying, and being seen and seeing. This difference is important when we consider the status of things undergoing action. For example, Socrates argues (see 10b8-c6) that a "thing carried" is a "thing carried" because it is *being* carried, or a "thing led" because it *is* led, not because they are *things* carried or *things* led. So too with a thing seen: a thing is seen not because it is a *thing* seen, but because it is seen by someone. Socrates' point is that when we are confronted with the question of *why* a thing is undergoing action we must look to the action (see 10c3) and not the thing (see 10c2).

Having secured Euthyphro's understanding, Socrates makes what seems to me an unfounded connection: he says that as with seeing, leading, and carrying, so too with loving (10c8-9). A thing is loved not because it is a thing loved, but because it *is* loved.¹⁵⁸ This seems to me to be too sharp a distinction. There is a more profound relationship between our loving and what we love than between our seeing and what we see, or our carrying and what we carry. Although it is true that we can only see what can be seen and only carry what can be carried these things, in general, are only seen or carried when chance or choice prevails. There is no *intimate* connection between the thing and our seeing or carrying. Loving is different. Objects (or people) that we love have a power over us, a power not shared by things which we merely carry or see. The most immediate example of this is our loved ones. We can see them and possibly carry them, in the same way that we can see and carry other objects; but

¹⁵⁸ It is literally becoming or undergoing the love.

we love them because of *who* they are. If they were to change they may become for us unlovable. They could not become unseen. It is true that if they happened to gain weight we might not be able to carry them. We could if we got help, however. Carrying and seeing are *accidental* to us, they are objective and impersonal. Loving is not. In loving we love what is loveable, and what is loveable is intimately bound to who we are.

Socrates' presentation of the intimacy of loving as something objective and absent of desire points towards Euthyphro's own position. By Euthyphro's understanding, the gods sanctify piety through their divine-objective love, while the accessibility of piety to men means that this divine-objective love is also a human-like love.¹⁵⁹ Euthyphro's sympathy with this divine love validates why he does what other people consider mad. He doesn't follow men, he follows gods. It is only the gods who know what is right and wrong, just and unjust. Hence, knowing the gods is the path to knowing how life should be lived. In knowing the gods one comes to know what they know. One comes to see what it is which makes the pious loveable. One sees *why* the pious is desirable; one comes to love like a god. And so, for Euthyphro, the pious is a revelation to men which relies for its visibility on one's own divine, human-like love; a love which itself relies for its legitimacy on its equivalence with the gods' divine and objective love. In being both human-like and

¹⁵⁹ Cf., Burger (1999, pp. 50-51), who says that "what Socrates has split is a whole constituted by the double direction that characterizes the experience of *eros*: while the lover perceives and responds to something in the beloved, his love in turn magnifies or enhances its object in such a way that it becomes more than what it was in itself... The gods Euthyphro takes over from Socrates here are not erotic; in finding dear (*philon*) that which is intrinsically holy, they are not like the lover who worships his beloved like a god. Euthyphro's choice does reflect some effect of Socrates' effort – the gods are now constrained by an *idea*; only this *idea* is left unintelligible and the gods who contribute nothing to it are superfluous". By comparison, what I am arguing is that in claiming to have *divine* knowledge of this *idea*, Euthyphro makes the gods both the cause of all that is holy – an *unerotic* love – and also lovers of what others might also hold dear.

objectively loving, Euthyphro's gods are thereby philosophically transparent. Divine omnipotence and an understanding rooted in the intimacy of love provide both the justification and foundation of Euthyphro's wisdom.

Exploring the terrain of this confluence, Socrates asks "Now what are we saying about the pious, Euthyphro? Isn't it loved by all the gods, as your argument says?" (10d1-2) Euthyphro readily agrees. And when he probes further: "Because it is pious, or because of something else?" (10d4-5), Euthyphro, satisfied that the gods must find the pious loveable, is happy to agree. When Socrates sums up, however, with: "Then is it loved because it is pious, rather than pious because it is loved?" (10d6-7) Euthyphro agrees, stating "it's likely" (10d8) only in deference to Socrates it would seem. He hesitates, possibly because of Socrates' one-sided definition, a stricter definition than what Euthyphro initially agreed upon. (Having initially said that the pious is what all the gods love (see 9e1-2), Euthyphro would, I imagine, also have answered that all the gods love what is pious. This would make the pious and the gods equivalent, and would preclude Euthyphro from making any claims to *knowing* what is pious.) "But in fact, just because it is loved by gods, it is something loved and dear-to-the-gods" (10d9-10) says Socrates. And with this Socrates is in a position to expose Euthyphro's confusion. Euthyphro must now agree that what is loved by the gods is different to the pious. The pious is loved because it is pious but what is loved by the gods is so because they love it. In Socrates' words: "For the one [i.e., what the gods love], because it is loved, is the sort of thing to be loved; the other

[the pious], because it is the sort of thing to be loved, is loved" (11a6-8). Euthyphro has found himself stuck in contradiction.¹⁶⁰

Euthyphro, unlike the gods, cannot appeal to his divinity to justify himself. And yet, his justifications *are* appeals to divinity, for his wisdom, as he says, is divine (5a1-2). What the gods love – because it is loved – is what they sanctify by way of their divine-objective love. Piety is not accessible to us through this love for it is circular. Rather, piety, if it is visible to men, is the sort of thing to be loved by gods. This, however, gives rise to a contradiction. For if it is not sanctified by the gods through their love (because it is loved) then it is not something objectively divine: it is not *truly* pious. If the gods love what is not divine, but rather something which can be loved by humans as well, then we cannot gain knowledge of piety by sympathising with them. The only option, it would seem, is to become a god. Yet this would mean, as Socrates has been implying, that either we could not know what we were loving, or that piety if it has a determinate structure along the lines of measuring and weighing renders the gods, and so the fundament of our vision, superfluous.

¹⁶⁰ Lewis (1985, p. 45) points out that Socrates' argument is a non sequitur, that "If the gods love the holy because it is holy (10d8), and if the holy and the god-beloved are not the same (10e2-11a3), then the holy must be god-beloved even if it is not *the* god-beloved". He goes on to say that "The conclusion that they [the god-beloved and the holy] are opposites is a false inference from the given premises... The task of finding its proper premises has been left to the reader". I agree with Lewis on this point but disagree with him about the premises. He says that because orthodox piety is concerned with praying and sacrificing to the gods, and that the gods themselves don't pray, then they are not pious. And that because the gods love those who (according to Euthyphro) imitate them, then they do not love piety. Imitation of the gods, he concludes, is god-beloved but not holy.

I think that a more satisfactory interpretation can be had if we take our bearings by the knowledge which Euthyphro claims to possess, a knowledge which allows him to do what he believes is just because it is sanctified by the gods. For there has been no mention yet of praying and sacrificing; rather, the conversation up to this point has been searching out the details of Euthyphro's supernatural wisdom – an example of which is his prophecies to the Athenians (3c1-6). The definition "doing what the gods do" wasn't provided by Euthyphro because the gods love imitators, but that in imitating the gods Euthyphro will be doing what is pious because he knows the gods (see 5a1-2). Only he can imitate the gods properly because only he has access to the many things unknown by Athenians (6b7-8). Piety, at this stage in the conversation is presented, by way of Euthyphro, as a virtue, not a ritual.

Silent Speech

In order to disengage Euthyphro's perspective from his theology, to make him stand on his own two feet, as it were, Socrates says to Euthyphro

...when you are asked what ever the pious is, you don't wish to make clear to me its substance, but rather to speak of a certain affection concerning it: that the pious is affected in being loved by all the gods. But what it is, you haven't yet said (11a9-b2).

The measure of the success of Euthyphro's definition would be Socrates' silence: they would not, as Socrates says, disagree over such a definition (11b4). Put differently, the definition would take the form of the perfect speech of the gods – absent of desire and perspective. The speech would, in fact, not be speech at all, but the indisputable, so silent, path to the silence of the gods.

We must imagine that such silence would be, for Euthyphro, equivalent to the irrefutability of the traditional practice of piety (as he first looked to Zeus's practice to justify his own). For, a *theoretical* or fundamental silence does not accord with Euthyphro's garrulous gods. Indeed, the tradition's divine sanctification and so unquestionability is, we might assume, of one with the verbosity of Euthyphro. Euthyphro's avowed lack of ignorance and Meletus' claim that the tradition is indisputable are one and the same thing, in other words. In contradistinction to the ignorance (and silence) of Socrates, which is equivalent to the unattainability of the whole of wisdom, the silent irrefutability of tradition or history renders the philosophical exploration of eternity unnecessary. Not moving beyond the cosmos as ordained by convention, therefore, there is room in the tradition for the imitation of philosophy under the guise of tradition's own foundations. And so Euthyphro

attains his wisdom by, ironically, denying that the gods are historical, while retaining their visibility by way of their historical garments – traditional religious stories.

Given that a universal speech would be a silent speech, and that Euthyphro is anything but silent about the way of the gods and justice in this world, it is fitting that he is surprised to find his definitions going around and not staying put (11b6-9). Socrates adds to this by saying that Euthyphro's speech is like the statues of his ancestor Daedalus, "...for they aren't willing to stay still" (11c6). This is not, however, wholly true. Socrates is the one who "moves" the "stationary" speeches of Euthyphro, speeches which Euthyphro wishes to "stay still" (11d1-2). That Euthyphro's definitions are supported by justifications which themselves are historical means that he will be forever chasing the mirage of eternity, only ever able to be grasped, and therefore lost, with a transformation into history.¹⁶¹ Socrates, as Euthyphro correctly surmises, is the Daedalus of speeches (11d1), for Socrates exposes what is the ground of Euthyphro's wisdom: the gods which create and so are without form, but whose "ways" must be stabilised or made visible through knowledge of piety. We cannot have it both ways unless we admit that our knowledge is not wholly divine, for it is by way of our own efforts that what the gods love shows itself. Our connection to the gods is not direct, but mediated by what *we* love. Euthyphro cannot admit this without also admitting that prophecy is never wholly divine in origin. This would not only undermine his understanding of

¹⁶¹ Howland (1998, p. 98) says that "As 'straight thinkers,' Euthyphro and Meletus lack self-knowledge because they do not know where they are coming from. Socrates on the other hand is a 'circle thinker': he twice bids Euthyphro to start the inquiry 'once more from the beginning...'" I agree that Socrates is, in the sense meant by Howland, a "circle thinker". Nonetheless, the dialogue of the *Euthyphro* brings out even more explicitly the *inherent* circularity of Euthyphro's and Meletus' speeches. It takes Socrates to bring out this circularity: see, e.g., 14c4-6, where Socrates says that he is the lover following Euthyphro the beloved.

justice, it would also call into question the *truth* of the charge brought by Meletus – who equates justice directly with piety¹⁶² – against Socrates.

Piety and Justice

To establish *how* Euthyphro's knowledge of piety translates into just practice, Socrates asks him whether he thinks that all the pious is just (11e6). Euthyphro replies that to him it is (11e7). Nonetheless, Socrates wants to know whether "...all the just [is] pious? Or is pious all just, while the just is not all pious, but part of it is pious, part something else?" (12a1-2). This confuses Euthyphro. Socrates explains using the analogy of dread and awe:¹⁶³ "I am saying the opposite of what the poet composed who said: Zeus, the one who enclosed and planted all these things, You are not willing to speak of; for where dread is, there too is awe" (12a7-b2). It isn't right, continues Socrates, to say "Where dread is, there too is awe", (12c3-4) but it is right to say "...where awe is, there too is dread...I suppose that dread extends further than awe" (12c4-6).

To further clarify, Socrates makes once again an analogy using number.¹⁶⁴ He says that "...awe is a part of dread, just as 'odd' is a part of 'number'" (12c6-7). The mention of number once more should alert us to Socrates' general orientation in this section. Previously, we saw that the theme was Euthyphro's misplaced trust in the divinity, and hence objectivity, of his knowledge. Here Socrates explores the implications of this divine knowledge as it is played out in the realm of just practice. The contrast sought is between theoretical or divine knowledge and practice, and

¹⁶² See *Apology* 24c.

¹⁶³ This could also be translated as shame or reverence (West and West, 1998, p. 56).

¹⁶⁴ See 7b8-12.

their assumed or hidden connections which for Euthyphro sanctify his religious authority.

The analogy with number seems apt in so far as dread always arises along with awe, but is not thereby limited by it. Nonetheless, describing awe/dread in terms of numerical structure is misleading. As Socrates initially presented it, the dread which we feel in the presence of something awesome is the *same* as the dread which we feel when we dread things which aren't awesome, such as diseases and poverty etc. (12b6-8). The distinction lies not *within* dread, but in the presence or lack of awe preceding it. Annihilation of awe does not thereby extinguish dread. The *association* between dread and awe would, as it were, be removed from practice. Aristophanes, as he illustrates in the *Clouds*, understands awe and dread in this way. He shows that justice depends upon the awesomeness of the gods and the dread that this invokes. He vividly portrays the empty theories of Socrates supplanting the foundations of traditional practice. The vortex – Socrates' new divinity – does not evoke feelings of awe, but instead liberates us from the bonds arising from dread before Zeus. The result: injustice reigns.

The same does not hold for odd and number. Odd is a part of the whole of number because it is, along with the even, the internal *structure* of number. We do not come across number after having found odd, rather, to be a number is *also* to be odd (or even). Number and odd arise together not historically or in practice but theoretically. Hence, the annihilation of odd (or even) would also be the annihilation of number.

Since awe is not the internal structure of dread, they should not rightly be cast in a part/whole relationship. Only by abstracting from number can we do so.

With this misleading analogy, Socrates pushes Euthyphro to define piety as it stands to justice (12c11-d4). He pushes Euthyphro to delineate the internal structure of justice in the same way as we define “the odd” in terms of “number” (12d7-12).¹⁶⁵

If Euthyphro were to follow the awe/dread distinction as it arises in practice, he would say that being pious, amongst other things which may be neither pious nor impious, brings about justice. But piety for Euthyphro is not rooted in practice; it arises from what he *knows* of the gods. It is, in other words, theoretical or divine. It is the foundation of the tradition. And thus Euthyphro does not say that piety and justice are the same thing (12d5-6), but instead makes piety a part of justice. He makes no claim to being an expert on justice, he is, rather, a self-proclaimed expert on piety (4e11-5a2). He *knows* piety and this allows him to *act* justly.¹⁶⁶

Justice is thus no less incontrovertible than piety. However, justice need not be *known* along with piety, for divine knowledge is the foundation of all just

¹⁶⁵ Burger (1999, pp. 54-55) notes that “If odd and even number were the fitting model, the just and the holy would be two mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive species of some comprehensive genus and so no single action could be holy and just at the same time, in contrast with the original model of shame and fear, where everything holy would necessarily be just” Socrates, though, says that: “...awe is part of dread, just as ‘odd’ is part of ‘number’” (12c6-7) and “If the pious is part of the just, then we need to discover, as is likely what part of the just the pious would be. Now if you were asking me about one of the things mentioned just now, such as what part of number is the even and what this number happens to be, I would say ‘whatever is not scalene but rather isosceles.’...you too, then, try to teach me what part of the just is pious...” (12d9-e2). He is not saying that odd and even are analogous to the holy and the just, but that justice is *all* numbers and the holy (or pious) is both number *and* a part of number. The difference with the shame/fear (awe/dread) analogy is the distinction of the part from the whole. The number analogy shows a theoretical distinction, while the other shows a distinction in practice.

¹⁶⁶ With the exposure of the foundations of tradition, the link between Meletus and Euthyphro once again appears. Socrates makes the connection explicit: “...try to teach me what part of the just is pious, so that we may also tell Meletus not to do us injustice any longer and not to indict us for impiety, on the grounds that we have already learned sufficiently from you the things both reverent and pious and the things not” (12e1-5).

Socrates’ impiety is not his disregard of pious practice – he offers prayer and sacrifice as per the tradition – it is the separation of *theōria* from traditional practice. By way of contrast, Euthyphro’s theoretical vision is rooted in tradition, and is by this fact saved from Meletus’ accusation of impiety. The irony is that this theoretical vision, because it remains within the realm of piety, leads to the perversion of history and, ultimately, what is deemed unjust by the lights of piety – the disrespect of tradition and family. It is, nonetheless, the only defence of piety which can satisfy the accusation of a young Meletus against an old Socrates, for such a defence must transcend experience; it must become theoretical. Such a vision as we are coming to see cannot admit ignorance, for if eternity is rooted in history then it is known with the assuredness of tradition.

practice.¹⁶⁷ Consequently, according to Euthyphro, they are, and are not, one and the same thing. In truly understanding piety only he knows, so he claims, what it is to truly act with justice; however, he knows not justice. It is a consequence of, and not the foundation to, his knowledge. And so we can see why Socrates would offer two different examples of part/wholes, one rooted in practice and the other in theory, and pretend they were the same thing. For Euthyphro does just this. As we will see shortly, Euthyphro can only define justice in terms of his expert knowledge.

Euthyphro sees justice – or the benefit of humans – as rooted in the same “theoretical” foundations as piety; that is, the intimate knowledge of the divine things (4e11- 5a2). However, justice, he presumes, arises naturally in practice just as dread arises with awe. Justice is both the practical or historical consequence of piety *and* its theoretical equivalent. It is, from the perspective of tradition, unknowable, because the outcome of piety, and potentially knowable, along with the foundation of piety. Euthyphro consequently denies the practical or historical relationship of piety to justice in order to rise to his “wisdom”. This “theoretical” vision in effect dissolves the separation of the gods – the foundation of piety – from what might be just among men, making the gods and just practice ahistorical (as Euthyphro looks to the actions of Zeus as a guide to justice among men). Meanwhile he has really nothing more than their *historical* connection as justification for his practice (he is rooted in the tradition).

Euthyphro answers thus in a way which combines and separates piety and justice: “Then it seems to me, Socrates, that that part of the just is reverent and as

¹⁶⁷ If divine knowledge and knowledge of justice were one and the same thing then piety could very well be irrelevant (Lewis 1985, p. 51).

well as pious which concerns the tendance of the gods, while that which concerns the tendance of human beings is the remaining part of the just..." (12e6-9). This definition, following the paradigm of number and in keeping with Euthyphro's "expertise" makes piety a special branch of justice, distinguished by nothing other than its exclusivity. The whole, what in this case is equivalent to "number", is justice or "tendance", and the parts are the fractions of "tendance" which add up to the whole. Each part is distinguished from the other by the quantities or categories of things which require looking after. The division necessarily places gods and men on equal footing because each part must share that which makes them, combined, a whole. As, for example, odd and even, which share "number".

Given that Euthyphro understands piety and justice to be both the same in theory and distinguished through practice means, as we have seen, that he divides justice between men and gods. He makes piety that part of justice defined by the gods, thereby bringing them together in theory, but without making them *wholly* the same thing, for justice or "tendance" he understands as also a human affair (e.g., 6a3-6).

This confusion by Euthyphro of theory and practice is pounced upon by Socrates. He pursues the path paved by Euthyphro's understanding of divine knowledge as part of, and the foundation to, human practice (i.e., tendance). His first step is to compare Euthyphro's "tendance of the gods" – his justice to the gods – to looking after animals (13a1-b6).

Because the art of looking after animals, says Socrates, is for the benefit of the animal, then piety¹⁶⁸ must also, in looking after the gods, make them better.

Euthyphro is of course shocked by this idea. He thus changes tack, saying that “tendance” is, rather, the kind practiced by slaves (13d7-8). Socrates adds that this is like some sort of service to the gods (13d9-10). Euthyphro agrees. The pious has now parted company from the just, if by the just we mean “tendance”. Where piety and justice were united in theory – piety was *defined* by justice – now they are separated in practice. The gods may act justly by way of our pious practices, but our pious practices are oriented by the gods and not justice. As put by Lewis (1985, 58): “Piety presupposes that men are too weak to control chance but strong enough to control the beings who can control chance”. This might be so; nonetheless, in keeping with Euthyphro’s estimation of his own wisdom he thinks that piety is some sort of justice to the gods, and not rather a service to the gods so that *they* might enact justice. He wants the practice of piety to be itself some sort of justice, even if it has now diverged from what justice is as a whole (as a “tendance” generally).

In knowing what is the technique of piety, Euthyphro is saying that he does in a way know what is just. Where he was able to act, by his own estimation, justly in the world of men because of his “true” piety, which we saw was based on his confused association of himself with the gods, his “true” piety we now see allows him to act with justice only towards gods, not men. Considering this, we could say that Euthyphro’s piety, because its true expression is limited to the divine realm, precludes him from considering justice among men. When piety is true, then it would seem that by its own standards justice among men cannot be. Thus when

¹⁶⁸ Here Socrates refers to piety as “reverence” (West and West, 1998, p. 57).

Socrates goes on to ask Euthyphro what might be the end to which our justice to the gods aims, he seeks to fully expose the chasm separating Euthyphro's divine wisdom from just practice.

The End of Justice

Socrates proceeds to offer examples of service done for the achievement of some end: "...the skilful service to doctors happens to be a skilful service for producing what work? Don't you suppose it is for producing health? ...And surely that to housebuilders is for producing a house?" (13d12-e5). He then asks whether a "...skilful service to the gods would be a skilful service for producing what work?" saying to Euthyphro that "It is clear that you know, since you assert that you know at least the divine things most nobly of human beings" (13e7-10). Euthyphro's status as prophet is quickly dissolving into mere technician. As prophet he proclaimed to know what according to the gods is just (see 4e11-5a2). But if, as we might conclude, justice among men is the work of the gods then Euthyphro, who knows not this particular thing, cannot really claim to be a prophet either. Human justice is not one of the divine things to which he is privy. After much cajoling by Socrates Euthyphro admits that if one knows how to gratify the gods by praying and sacrificing then "...such things preserve private families as well as the communities of cities" (13e12-14b7). He doesn't say that the work of the gods is justice among men, but rather that doing what is gratifying to the gods (piety)¹⁶⁹ brings about justice among men. The traditional practices are what the gods find gratifying, and it is these things which preserve cities. Euthyphro maintains the traditional relationship between piety and

¹⁶⁹ Here Euthyphro means reverence (West and West, 1998, p. 59).

civic justice, and underlies this with the theoretical unity of piety and justice within the divine realm. He has not thereby given up his claim to prophecy, but supplemented it with the orthodox pious practices.¹⁷⁰

Following this return by Euthyphro to his safe-haven of prayers and sacrifices, Socrates comes out with a truly surprising statement. He says to

Euthyphro:

You could have told me much more briefly, Euthyphro, if you wished, the main point of what I was asking. But you are not eager to teach me; that is clear. For you turned away just now, when you were at the very point at which, if you had answered, I would have learned piety sufficiently from you (14b8-c4).

How are we to take Socrates' bold statement? What is it that Socrates would have learnt? Socrates' statement seems shocking because where previously the arguments were circular, now we are told that the conclusion is only moments away. Socrates says the key to the mystery is *here*, but does not show us exactly where! And just as quickly as he hits us with this he drops it! Why? Why does he then revert to asking Euthyphro what his definition of piety is?

Judging by the lead-up arguments to Socrates' bold statement, it makes sense to conclude that Euthyphro was holding back from saying "justice" is the gods' achievement.¹⁷¹ He *nearly* said this, when he said that piety, the art of praying and

¹⁷⁰ See Weiss (1994, p. 270), who says that "It is perhaps not surprising that Euthyphro, the self-proclaimed expert on holiness, returns finally to representing holiness as a form of know-how: the pious man knows how to say and do what is gratifying to the gods by praying and sacrificing (14b3)".

¹⁷¹ On this point I disagree with Blits (1980) and agree with Cobb (1985). Blits (1980) says that we can find the answer in Socrates' silence: Socrates goes on to examine knowledge of sacrificing and praying, and omits the other part of Euthyphro's answer, the part about preserving families and the city. And so "If the correct answer is indicated by Socrates' silence, the holy is entirely human; its decisive effects are familial and political stability and order. The holy is thus subordinate to the statesman's art (cf. 2a8-d1)" (p. 34). I don't think that this is the correct interpretation (even though it might be true of conventional piety) given that Socrates made it clear that the answer was on the tip of Euthyphro's tongue (14c1-3). It would make no sense for Euthyphro to elaborate on what he has already said. Rather, it is the work of the gods, and not the outcome of piety which is the issue here. Even though he

sacrificing, preserves families and cities. Bringing human justice under the divine work of the gods would, though, leave Euthyphro in an impossible position. He would have to explain why he is, knowing “how the divine is disposed concerning the pious and the impious” (4e3-4) destroying his family, and so, by the standards of *men*, acting unjustly.

Previously, piety and justice were the same thing: to know what is pious and to act accordingly was for Euthyphro to act with justice. To not act piously was to act with injustice – as did his father. Divine justice and human justice were unified. Now, however, we see that it is more complex. The separation of justice among men and piety/justice in theory must be bridged by pious practice, which is both just for men and just for gods. Proper prayer and sacrifice *combines* theoretical piety (justice to the gods) with the practice of piety (historically arising justice among men). Hence, in satisfying the gods, Euthyphro, so he says, preserves cities. However, divine justice – theoretical piety – is separated from *theoretical* justice among men. In fact there can be *no* theoretical (or divine) perspective of justice among men, for such justice arises merely as the side-effect of divine justice. It is neither true nor false for, according to Euthyphro’s perspective, it is not the work of the gods. Justice, by this understanding, is something like a demythologised version of the orthodoxy; it is not divine, it is merely a conventional unity.

Not knowing, and unable to know, anything about justice among men, but proclaiming to know everything about divine justice, we could say that Euthyphro’s

has said what piety brings, he says nothing at all about what the *gods* bring, and this was Socrates’ question. If he had said this then he would have to explain why *his* service to the gods is not aligned with the *work* of the gods, for he is setting about to destroy his family. I would agree with Cobb, therefore, who says that “the goal that the gods hope to achieve by using human beings as their servants is the spread of justice among humankind” (p. 43).

wisdom is indeed supernatural. In accord with this interpretation we find that Euthyphro's supernatural wisdom, or more rightly his ignorance of his lack of wisdom, is played up by Socrates. Jokes are littered throughout the dialogue about Euthyphro's unwillingness to teach his wisdom (3d6); his wealth of wisdom (12a6); and Socrates' own desire for Euthyphro's wisdom (14d5).

Divine Justice

Wisdom is what Euthyphro is afraid to admit he lacks. And rather than professing his ignorance, both as to what the gods love and what is their achievement, Euthyphro sticks with the knowledge which underpins his authority; he holds fast to the notion that the pious is knowledge of sacrifice and prayer. This is defined by Socrates as a "...certain art of commerce for gods and human beings with each other" (14e6-7).

In commerce, the trading of goods or services requires that each party knows what is of value to the other (14e). If we were to write a manual on the art of trading with gods we might say that the following are required: (1) the gods have desires; (2) their desires are open to us; and (3) we can give them what they desire. We would assume, therefore, that the gods desire only what falls under our power to give them. This would be fine if our gifts satisfied the *true* desires of the gods, if we knew what the gods desired so that we could offer the appropriate gift. Still, even if we could do this, as Socrates points out, a gift to the gods always implies that *they* are in some way deficient. Euthyphro, thinking that he has circumvented this problem, says what the gods desire is respect and honour (15a10) or, gratification – what they love (15b3). What they love turns out to be, from our perspective, a service to Euthyphro and

nothing else. The gods love what only Euthyphro can provide, given his knowledge of them. Euthyphro has, in effect, inverted the natural order, making the gods serve him. And in serving him they bring about what Euthyphro himself loves – his own wisdom.¹⁷² At the beginning of the dialogue we saw that Euthyphro believed that prosecuting his father was pious, that this was what the gods love. Now we see that according to Euthyphro’s own understanding this has no relation at all to justice among men. Euthyphro’s supernatural wisdom is, like the arguments pursued throughout the dialogue, circular.

And so we return to the beginning: “So aren’t you aware now that you are asserting that what is dear to the gods is pious? Does this turn out to be anything else but the dear-to-the-gods, or not?” (15c5-7). We now have a clearer picture of why contradiction should arise. Euthyphro’s understanding of the gods as human-like, as desiring something other than themselves, sanctifies his specialist knowledge; while their “objective love”, their love of only what they themselves choose, is necessarily a sanctification of their divinity. But *this* love and absence of stable form makes it impossible for him to know what is truly pious. Not only this, his desire for transcendence precludes him from understanding his own lack of wisdom, and binds him to the distinction between knowledge of divine and human justice.

“Therefore either we weren’t agreeing nobly before, or, if we did agree nobly then, we aren’t setting it down correctly now” (15c9-11) continues Socrates, then making the call to return to the beginning and search out again a definition of the pious. This would, of course, if Euthyphro still professed certain knowledge, take us around in another circle. The consequences of Euthyphro breaking the circle would

¹⁷² See *Statesman* (290d7), where seers are described as being filled with their own self-importance.

be that he could not be certain that prosecuting his father is the right thing to do. In

Socrates' words:

For if you didn't know plainly the pious and the impious, there is no way that you would ever have attempted to prosecute an elderly man, your father, for murder on behalf of a hired man. Rather, as to the gods, you would have dreaded the risk that you would not do it correctly, and as to human beings, you would have been ashamed (15d4-9).

We could also add that Euthyphro's absence of dread is also a lack of real reverence. He does not revere the gods because they are not, for him, truly divine. We could possibly say the same thing about Meletus, whose boldness in prosecuting Socrates (the "old man") under the auspices of the pious also shows a lack of shame amongst men.

An Ignorant Socrates

In the last section of the dialogue, as Euthyphro is escaping further questions, Socrates laments the fact that he was unable to learn about the pious and the impious from Euthyphro and so escape Meletus' accusation. However, we know it was precisely *because* he was unable to learn this from Euthyphro that he is able, philosophically, to escape the accusation brought by Meletus. Nonetheless, Socrates was only able to escape before *our* eyes, as it were. For Euthyphro, if he had understood Socrates, would inevitably have sided with Meletus. That it was necessary to make his defence using the "true" man of tradition precluded Socrates, I think, from entering into a discussion about wisdom. Such a discussion would have exposed his own ignorance, and so have shown from the perspective of tradition, from the perspective of the city, Meletus' charges to be true, thereby ending the

conversation and dissolving his defence. As it happens, the truth of Meletus' charges was shown to be merely historical. This is because the tradition cannot but help decree that *true* justice is tantamount to a specialist understanding of the gods. Such an understanding denies (Socrates') ignorance *within* wisdom, replacing it with the blindness and silence of convention. Only with an "impious" search for the divine might we accord with the truth of piety; and in so doing expose the foundations of justice.

The *Euthyphro* thereby sets the scene for reflection on the prophetic nature of philosophy.¹⁷³ In the following chapter I turn to Plato's *Phaedo*. This dialogue explores what was only ever alluded to in the *Euthyphro*: the wisdom which might be attained with the examination of our own soul.

¹⁷³ Desjardins (1988, p. 116) makes the more general observation that the aporetic ending of this "Socratic" dialogue is intended not as an end but as a beginning.

Chapter 5: Death and the Soul in Plato's *Phaedo*

Now I want to prophesy to those who convicted me, for I am at the point when men prophesy most, when they are about to die...You are wrong if you believe that by killing people you will prevent anyone from reproaching you for not living in the right way. To escape such tests is neither possible nor good, but it is best and easiest not to discredit others but to prepare oneself to be as good as possible. With this prophecy to you who convicted me, I part from you.¹⁷⁴

Our souls are like those orphans whose unwedded mothers die in bearing them: the secret of our paternity lies in their grave, and we must there to learn it.¹⁷⁵

Introduction

Other dialogues speak of philosophy, usually by bringing it into relief with a reflection on arts which also aspire to the good life.¹⁷⁶ But no dialogue, except the *Phaedo*, pursues directly the *theoretical* question of the philosophical way of life. The *Republic*, for instance, puts to philosophy the question of politics which, as we learn, is also a philosophical question. However, it is not philosophical in the same way as the question posed in the *Phaedo*; for the philosophical aspect of politics is that which *transcends* mere political truth, whereas the philosophical (or more rightly, theoretical) aspect of philosophy is that which transcends the philosophical life. The *political* life is subsumed by philosophy in a different way to the *philosophical* life, and thus one cannot fully transcend the philosophical life to expose philosophy: only *through* the philosophical life is philosophy exposed. To put it another way: politics is but one aspect of our lives, whereas philosophy must be the grounding for all

¹⁷⁴ *Apology* 39c1-d8 (all translations are from Plato, 1997a).

¹⁷⁵ Melville *Moby Dick* (1999, p. 464).

¹⁷⁶ For dialogues which refer specifically to the life of philosophy see *Euthydemus* 304d+; *Gorgias* 481e-488b; *Phaedrus* 249a-e, 256a; *Republic* 3.407c, 5-6.475c-491e, 10. 611e, 10.618e; *Symposium* 215b-222c for Alcibiades' critique of Socrates; and *Apology* 19d-33c.

aspects. A philosophical reflection on the philosophical life, as a life lived according to the truth *must*, then, be intimately tied to a reflection on death. But *what* could we know of death from within life? And how can death be a foundation for a certain sort of life?

In arguing that these questions are fundamental to the *Phaedo*, I will also hope to show that they plumb the possibility of philosophy itself. To wonder about these questions is, of course, already to philosophise. And to wonder about the possibility of philosophy is to wonder whether our understanding is not just circumscribed by *us*, whether it *is* the path by which we are led to encompass ever greater truths. The *Phaedo*, I will show, addresses these concerns.

I will argue that the *Phaedo* shows how such a theoretical understanding of philosophy can too easily lapse into disengagement, becoming a concern of gods only, not people.¹⁷⁷ We can too easily leave ourselves behind, in other words. This, as the dialogue shows, is tied up with “philosophical method”. The “truth” of philosophy might thus be both a consolation and a warning: a consolation for what philosophical practice cannot provide, and a warning about the dangers of transcending philosophical *practice*.

When interpreting the *Phaedo* I do, therefore, take seriously the *practice* of philosophy. I make the initial assumption – following what is shown with reflection on our everyday lives – that *all* practice, if it has a *purpose*, arises from the recognition that what we currently accept as our natural state is somehow deficient and that it is up to us to create ourselves under the shadow of this knowledge. For we do not

¹⁷⁷ And thus it is important for us to note that Socrates reflects upon his life as a whole, immediately before he is put to death.

stumble upon a way of life but, rather, take up what we may stumble across because we *can* justify it, because it fits with what we *understand* to be a better life.

To set the scene for my upcoming study of the *Phaedo* I will briefly survey some thoughts on life offered by Marcus Aurelius and Friedrich Nietzsche.¹⁷⁸ Such a survey will, I hope, show what is at stake when we speak about the significance of death – the end of life or Nature – for our understanding of philosophy and, in particular, its significance for *how* we can justify seeking to live better lives.

According to Nature

Aurelius

Marcus Aurelius, the famous Stoic and Roman Emperor, mused that

One thing hastens into being, another out of it. Even while a thing is in the act of coming into existence, some part of it has already ceased to be. Flux and change are for ever renewing the fabric of the universe, just as the ceaseless sweep of time is for ever renewing the face of eternity.¹⁷⁹

And:

Either the world is a mere hotch-potch of random cohesions and dispersions, or else it is a unity of order and providence. If the former, why wish to survive in such a purposeless and chaotic confusion; why care about anything, save the manner of the ultimate return to dust; why trouble my head at all; since, do what I will, dispersion must overtake me sooner or later? But if the contrary be true, then I do reverence, I stand firmly, and I put my trust in the directing Power.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ I chose Aurelius and Nietzsche because they each passionately sought the best way to live according to Nature. What this life might entail is distinguished by how each understands philosophy.

¹⁷⁹ *Meditations*, book 6, s. 15. (translations are from Aurelius, 1964).

¹⁸⁰ *Meditations*, book 6, s. 10.

Again: "Observe how all things are continually being born of change; teach yourself to see that Nature's highest happiness lies in changing the things that are, and forming new things after their kind".¹⁸¹

In reading these remarks by Aurelius we could say that, for him, even though the cosmos is *becoming* it is not meaningless. Becoming is to be revered because its end is good. And so we who are but a link within the chain of becoming fulfil our part most nobly by cherishing, rather than fighting, divine providence. We have this choice because we are not fully subsumed under the realm of Nature. Nature is *necessarily* divine, we are not.

The practice of philosophy is made possible by this disjunction. In recognising that the goodness of Nature transcends us yet ceaseless flux, as Nature appears to us, is a movement within this goodness, we can understand the world in such a way whereby the *practice* of philosophy is paramount. We do not seek out the essence of Nature but find truth in our resolve to "harmonise" with Nature, as it were. Thus the practice of philosophy is necessary in order that we might attain our rightful place within Nature. We arrive at this place after reflecting upon the nature of things as they appear to us. We see that they are temporal – they are born, they grow old and they die. All things change. With awareness that the impermanence of things is the necessary and proper way of Nature we conclude that self-control, equanimity, and courage are necessary for *us* so that *we* may live at peace with the world. This is to let go of what we cannot wholly fathom, while acknowledging that there is a divine plan beyond our full comprehension. But this is far from letting go of ourselves. For, in order to accept Nature for what it is we must take command of

¹⁸¹ *Mediations*, book 4, s. 36.

what is ours. Only with the virtues such as self-control etc. can we imitate the wisdom of divine providence. As a consequence, with philosophical contemplation we can understand why our own self-possessed wisdom is naturally good; and with this understanding we can seek to let it flower. In sum, the wise person sees Nature for what it is and this allows him or her to act with clarity and insight.

What I find beautiful and magisterial about this is that in seeing the world clearly we realise our better selves. Aurelius' perspective on how we must follow Nature rings true from within our daily lives. Because the highest in Nature is that which is deep, unified, and mysterious, and because it is *natural* for us to choose what is best, we are living in accord with Nature when we revere what is deepest, unified and most divine in ourselves. What is deepest within us is brought to light as the virtues (those practices which are rooted in and support wisdom), just as the deepest, divine and most mysterious aspect of Nature is the exhibition of harmony or unity. Wisdom is the expression of our unity, as it were.

What seems almost too grand, though, is the idea that Nature *itself* is unified, that all things move by way of wisdom. Why does Aurelius make this seemingly unfathomable leap? The reason is, I think, ethical. What he seems to be saying is that we shouldn't just put up with what Nature throws at us. Nature is more than this. We are more than this. We should nobly transform adversity into necessity. By *doing* this, we find wisdom, and we emulate Nature. Thus the movements of Nature are not meaningless, for when we properly see into them we find that at their core is a wisdom directly experienced by us. With this experience we see the absurdity of those who claim otherwise. For, if the world were just a chance organisation of atoms, as argued by Democritus, then we would be under no compulsion to discover

Nature's truth. Our experience of wisdom and ignorance would be equivalent. We would be merely another movement in the chaos of all things. There would indeed be no truth to uncover and so no sense by which we might hope to better ourselves – no purpose to our lives, as Aurelius said. That there is some coherence to our lives thus reflects the truth that Nature herself shows us her depths. This coherence, our “taking command of ourselves”, is wise in itself for it is, according to Aurelius, the path to right conduct. Hence, we can see why Aurelius said that not only is Nature coherent, it is also wise – “a unity of order and providence” – for with the right understanding, with wisdom, we uncover the *whole* of Nature.¹⁸²

Nietzsche

The grand beauty of Aurelius' vision is one thing; the truth of it might very well be another. Equating what is good for us and what is good by Nature would seem to reduce the mystery of the whole to our appreciation of it. This was Nietzsche's beef with the Stoics. He thought that they weren't honest enough, that they trundled out “Nature” to justify their own ideas about what is and is not noble, perverting Nature as a consequence.¹⁸³ Nietzsche's beef was concerned with *theory*. He took umbrage with the fact that the Stoics were not following Nature as it really is.

¹⁸² “Do you then, I would say, simply and spontaneously make your choice of the highest, and cleave to that. ‘But what is best for myself is the highest,’ you say? If it is best for you as a reasonable being, hold fast to it; but if as an animal merely, then say so outright, and maintain your view with becoming humility – only be very sure that you have probed the matter aright” (*Meditations*, book 3, s. 6).

¹⁸³ See *Beyond Good and Evil*, part 1, s. 9 (translations are from Nietzsche, 1990): “Is living not valuating, preferring, being unjust, being limited, wanting to be different? And even if your imperative ‘live according to nature’ meant at bottom the same thing as ‘live according to life’ – how could you *not* do that? Why make a principle of what you yourselves are and must be? – The truth of it is, however, quite different: while you rapturously pose as deriving the canon of your law from nature, you want something quite the reverse of that, you strange actors and self-deceivers! Your pride wants to prescribe your morality, your ideal, to nature, yes to nature itself, and incorporate them in it; you demand that nature should be nature ‘according to the Stoa’ and would like to make all existence exist only after your own image – as a tremendous eternal glorification and universalisation of Stoicism!”

We could look at it this way. If, on the one hand, Nature is all-wise and we are a part of Nature, then no matter our practice we are ourselves devotees of providence; but if, on the other hand, we must *become* a part of Nature, then, because Nature only presents her goodness to us in the present moment,¹⁸⁴ *our* becoming is dissociated from her end. Explaining this a little further, we could say that in becoming a part of Nature we accept the pains of life for what we choose – a noble life. That is, we accept Nature becoming for the sake of Nature’s end. And so, at bottom, only as a consequence of our *choice* is the end of Nature exposed; in every other respect she shows only her inscrutability. How then, other than that we endure her capriciousness, can we speak of our Nature as her ends?

Despite the logical persuasiveness of Nietzsche’s appraisal he is, I think, too harsh in his criticism. He doesn’t give a fair hearing to the Stoics’ understanding of Nature, weighing in favour of the ends and paying scant regard to the practice which might open to us the divinity within Nature herself. His partiality is in keeping with his religious zeal to proclaim boldly what is the objective (or scientific) truth of our humanity (and thereby of truth itself). He is the unmasker of philosophy, the one who sees through the posturing and self-deception of the “moralists” preceding him.¹⁸⁵ He sees himself as the hero, unafraid to recognise that the rank-ordering or valuation of life which we justify in the name of Nature is not in fact true, but the

¹⁸⁴ “For the sole thing of which any man can be deprived is the present; since this is all he owns, and nobody can lose what is not his” (*Meditations*, book 2, s. 14).

¹⁸⁵ For instance: “What makes one regard philosophers half mistrustfully and half mockingly is not that one again and again detects how innocent they are...but that they display altogether insufficient honesty, while making a mighty and virtuous noise as soon as the problem of truthfulness is even remotely touched on” (*Beyond Good and Evil*, part 1, s. 5).

work of human artistry; *in fact*, neither true nor false, but still, nonetheless, Natural.¹⁸⁶

We follow Nature by fashioning values which express her will or power. This is our end – the end of Nature – no matter how much we might fool ourselves into believing otherwise. And thus the present moment is from this standpoint, because unregulated by truth, a place of infinite freedom; and, because it is *also* the *passing* moment of history, wholly determinate. To *be* human is to be split between the infinite freedom of the present moment and the absolute bondage of history.

Humanity thus emerges as Nature, as *both* fate and chance. According to Nietzsche, to *become* human is accomplished by forgetting this destructive truth and encompassing Nature fully by becoming her, by realising a truth which we have ourselves created.¹⁸⁷ Only by doing this can we extricate ourselves from the emptiness of history.

¹⁸⁶ “The falseness of an opinion is not for us any objection to it: it is here perhaps that our new language sounds most strangely. The question is, how far an opinion is life-furthering, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps species-rearing; and we are fundamentally inclined to maintain that the falsest opinions (to which the synthetic judgments *a priori* belong) are the most indispensable to us...*To recognise untruth as a condition of life*: that is certainly to impugn the traditional ideas of value in a dangerous manner, and a philosophy which ventures to do so has thereby placed itself beyond good and evil” (*Beyond Good and Evil*, part 1, s. 4).

¹⁸⁷ See also David Hume, who reduces the End of Nature to a human fabrication: “The scenes of the universe are continually shifting, and one object follows another in an uninterrupted succession; but the power of force which actuates the whole machine, is entirely concealed from us, and never discovers itself in any of the sensible qualities of the body” and “...the generality of mankind never find any difficulty in accounting for the more common and familiar operations of nature...It is only on the discovery of extraordinary phaenomena, such as earthquakes, pestilence, and prodigies of any kind, that they find themselves at a loss to assign a proper cause, and to explain the manner in which the effect is produced by it. It is usual for men, in such difficulties, to have recourse to some invisible intelligent principle as the immediate cause of the event which surprises them...Here, then, many philosophers think themselves obliged by reason to have recourse, on all occasions, to the same principle, which the vulgar never appeal to but in cases that appear miraculous and supernatural. They acknowledge mind and intelligence to be, not only the ultimate and original cause of all things, but the immediate and sole cause of every event which appears in nature... Thus, according to these philosophers, every thing is full of God...it seems to me that this theory of the universal energy and operation of the Supreme Being is too bold ever to carry conviction with it to a man, sufficiently apprized of the weakness of human reason, and the narrow limits to which it is confined in all its operations...And however we may flatter ourselves that we are guided, in every step which we take, by a kind of verisimilitude and experience, we may be assured that this fancied experience has no authority when we thus apply it to subjects that lie entirely out of the sphere of experience” (Hume, 1952, s. 7, part 1). Whereas Hume *reduces* the End of Nature to a concept, Nietzsche would like to *expand* this concept into an existential necessity – the will to power.

Living Truly

We might say that Nietzsche resolved the contradiction inherent to Stoicism – arising from the disjunction between human judgement and absolute Nature. In so doing, though, he has made us disappear not into wisdom, but into the void. The space for practice is not, as it was for Aurelius, already prepared by a reverence for what is profound and wise, but rather wisdom is already foreclosed as merely our *natural* tendency to *falsify* Nature. If this is the painful truth (remembering that Nietzsche saw himself as the most truthful of philosophers because he was unafraid to face squarely the terror of nature minus the moral gloss¹⁸⁸) then, we must wonder, how could a philosophy which finds itself through practice ever defend its veracity? What would it mean even to speak of a truth which might encompass the way things are *and* our evaluation of the world? What would it mean to defend a life without *merely* justifying one's own preferences? Is the "truth" mere gloss, a diversion from ongoing practice? Should we, like Aristotle, separate theory and practice, and make nobility self-evident?¹⁸⁹

These questions already show that we have stepped into philosophy in the *grand* sense (that we wish to speak and act with *full* awareness), and what's more, that it is philosophy which will render our first step merely hopeful fantasy or truly an awakening. Without entering into the debate here, but still to offer an introduction to what follows, I would say that for Plato philosophy is this awakening and that

¹⁸⁸ For instance: "What makes one regard philosophers half mistrustfully and half mockingly is not that one again and again detects how innocent they are...but that they display altogether insufficient honesty, while making a mighty and virtuous noise as soon as the problem of truthfulness is even remotely touched on" (*Beyond Good and Evil*, part 1, s. 5).

¹⁸⁹ E.g., "In most men, pleasant acts conflict with one another because they are not pleasant by nature, but men who love what is noble derive pleasure from what is naturally pleasant" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1.15).

such an awakening involves *seeking* our true place in Nature, with full recognition of what this implies.¹⁹⁰

The questions I will be pursuing in this chapter on the *Phaedo* follow from Nietzsche's concern that virtuous practice cannot be sanctified by Nature. What is at stake, therefore, is the very foundation of philosophy; which is to say the *natural* accord between understanding and goodness. The nature of such an exploration makes it impossible that anything like a proof can be offered, for in undertaking the quest we are in a way already sanctifying it. Rather, such an exploration looks more like a self-uncovering (which for Nietzsche exposed chaos, and which for Aurelius mirrored the whole of Nature).

At bottom is the nature of what and who we are. That this question should arise at all is not, though, grounds to believe that there is a ready answer. Rather, the appearance or not of an answer will have something to do with the way of our search; and the way, as my interpretation of the *Phaedo* will show, is illustrated by what makes possible the very existence of philosophy in the first place. This quest will necessarily seek to expose our origins. It will thus be a reflection on death as both the beginning and end of life, the nature of this life as it arises within these limits exposed to eternity, and our place as creatures who seek to understand what is naturally good for us.

These explorations seek the possibility of philosophy not just from the perspective of theory, wherein truth is dissociated from our lives, but also from *within* the practice of living. From within this practice, the possibility of philosophy

¹⁹⁰ It is true that Aristotle believed man's greatest pursuit was theoretical contemplation; but this is passive in a way which Plato's quest is not. Contra Plato, Aristotle embraced a clearer distinction between Nature and ourselves, a distinction which renders Nature objective.

is, as the *Phaedo* demonstrates, shown by reflecting on the limits of our own lives, limits which guide us towards eternity and which, because they appear only against the profound otherness of death, are partly prophetic.

The Phaedo: Part 1

The *Phaedo*,¹⁹¹ from the outset, hints to us of a mysterious and profound opposition. Phaedo, the narrator of the dialogue, presents to his companion, Echecrates, a speech about Socrates' last day, the day of his execution. This speech, he says, is delivered in the spirit of commemoration; a commemoration of the dead Socrates.¹⁹² As well as describing to Echecrates some of the details of Socrates' last day, he presents a verbatim (according to him) account of Socrates' conversation with his friends. This conversation is on the soul (the dialogue was in ancient times known as "On the Soul"), and eternal life. Within *this* drama, the profound opposition of life and death is brought further to light by Socrates. His conversation is itself a (ironic) commemoration of sorts, a commemoration of the foundations of the philosophical life.

Thus the *Phaedo* is, as I will show, profoundly self-reflective: it is a philosophical commemoration of philosophy – i.e., Socrates' "speech" – as disclosed by a commemoration of a philosopher – i.e., Phaedo's "speech". We come to see the dead Socrates through the living conversation of Phaedo and likewise within this conversation we come to see the "non-living" foundation of philosophy through a reflection on the individual soul. Despite what would seem to be the almost infinite

¹⁹¹ Translations are from Plato (1997a).

¹⁹² "Remembering Socrates, whether I'm speaking myself or listening to someone else speaking, is always my favourite occupation", says Phaedo (58d5-6).

distance to the roots of philosophy (they are presented dramatically as being at least *two* lifetimes away – (1) Phaedo remembering Socrates and (2) Socrates remembering eternity) when reading the dialogue they present themselves to us intimately. This suggests that what we *share* is the foundation from which blooms philosophy, a foundation which though it transcends each of us individually, is exposed only at the edges of our *own* existence.

The drama thus confronts us with the complete *otherness* of death to life, at the same time showing death's presence *within* life. The otherness of death is presented as the existential reality of Socrates' (and also our own) absence, while at the same time (the now dead) Socrates' eschatological discussion suggests some on-going presence of death within life. This dramatic frame of the dialogue thus holds in tension our double exposure to death; a double exposure which, as the dialogue shows, arises along with the possibility of philosophy.

The opposition theme arises again with Phaedo's own reflections on his feelings the day that Socrates' died. On Socrates' last day he says he "...had a strange feeling, an unaccustomed mixture of pleasure and pain at the same time¹⁹³ as [he] reflected that [Socrates] was just about to die.¹⁹⁴" (59a5-7). Phaedo felt pleasure on this day because Socrates met his death with such "fearlessness and nobility" that he held strong hope that Socrates would "...not go to the next world without some divine protection..." (see 58e5-59a2). He was pained, of course, because this doesn't

¹⁹³ Literally: "one and the same, common, joint" (Liddell and Scott, 1940). This should be read with reference to Socrates' musings on bodily pleasure and pain (60b2-c5), particularly the simile about two creatures with one head.

¹⁹⁴ This literally means "bring to pass, accomplish" (Liddell and Scott, 1940). In other dialogues, the Gorgias 481b) for example, Plato uses a different word to refer to death. Maybe at this point in the *Phaedo* he is underscoring the ambiguity of Socrates' death (What has been accomplished? Death? Or life?).

take away from the fact that Socrates will be gone. Phaedo's pleasure, we could say, saves Socrates' death from tragedy, allowing it to be transformed into what is presented as the dramatic *outer* frame of the dialogue – the pleasant activity of recounting stories about Socrates (58d4-6). These stories are like dreams of an immortalised Socrates in the after-life, an eternal image of his final conversation with friends. As others have pointed out, Socrates does live on through these stories, and so, in a sense, does gain eternal life.¹⁹⁵ Nonetheless, this is not, I believe, where Phaedo is coming from. Phaedo felt pleasure, and "...virtually none of the pity you'd have expected..." (59a1) because Socrates *himself* would have a greater chance than anyone else of being all right in the after-life. The stories about Socrates are not for Phaedo the continuation of Socrates-in-abstract. It is absurd to think that Phaedo in believing that Socrates continues to exist must recount stories about him to make this belief true. These stories are touchstones of the real Socrates who, he believes, does with all likelihood live on (see 59e1-59a2).

This question of Socrates' immortality is, of course, the philosophical heart of the dialogue. And thus if we are reticent to follow Phaedo only as far as he would take us (to take pleasure in hope rather than enter into philosophy), Socrates' happiness is also open to question. And if, as I will argue, Socrates' attempts to prove his immortality are unsuccessful,¹⁹⁶ then we must ask ourselves why *is* he happy? Thus I will argue against Eckstein,¹⁹⁷ who believes that Plato is taking this opportunity to critique Socrates' obsessive rationalism; a rationalism which has led him to the absurd and selfish decision to commit suicide. I will argue that Socrates'

¹⁹⁵ E.g., Ahrens Dorf (1995, p. 17).

¹⁹⁶ See also, e.g., the Introduction to Plato (1993) and Gadamer (1980).

¹⁹⁷ Eckstein (1981).

so-called suicide cannot be attributed to a manic rationalism (indeed, I will argue that we cannot so easily label Socrates' death as a "suicide"), and that to do so is to misrepresent the dialogue as merely a dramatic piece, starring Socrates as the stubborn grouch, unable to admit that he may have been wrong in not fleeing the prison to save his skin. As will emerge with the unfolding of the dialogue, I don't believe this does justice to the presented arguments nor the drama.

I will also take a different view to Ahrens Dorf,¹⁹⁸ despite his brilliant and well-argued interpretation, and despite the many points on which I have benefited from his insights. My interpretation will differ from his on what is a crucial point: the philosophical significance of death. Once again, my position on this crucial point will arise as I develop my interpretation.¹⁹⁹

Phaedo Remembers

That the dramatic context is of some importance has been shown, I think, by this introduction. Still, the issue remains of how we are to approach Socrates given that it is only *through* the narration of Phaedo. Can we trust Phaedo to remember the important details or not? In a recent book, *The Soul of Socrates*, Ranasinghe²⁰⁰ debates this very issue. He argues that we must approach the dialogue in the *Phaedo* by way of its narrator, Phaedo. His reasons for doing this are well founded. Although, I believe he pushes them too far. Ranasinghe points out that the only other dialogue named after one of the supernumerary characters is the *Philebus*, and the *Phaedo* is the

¹⁹⁸ Ahrens Dorf (1995).

¹⁹⁹ Two other books which I will refer to throughout the chapter – by Burger (1984) and Dorter (1982) – do not deny the fundamental significance of death as a philosophical concern. On key points, however, my arguments differ from theirs. My interpretation of the significance of death for philosophy is thereby not wholly aligned with either of their interpretations.

²⁰⁰ Ranasinghe (2000).

only dialogue named after the narrator.²⁰¹ The naming of the *Philebus* is easy to understand according to Ranasinghe: Philebus embodies the life that Protarchus, Socrates' conversation partner, defends. Yet, if we think about some of the other dialogues named after a character – the *Laches*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Theaetetus* for instance – we also find that these characters also define in some essential way the theme of the dialogue. And hence I wonder whether we can assume that just because Phaedo is the *narrator* that he also acts as an *editor* of Socrates' conversation.²⁰² An assumption more in keeping with the other dialogues and one which doesn't reduce the teaching of the *Phaedo* to merely a negation of Phaedo's perspective based on *his own* inconsistencies, is that the dialogue is so named, and set outside of Athens in Phlius (a "Pythagorean" town), to provide a context for and to illuminate the themes of Pythagorists (the soul as harmony etc.) and death, more generally.²⁰³ That Phaedo is asked by Echecrates to give an accurate account, and that he consents to do so, alludes, I think, to Phaedo's distance from Socrates²⁰⁴ and thereby his distance from death. The character of Phaedo does then, I believe, *represent* what *he is* in the dialogue – a narrator. Because of this representation, because Phaedo reproduces and does not interpret the conversation of Socrates, we *can* philosophically engage with Socrates. This is not so different to *Laches* or *Phaedrus*, who also *represent* who they are.

Still, this may not be enough to convince Ranasinghe, who says that the narrators of other dialogues such as the *Symposium* and the *Theaetetus* confirmed with

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 55.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 55.

²⁰³ Possibly, it is to create even further distance between ourselves and Socrates' death.

²⁰⁴ See Ranasinghe (2000, p. 53).

Socrates the accuracy of their accounts. Phaedo, he says, does not.²⁰⁵ In Phaedo's defence, however, we should remember that Apollodorus, the narrator of the *Symposium*, was not even at the gathering at Agathon's house, but was told the story by a follower of Socrates. Apollodorus then checked for accuracy only *part* of the story with Socrates – of which part we are never told.²⁰⁶ The same is true of the *Theaetetus*, where Euclides checks for accuracy only those parts which he could not remember. Again we do not know which parts have been checked, and we ourselves cannot check the accuracy of those parts which haven't.

Nonetheless, and despite these arguments, if we take the position that we can only enter the dialogues – or, at least the *Phaedo* – through the narrator, we are left in the awkward position of having to interpret the internal dialogue from *within* the narrator's perspective. What would this mean?

Firstly, to even understand the dialogue *as* interpretation we would have to understand it as a deviation, a deviation from the "true" dialogue. But how do we assess this "true" dialogue except through the narrator? Even if all we could fathom *was* the narrator's interpretation, presuming in other words, that the truth is open to us only *through* the inconsistencies presented by the narrator, how could we separate the narrator's inconsistencies from those presented *within* the narration? Wouldn't we have to presume, in the first instance, that some inconsistencies have arisen because of the narrator's own inclinations, some he has passed over, and that possibly, other inconsistencies have been covered over? And this would mean once again that we would have to know the "true" dialogue in order to establish what in

²⁰⁵ But Phaedo *does* discuss afterwards with the others who were there at Socrates' death (see 88c1-2).

²⁰⁶ 173b.

fact are and are not the inconsistencies which lead us to see clearly the truth that the narrator unknowingly presents to us.

Secondly, not knowing the “true” dialogue would prevent us from recognising dramatic irony. For only when Socrates’ conversation partners speak their mind, or, in this case, when we are presented with *their* words, can we grasp the irony of their position. Without access to these words, and without confidence in the description of the context which is presented to us, irony cannot lead us to truth, only fantasy. Fantasy can only be exposed within a broader perspective. Such a perspective, if the dialogue is wholly narrated, must then arise from *within* this narration. In other words, the narrator, if the dialogue is to engage us philosophically, must be able to recollect the essence of the dialogue, even if he is unable to fully grasp its meaning.

For these reasons I do not believe that we can follow Ranasinghe and imagine that “Phaedo is at liberty to embellish his story and highlight those aspects of the tale that he finds most attractive”.²⁰⁷ The most we can say, I think, is that Phaedo presents only part of the story, that part which he thinks, Echecrates – a Pythagorean – would find most interesting.²⁰⁸ And so we could add that the interpretation presented to us has been embellished *despite* the presence of Phaedo as the narrator. It has been embellished in the same way that all of Plato’s dialogues have: Socrates engages in discussions with others who see the world differently to him, and so he speaks differently to different people.²⁰⁹ Thus the *Phaedo* is already tainted with what is

²⁰⁷ Ranasinghe (2000, p. 57).

²⁰⁸ I think that Eckstein’s (1981, p. 4) approach is thus not overstepping the mark when he says that Plato: “... tells the story of Socrates’ deathday from the limited point of view of Phaedo, one of the characters present”.

²⁰⁹ See Rosen (1987b, p. liii).

important to Pythagoreans. In fact, many of Ranasinghe's perspicacious observations are based on access to the drama of Socrates' death, unmediated by Phaedo; and only with this access is it possible for Ranasinghe to transcend the Pythagorean world-view.

Liberation and Death

And so with this we turn back to the *Phaedo* and to Socrates' opening comments.

Socrates sat up on the bed, bent his leg and rubbed it with his hand, and as he rubbed it he said: "What a strange thing that which men call pleasure seems to be, and how astonishing the relation it has with what is thought to be its opposite, namely pain! A man cannot have both at the same time. Yet if he pursues and catches the one, he is almost always to catch the other also, like two creatures with one head..." (60b2-7).

Earlier we saw that Phaedo experienced pleasure and pain mixed within the soul: they were experienced simultaneously, not temporally. We should bear this in mind as we come now to make sense of Socrates' remarks about *bodily* experience of pain and pleasure.

Having just been released from his fetters we find Socrates rubbing his leg and musing about pleasure; or, to be more precise, about those pleasures "so called" by men. Dorter²¹⁰ also notices the distinction made between what men call pleasure and "true" pleasure.²¹¹ On the *apparent* opposition Dorter remarks that "...their falsity consists precisely in the 'strangeness' Socrates points out: they are not pleasant or unpleasant *in themselves* but only in relation to each other: pleasure as a cessation

²¹⁰ See also White (1989, p. 29).

²¹¹ Dorter (1982, pp. 5-6).

of pain, pain as a cessation of pleasure".²¹² Dorter argues that pains and pleasures as commonly understood – as falsely understood from the perspective of the body – give the false appearance of being opposites. For true pleasure and true pain would not be relative.

This distinction is I believe fundamental to grasping the structure of the *Phaedo* as a whole. It is worthwhile, therefore, to spend a little longer fleshing this out. We can do this by looking to the *Philebus*. In the *Philebus* Plato delves into a question concerning the good life: is it characterised by pleasure, knowledge, or some mixture of both? In this discussion Socrates makes the point that pleasures and pains when approached wholly from the perspective of the body are unlimited. They are forever decreasing and increasing.²¹³ Looked at from only this perspective, pleasures and pains cannot be experienced, for they are constantly in flux. Our *experience* of pleasure as the absence of pain only arises if we move beyond temporality, beyond the body. Without memory, pleasure would not survive from one moment to the next,²¹⁴ and without this we would be unable to enjoy our pleasures or be harmed by our pains. This kind of life we might ascribe to shellfish not humans.²¹⁵

A radically temporal relationship separates pleasure and pain; pain is experienced only with the absence of pleasure, and vice versa. Such a separation makes a mockery of any *apparent* opposition: the *relationship* of pain to pleasure as pain and pleasure is sundered. With this in mind we could say that men think that

²¹² Ibid., p. 24.

²¹³ See *Philebus* (28a).

²¹⁴ *Philebus* (21c-d).

²¹⁵ *Philebus* (21c6-8).

their pleasures and pains are opposites because they misunderstand how they come to understand pleasure and pain. Thinking that the pains and pleasures they experience through the body are pure in themselves they misrepresent their cause; for truly opposite pleasures and pains are impossible. What leads men to imagine that the pleasure they feel is opposite to the pain is the fact that bodily pleasures and pains do not occur together; pain always conquers pleasure or pleasure pain: the body does not feel pleasures and pains at the same time. And yet, it is precisely *because* of this, that they are not opposites. Pleasure is experienced as such because it follows from, yet does not leave behind, pain. With memory, we experience the pleasure which comes from the absence of pain and vice versa.

Within the soul we can, like Phaedo, experience them together because the soul, unlike the body, is not strictly temporal. We can feel pain associated with an unquenched desire and yet take pleasure in its fulfilment in the future, for example. Our soul transcends time in a way which the body cannot. The temporal relation of pleasure to pain is captured by us, as it were, and with this we can partly transcend what from the perspective of the body is strictly historical. And yet only within time, as the movement away from pain, do we experience the fullness of pleasure. The soulful pleasures, we might say, occur within time while reaching beyond it.

Pain and pleasure are joined in a sense which partially transcends the temporality of the body, and only with this join can pain and pleasure be experienced *as* pain or pleasure. And thus we can make sense of Socrates' comment in the *Phaedo* that Aesop, if he had thought about it, would have written a fable or myth about a god wanting to stop the fighting between pleasure and pain, but being unable to, he joined their heads together instead (60b6-c4). Only because the soul

partially transcends or unifies the movements of the body do pain and pleasure exist. To resolve the apparent opposition of pleasure and pain, to remove the *appearance* of opposition and reveal a “truer” relationship would require their absolute separation. Hence, the unity and stability of what we call pleasure and pain rests on what *appears* to be an opposition. It is for this reason that the body is unable to be used as representative of their nature, because the blind “oppositions” of the physical body would actually dissolve the *apparent* opposition of pleasure and pain, rendering pleasure and pain wholly unrelated *as* pleasure and pain. Yet, transcending the body altogether we end up in the same place. Resolving the opposition that eluded Aesop’s god, the existential (or temporal) opposition of pleasure and pain dissolves.

This profound relationship between the unity and opposition of pleasure and pain is a prelude to Socrates’ exploration of the nature of the soul and death. Socrates, as I will show, treats of soul and death as if they were temporal movements of the body, analogous to pleasure and pain. This is inadequate to our understanding of the soul and death because, as with looking at pleasure and pain from this perspective, they are rendered indistinguishable. Only from within the circumference of soul, as the *Phaedo* will go on to show, does death have any significance. Yet, the significance of death is not only its opposition to life, for only from within life can we talk of opposition. Death is both the temporal opposite and the eternal other. From within life, death shows itself as both the limit of existence and its source.

Liberating Socrates

The removal of the fetter from Socrates’ leg is surely an analogy for what will be the coming liberation of death: liberation from the prison cell, and liberation from

the pains of the body. Running with this analogy we would have to conclude that Socrates himself (and not just his leg) will find pleasure only in the after-life. Pleasure will arise when, finally, he has been completely liberated. Phaedo, we might remember, had a strange feeling of pleasure and pain in his soul at once. Socrates seems to have something much more remarkable: a strange foreknowledge of death from *within* its opposite, his own life. Given the perspective of the body just outlined – pleasure follows pain – we could say that this foreknowledge is rendered radically obscure by the fact that death *follows* life. Socrates' happiness in this life could only ever stem from a *prophetic* insight, an insight into what will be coming his way when he dies. The *nature* of this prophecy will be what will concern us throughout the rest of the dialogue: what *does* Socrates know of his own death?

This “metaphysical” interpretation stands somewhat in contrast to Ahrensdoerf, who takes his bearings by what he sees as the *Phaedo's* driving theme: a defence of philosophy “...against the theoretical challenge posed to that way of life by piety”.²¹⁶ This theme emerges with Ahrensdoerf's credo that

Socrates' interlocutors...are our natural stepping stones into the dialogue, and it is only by beginning from where they begin that we can hope to understand how Socrates defended the philosophic life on the day of his death and whether he defended it adequately.²¹⁷

I agree with Ahrensdoerf's interpretative credo...to a point. However, I believe, that we must consider the significance of Socrates' words not just from the supposedly clear-cut opinions held by his friends, but also from within philosophy itself, where death is the “other” of philosophical life. The philosophical significance

²¹⁶ Ahrensdoerf (1995, p. 7).

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

of death, I will argue, shines through the conversation between Socrates and his friends. And thus rather than arguing, as does Ahrens Dorf, that Socrates induces his friends to believe in the eternity of the soul, bringing out their “hidden” piety as it were, so that it might be more conclusively refuted by him,²¹⁸ I believe that the eternity of the soul is also a question central to philosophy itself, a question which finds its significance with both the *life* of Socrates and the significance of *death*.

I likewise disagree, on this point, with the reading offered by Madison who is also unwilling to give a “metaphysical” interpretation. He says that

Socrates begins by asking if death is nothing other than the separation of the soul from the body...Given what follows this statement, namely, the problematic characterization of the body, the ever shifting nature of the soul, and the inconclusive arguments...this statement must – unless we assume that Plato was simply a sloppy thinker – be interpreted not as Socrates’ own view of the nature of death, but as a metaphor for philosophical conversion and as the prelude to the “incantation” he sings to charm away the fear of death.²¹⁹

Against this, I will go on to argue that only with a “metaphysical” interpretation can we do justice to the mythical or “prophetic” presentation of death. Indeed, working against Madison’s own interpretation is the evidence he must provide to support his thesis that the difference between the soul and the body is a way of life. He makes reference, for example, to the “base, pleasure-seeking existence” which Socrates, with his metaphorical presentation of different ways of

²¹⁸ See, e.g., *ibid.*, p. 38 “...by readily agreeing here that the soul survives after death, Simmias allows Socrates to assume throughout what he explicitly calls his defense of the philosopher’s readiness to depart from this life that there is an attractive, or at least potentially attractive, alternative to this life, namely, the afterlife...the question of whether there is an afterlife emerges only after both Simmias and Cebes have come to feel in their hearts the power of the hope for a life beyond this one”. If this is this case, though, then how can Ahrens Dorf also maintain that it is from the beliefs of Simmias and Cebes that we must begin our interpretation?

²¹⁹ Madison (2002, p. 426).

life, is convincing his friends to give up.²²⁰ Given that Cebes and Simmias are Pythagoreans and so, even if lapsed, would err towards the ascetic, I don't think that this argument of Madison's is correct. Ahrens Dorf is, I believe, closer to the mark in this regard. By way of these preliminary remarks (more will follow) I hope to distinguish my position from one in which the question concerning the immortality of the soul can be settled as if it were only a question about (fear of) the after-life.

Interpretations by Ronna Burger²²¹ and Kenneth Dorter²²² also deserve mention here. My examination cannot do justice to the depth and breadth of the arguments presented in each of these interpretations; nonetheless, I hope to at least bring out the flavour of each and thereby pave the way for my own study. Even if the differences between these perspectives and mine cannot at this point be fully exposed, this brief overview will at least prepare the ground for my study, showing where the details will fall, so to speak.

According to Burger, Socrates presents himself in the first half of the dialogue (to 88c) under the guise of an ascetic. These ascetics are, by Burger's account, the "genuine" and "true" philosophers referred to by Socrates at 64a-67b. She says that Socrates hides behind the mask of the "true" philosopher so that he may bring out later in the dialogue the confusion of those who imagine that the true path to wisdom is by separating the psyche from the body.²²³ They mistakenly believe that the body (or the senses) is the source of the eclipse behind which shine the beings, and thus being is exposed by the psyche's (sans body) penetration of the things of

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 428.

²²¹ Burger (1984).

²²² Dorter (1982).

²²³ Burger (1984), see pp. 40, 49, 91, 113.

this world.²²⁴ These “true” philosophers, in seeking death, seek out the opposition of life: asceticism is for them the path to truth. Their eagerness to transcend the body and commune with the beings themselves shows, according to Burger, their misunderstanding of the nature of the body and the psyche. They castigate the body for what are really psychic misconceptions.²²⁵

Distinct from the ascetic practice of the “true” philosophers, the proper practice of philosophy, as shown by Socrates in the second half of the dialogue, is the death of self-interest.²²⁶ This involves moving from the selfish desire to commune directly with the beings of things to the more subtle separation of *logos* from the individual self.²²⁷ The turn to *logoi* in the second half of the dialogue is, then, an acknowledgement of the delusions or misconceptions of the psyche, and thereby a recovery of philosophy by way of insight into our true nature.

Although I agree with Burger’s interpretation of what amounts to the confusions of the natural philosophers and the reasons behind Socrates’ “second sailing” (see 99d1), I do not agree that in the first half of the dialogue Socrates is wearing the mask of the ascetic – as if he were speaking frankly but through the mouth of another. I will argue that Socrates’ position in the first half of the dialogue is a necessary prelude to what is presented in the second half. I argue that the first half of the dialogue shows, by way of the inadequate arguments which seek proofs of our eternity within a temporal understanding of death, not philosophy misunderstood but philosophy thwarted by death. The reality of death emerges with full *philosophical* significance, in other words. This reality, I will argue, balances the

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 145.

²²⁵ Ibid., see pp. 43, 46, 97, 100, 118, 127.

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 203.

²²⁷ Ibid., pp. 186, 216.

second half of the dialogue, wherein Socrates approaches death from within life and so presents its almost eternal distance from us.

The second interpretation to be briefly considered here is that of Dorter's. According to him Plato's arguments show that the soul is part of a "world soul"²²⁸ – essentially an eternal life-force. With this interpretation death is the boundary between our souls and the world soul.²²⁹ The commonly understood association of death with non-existence (i.e., what is understood to be its opposition to life) is used by Dorter to argue that life, or the world soul, is eternal. Death is thus viewed by Dorter as the realm of eternal life and by its absence that which defines life *as* eternal.²³⁰

What is unsatisfactory with this interpretation is that Dorter separates death itself (non-existence) and the realm of death (the world soul) thereby making the practice of philosophy untenable. We can see this by considering Dorter's interpretation of the *Phaedo's* recollection argument (about which I will have more to say later).

Dorter argues that the *Phaedo's* recollection arguments serve to show the equivalency of the Forms (the things-in-themselves) and the world soul. They must both be pre-existent;²³¹ and given the eternity of the Forms, the world soul as "life itself" is that which exists eternally.²³² I argue, though, that to conceive of the world

²²⁸ Dorter (1982), see pp. 43ff.

²²⁹ E.g., *ibid.*, p. 78: "...Socrates does not speak merely of the body's dying and being born while 'we,' the souls, continue to exist. Rather, he speaks of *our* dying and being born while the soul continues to exist".

²³⁰ E.g., *ibid.*, p. 161: "The implications the present study has led to are that the soul must be eternal if the universe is not to die out since soul is what bears life to it; and that soul must not only eternally exist but be eternally alive, for the argument has shown it to be immortal in the literal sense of being unable to exist as dead, i.e., to accept the opposite of the form it bears and still be what it was".

²³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 156.

soul or “life itself” as in opposition to non-existence is to pass over the perplexity which arises when we consider that the Forms also do not admit life. How can life itself resemble that which is eternally dead (i.e., non-living)? And how can the Forms be eternally dead (i.e., non-living) and yet not admit non-existence (for as with life itself, they cannot die)? How could an individual soul ever come to be good or otherwise, if death is non-existence, the Forms are non-living, and life or the soul is eternal movement? If our soul shares in the world soul then how can it also share in the Forms? What, in other words, is the relationship between life itself, the eternally non-living – the Forms – and philosophy? More to the point: What is death to philosophy? These questions are, I believe, central to an adequate interpretation of the *Phaedo*.

My interpretation differs from Dorter’s because I show that death is both non-existence and eternity, depending on which face we are shown. Life itself is not completely separated from death as non-existence, therefore. Indeed, death must play an integral part in life itself for it is what separates life from the eternally unchanging. The ultimate equivalence of the two aspects of death makes the Forms real and eternal only if they are also from within this life non-existent. They remain mythical, in other words, but not false thereby.

In the first half of the remaining dialogue I will argue that Socrates examines the soul from the “outside”, trying to prove its existence beyond this life, as it were. Death is from this perspective the after-life, and combines with birth or life to form the ongoing cycle of regeneration. It is, in other words, treated as a *condition* of everyday life while, in order to satisfy the eternal soul argument, implicitly plays the part of eternity – what lies *beyond* this life. Because of this disjunction, in making his

argument about the eternity of our own souls, Socrates must combine the two faces of death. In doing this he sidesteps the significance of our *own* deaths. He confronts not himself (or any other individual) but the movements of the cosmos. Establishing the foundation for philosophy from this perspective we find that Socrates creates a fictional place for death, a place wherein our souls are eternal, but where death, as a condition for temporality, loses all significance. The denial of our *own* deaths as non-existence (a condition of temporality) from within a view of death where the opposite should be true means that philosophy is sanctified only if death so understood is unreal. Socrates is urged by his friends to confront this, to show that we are eternal in the face of the reality of death.

In the second half of the dialogue Socrates saves philosophy from this absurdity, by approaching the soul's eternity from *within* this life. He shows that in seeking out the limits of this existence, we do at the same time unify ourselves and *become* "eternal". This seeming paradox – a becoming eternity – is the result of our human condition, wherein death both defines our temporality and is the path through which we approach eternity. Philosophy arises because of both "aspects" of death: the temporalisation of death as seen from within this life means that we enter the path of eternity only through the doorway showing the possibility of our existence as unique mortal beings.

Philosophy and Liberation

In the next section of the dialogue Socrates, following a dream (60d-61b), introduces us to the double-face of death. His interpretation of this dream, after the *delay* of his death, leads him to reassess philosophy; thereby leading us to conclude

that he thinks philosophy has not delivered on its final promise – eternal wisdom and death – and so may be a sham (see 61a2-6). Death, and so philosophy, may have nothing to offer for living a good life, we must presume. Along with this dismissal of philosophy, however, he also *celebrates* his liberation from death; a liberation made possible by the god of prophecy – Apollo (see 61b1-2). The absence of death, which somehow makes philosophy worthless, is with the presence of Apollo turned around. Death, as a necessary end of philosophy is also a threat, yet it is saved from being so by prophecy. What would seem to be the impossibility of philosophy, given that we can only access eternity in the after-life, is transformed into its possibility – as liberation *from* death – given the gift of Apollo. And so we are led to believe that philosophy is inevitably prophetic: death renders philosophy impossible, yet it is also philosophy’s foundation.

With this summary in mind, we can now turn to the dialogue itself, picking up from where we left it following Socrates’ musing on pleasure and pain. Here we find Cebes interjecting, reminding Socrates of the verses of Aesop which he set to music, and his invocation to Apollo. Cebes says that several people – notably Evenus – have been asking why he composed such things when he hasn’t done anything like that before (60c6-d5).

Socrates replies that the reason he did so was because he was interested in the meaning of some of his dreams; or one in particular, which has recurred throughout his life. This dream, or literally “vision in sleep”, although appearing differently at different times, always says the same thing: “...make music, and practise it...”²³³ (60e7). In the past, Socrates has taken the dream as confirmation or encouragement of

²³³ The best translation here would be something like “musical poetry”. See Hackforth (1955, p. 37).

his philosophising,²³⁴ since philosophising, he believed, was the finest form of music. But now, after the trial, and the “festival of the god” which forestalled his death, Socrates thinks that maybe the dream had been telling him all along to compose music in the popular sense. And so this he did. First, though, he wrote to Apollo (61b1-2). After this he decided that if he was going to be a writer he should write fables (or myths) rather than arguments (61b4). So what he did was to take the first few stories of Aesop, stories that he knew off by heart, and make poems out of them (61b5-6).

What are we to make of this? The festival of Apollo prevents Socrates from being put to death, and so he thinks that maybe his life was lived falsely? Is death something welcomed, and to have that forestalled, a rebuke from Apollo? Why would Socrates change his outlook on life if the festival wasn't for him some admonishing omen? And why did he imagine that maybe music in the popular sense was what he should have been practising throughout his life? Concerning the answer to these questions we are given a hint by his mention of Aesop once more. We should remember that Socrates associates Aesop with the kind of poetry which could turn the opposition of pleasure and pain into a fable about a double bodied creature with a single head (see 60c). We can, I suggest, associate Aesop with the temporality of the body. We are also given a hint by the festival itself. According to tradition, the Athenians after losing a war with the Cretans were obliged to send each year seven boys and seven girls to the King of Crete. These fourteen youths were each year fed

²³⁴ See also *Apology* 28e4-8. Socrates' *daimonion*, or divine sign, which only encourages or indicates *negatively* (although in *Phaedrus* 242b7-d3, Socrates is bid by his *daimonion* not to leave *until he has* made atonement for his offense against the gods), is part and parcel of his philosophical spirit, and not, as in the case of this dream, a prelude to philosophy *per se*. See also *Euthydemus* 272e4-5; *Apology* 31c7-d7, 40a4-c3; *Theages* 128d1-131a; *Theaetetus* 151a2-6; *Republic* 496c3-4; *Euthyphro* 3b5-6.

to the Minotaur, a monster who lived inside a long and tangled labyrinth constructed by Daedalus. Theseus, desiring to save Athens from further grief, travelled to Crete one year with the other youths. Within the labyrinth, Theseus slew the Minotaur, and found his way out by following a thread given to him for this purpose by Ariadne. The Athenians had vowed to Apollo that if the youths were saved they would send a ship each year to Delos. The whole period of the voyage to and from Delos, beginning when the priest of Apollo crowns the stern of the ship, is a holy season, during which the city is not allowed to be polluted by public executions, and when the vessel is detained by contrary winds, the time spent in going and returning is considerable. The ship was crowned on the day before the trial, and this was why Socrates lay in prison and was not put to death until long after he was condemned (see 58a6-c4).

Could it be that Socrates composed Aesop-style fables because philosophy was unable to provide the final release from his own labyrinth – the prison and the fetters and ultimately his body? Philosophy is thwarted by the reality of the body and so maybe, he thinks, the temporal “body” is the ultimate expression of *our* reality. More appropriate than philosophy, which might bring false hopes, is the prosaic distraction offered by fables. In imitation of the highest things – the commonplace and bodily – this might be the highest art. Nonetheless, before his brief fling with common poetry Socrates composed *arguments* to Apollo, the god of prophecy. Prophecy and the search for truth are brought together by Socrates. In distinction to common poetry which was a reinterpretation of his “life-practice” and which he took up in resignation, Socrates’ composition to Apollo was in “...honour of the god of the present festival...” (61b2-3). Socrates, in composing common poetry,

laments the fact that he has been denied death, because of his bodily prison, and yet in honouring Apollo he celebrates the liberation from *death* – like the youths from the bowels of the earth – offered by prophecy.²³⁵ What will be explored in the rest of the dialogue is this: the profound irony which finds death within life (through philosophical prophecy) and death beyond life (through the body).

On this section, White proposes that “Socrates’ new interpretation of the dream could mean that now, during a period in his life that he knew would culminate in his death, he should complement a life spent pursuing philosophy”.²³⁶ The complement is myth, suggests White. Myth is necessary, for reason allows only what we can justify from our own limited perspectives. Easing the constraints, myth can explore the terrain only hinted at by reason. Such an interpretation acknowledges the natural progression from argument to myth, while also distinguishing the rationality of philosophy from mythic poetry. Accordingly, the *Phaedo* is broken down by White with an eye on this demarcation. For him, the final myth presented in the *Phaedo* is the culmination of all preceding it; a culmination encapsulating inferences from more rigorous metaphysical arguments.²³⁷

Where I differ from White’s dazzling and astute interpretation is on the question of death. For White, the mythic element in the *Phaedo* is related to arguments which demonstrate the soul’s immortality.²³⁸ Immortality of the soul is a belief he attributes to Socrates. Hence, when Socrates reinterprets his dream, White believes he does so not in reaction to the forestalling of his death, but merely because

²³⁵ For support of this interpretation refer to 85a-b where Socrates says that the swan’s final song – its swan-song – is a song of happiness, as it can see into the future *because* it belongs to Apollo. Socrates says that he regards himself as a fellow-servant of the swan, devoted also to Apollo.

²³⁶ White (1989, p. 31).

²³⁷ See, e.g., *ibid.*, p. 238.

²³⁸ See, e.g., *ibid.*, p. 19.

on this day he is to die.²³⁹ The mythic element, like death, is the capstone to Socrates' own life, following White's interpretation. Yet, we must wonder, why would Plato bring together in one powerful scene the god of prophecy, death averted, a resigned poetry and offerings of gratitude if not for the reason that death is somehow both the end of life *and* its beginning? In distinction to White's interpretation, therefore, I will argue that death underscores both the possibility and the tragedy of philosophy. The mythic element in the *Phaedo* is, I therefore suggest, an attempt to transform the tragedy into a charming reality. This transformation is, as we will see, successful only with the impossibility of philosophy.

And so with this, Socrates says to Cebes that Evenus, if he has any sense, should follow him as soon as he can. He is leaving today he says, it is the order of the Athenians (61b6-c1). We could say that Socrates is leaving not because it is his choice (not in a direct sense, at least) but because the political will of the people has won. But it is also true that his death is the consequence of his philosophical practice. His advice to Evenus is therefore far from straightforward. Is he telling Evenus to follow him in emulation of his *life*, his practice of philosophy, or in emulation of his *death*, his journey to the after-life? In following the first path it would seem that he couldn't help but follow the second though, for it was precisely Socrates' philosophical practice which led to his punishment by death. The Athenians – those foes of philosophy – seem to be bringing about just what good advice Socrates is himself offering to Evenus! What a delicious irony that the Athenians were unknowingly granting Socrates the desired end of his philosophical practice! When we look into the irony, when we wonder about this strange case of the anti-philosophical

²³⁹ See Ebert (2001, pp. 30-33).

delivering the ultimate philosophical prize; we wonder about the ambiguity of death, an ambiguity which makes Socrates' advice to Evenus at once both deficient and true.

Simmiias understands Socrates' advice with an eye towards Evenus, and surmises that he is not very likely to do what Socrates suggests, to practice anything which would lead to death. Socrates asks Simmiias whether Evenus is not a philosopher, and Simmiias replies that he thinks he is (61c5-6). But we also know that Evenus is a writer of popular poetry (60d8-9). He is, we presume, even in his so-called philosophical practice happy to stick to the empirical, temporal realm. On this issue, Ebert says that "Evenus is called a philosopher because and insofar as he is represented as a member of the Pythagorean community".²⁴⁰ According to Ebert's philological analysis "philosopher" and "Pythagorean" should, in this instance, be understood as almost equivalent. Against this interpretation, though, we could look to other dialogues wherein Evenus is mentioned as being a teacher of rhetoric²⁴¹ and a sophist.²⁴² We might say, then, that he is something of a lapsed Pythagorean. His unwillingness to follow Socrates to Hades is, I suggest, not just a consequence of his desire for life over death, but tied up with his whole outlook on life.

Who Cares for the Soul?

Having introduced what I have interpreted as the double-face of death, Socrates turns to his way of *life*. In this section of the dialogue Socrates separates death according to what is our responsibility. Because our lives are not wholly ours,

²⁴⁰ Ebert (2001, p. 427).

²⁴¹ See *Phaedrus* 267a.

²⁴² See *Apology* 20b8.

because it was not our choice to be born, it is not we who are responsible for our fated deaths. This is the prerogative of the gods. What we can take responsibility for is our own practice of dying. But what sort of practice would this be which seeks out what is best left to fate? Wouldn't it be a case of trying to surpass the gods? Why would we want to liberate ourselves from their good guidance by taking death into our own hands? These are the questions which Socrates is forced to confront when he splits death (into fate and practice).

Anyone, Socrates says, who is serious about being a philosopher will follow him: but, he says, without taking their own life. *They* say that this is not permitted, he adds (61c8-d1). The "they" to which he refers is uncovered a few moments later when, in reaction to Cebes' questioning about philosophers not being able to use violence to die, he prods Simmias and Cebes to remember what they learnt in their time with Philolaus, a Pythagorean (61d6-7).²⁴³ Simmias and Cebes can't remember anything for certain and so Socrates proceeds to inform them of what he has heard, considering it not inappropriate to speculate since he himself is about to make the journey (61d9-e3).²⁴⁴ First though, he says to Cebes, they must keep seeking an answer as to why a man is not allowed to kill himself (62a1).

The sanctity of our lives, *despite* what we think about them, is emphasised by Socrates when he says that even if we do come across an answer as to why a man shouldn't kill himself, the situation is not clear-cut. It could still be that at some times and for some people death *is* better than life and *still* it is wrong that they take their own lives; they must wait for someone else to do it for them (62a2-6). Cebes, possibly

²⁴³ Gadamer (1980, pp. 22-24) makes what I think is a valid argument that Simmias and Cebes represent the rational and scientific, and not the religious, strand of Pythagoreanism.

²⁴⁴ Socrates' speculations, at least in this section of the dialogue, are not wholly his own, which is not to say that they don't, for him, reveal some truth (cf., Burger, 1984).

remembering some time when he himself wished for a reprieve from the tortures of life, acknowledges to himself this somewhat strange, almost comical, predicament we find ourselves in, with a “god knows” in his own dialect (62a8). Socrates, it seems fair to say, thinks that the answer to the question finds its support not in whatever suffering or joy we may be experiencing but in the fact that our lives are not wholly ours.

The logic of all this, says Socrates, comes from the argument of the mystery religions, which say that men are in a prison of some sort and have no right to release themselves from it or escape. This, he says, is not easily understood. What is true, though, is the part which says that those looking after us are gods and we are their possessions (62b2-7). Being so possessed, given the fact that *our* life is not *ultimately* ours, we must leave to the gods what is theirs – the decision as to when we will die. To do violence to ourselves, to escape from our bodies, is not our responsibility but the responsibility of the gods.

On this point White disagrees. He argues that what Socrates means here is not that we are possessions of the gods because to them we owe our mortal existence, but that we are their possessions because they are better than us. Backing up this claim is his observation that we exist because we are ensouled and soul by itself is immortal.²⁴⁵ Hence: the implication that we have not been created, for we are eternal. However, considering that Socrates has not yet discussed the immortality of the soul, nor the idea that we are ensouled beings (death being the separation of our souls and bodies) I don’t think we can be so quick to dismiss the possibility that Socrates is referring to the mystery of our own existence. The fact that Socrates is talking of the

²⁴⁵ White (1989, p. 37).

prohibition against suicide makes it even more reasonable to suppose that this is what is meant.

The driving question concerns why we would take over from the gods when they themselves oversee our existence. If death is the responsibility of the gods, and we are their possessions, then there is some absurdity to the philosophical quest, as pointed out by Cebes (62d1-4). The wise man, the man who recognises the good guidance provided by the gods through this our embodied existence, should be upset about dying, and so be unhappy when the time comes. The stupid man might want to escape or free himself from good guardians (and so be happy to die), but the wise man would want to stay put (62d6-e6). Apart from anything else, this argument of Cebes pokes fun at Socrates and his decision not to escape from prison. Why *now* is he happy to leave when before (in the *Crito*) he had argued otherwise? Isn't Socrates, by his *own* argument, acting the fool? Mirroring the argument in the *Crito*, where Socrates says that it would be shameful to run away from the laws and that in doing so his life would be wasted, Cebes puts it to Socrates that "...the wise man surely doesn't think he's going to look after himself any better once he's free..." (62d6-7). Death, like Thessaly – the place to which Socrates could have escaped (*Crito* 52d3-4) – is free of all constraints and so there we will find not good counsel but, if anything, anarchy and self-indulgence. Our embodied existence is the realm of the gods and, like the laws of Athens, it is only within these constraints that a good life can be led. If philosophers are willing to die, then, by this analogy, they understand nothing of death. Their hubristic overthrowing of the gods leaves them homeless, and alone. (Aristophanes, as we know, would concur.) To this Socrates responds.

The Good Life and the After-Life

In responding to these questions Socrates offers nothing more than a hope: he hopes when he dies to meet better gods than those here. And maybe even better men; although he can't be sure. As it stands we are provided little assurance by Socrates regarding the goodness of death for men. For if the after-life has only wise gods and no people, then there will be no Socrates to be guided by the gods. How are we to be sure that the practice of philosophy is oriented by the wisdom in death if death itself might not be accessible to men? The reality of a blessed after-life would not seem to live up to Socrates' hope.

Socrates' defence against the "charge" – "Why should truly wise men want to avoid the service of masters better than themselves..." (63a4-5) – is the philosophical equivalent to his political defence made before the Athenians (see 63b5-6). The difference being that whereas it was necessary for Socrates in his trial to defend the charge that he did not believe in the gods of the city (see *Apology* 24b-c), in this "philosophical trial" it is taken for granted. He is required now to answer the question of *why* he doesn't believe in them, why he chooses to follow the "supernatural" instead.

He lays down his cards straight away. He says that he will meet other good and wise gods, and he will meet men who have died and are better than those here (63b4-c2). He does, though, qualify this last part saying that he can't state this – meeting good men – as a certainty (63c2). What he can be certain of is that the gods he meets will be *wholly* good (63c2-4). The gods in the after-life, we are entitled to presume, are different to the city gods. Men in the after-life, if they exist, are also

different to men here. If they don't exist, then we cannot be certain that Socrates, being a man and not a god, would end up there when he dies.

And so Socrates' defence, right from the very beginning, does not inspire our confidence. This uncertainty makes the question of *why* the philosopher is happy to die not as straightforward as Socrates would have us believe. That's why, although Socrates says he is happy to die, we find that he is happier practising philosophy. For it is at this point Cebes interjects, saying that the man who administers the poison advises Socrates not to talk as it may cause him to get heated and make the job of poisoning him more difficult (63d7-e2). Socrates says to pay no attention to him (63e3-5). Socrates is happier to practice that which *increases* his vitality.

Strange, then, that this practice is described by Socrates as none other than a practice for dying and death (64a2-4). What is more, the philosopher's practice is orientated by his *eagerness* for death (64a5-7). But what *can* the philosopher know of death? From what Socrates has said so far all we can say is that the practice of philosophy somehow gives hope that death will bring a blessed after-life. Given this hope, the philosopher must have some presentiment, if not actual knowledge, of the realisation of death and the goodness which it delivers. The ends of philosophy must be both *present* in practise and yet also absent, for their realisation is "merely" *hoped* for in death. Only a true account of this prophecy could sanctify what philosophy claims to be.

Sanctification of philosophy would seem to require a sort of self-disclosing mystical insight. Hardly possible one would think. Aren't philosophers really just confused about their own practice, seeking life in all the wrong places with the muddle-headed notion that death is their aim in practice? What is it to practice for

death if death, as commonly understood, is a diminution of life? This, no doubt, is the reason for Simmias' laughter:

By Zeus, Socrates, you made me laugh, though I was in no laughing mood just now. I think that the majority, on hearing this, will think that it describes the philosophers very well, and our people in Thebes would thoroughly agree that philosophers are nearly dead and that the majority of men is well aware that they deserve to be (64a8-b4).

It's funny to see Socrates supporting the opinions of the philosophy-hating majority about philosophy. What is it about death which shows itself to be both the greatest good and the last thing anyone would want? The Thebians are unable to answer this question for they "...are not aware of the way true philosophers are nearly dead, nor of the way they deserve to be, nor of the sort of death they deserve" (64b6-c1). With their misunderstanding of the philosopher and death, the Thebians set us to wondering if living truly and the desire for death aren't themselves ironically entangled.

Separating the Soul

Moving on to a defence of his hope, Socrates in this section brings to the fore what we already know of death. We know that death is the separation of body and soul. With this definition Socrates portrays philosophical practice as the soul separating itself from the body. Such practising of death is not enough, though, to convince Simmias that Socrates' hope is not a fiction. Hence, as Simmias sees it, this practice should not emulate our deaths as decreed by the gods. Rather, we should deny our bodies through reasoning (a reasoning which still very much tied to bodies in this world). Reasoning, as Simmias – a Pythagorean – comprehends it, is

mathematical, and so abstracts from this world but does not move beyond it.

Showing Simmias that the end to which he aims is not mathematical but ethical, Socrates broadens the discussion to encompass not only reasoning abstracted from bodies but reasoning which abstracts from the soul. This reasoning, we will come to see, moves by way of the things-in-themselves.

Socrates asks Simmias whether "...we believe if there is such a thing as death" (64c2-3). "Certainly" (64c4) replies Simmias.

Is it anything else than the separation of the soul from the body? Do we believe that death is this, namely, that the body comes to be separated²⁴⁶ by itself apart from the soul, and the soul comes to be separated by itself apart from the body? Is death anything else than that? (64c5-8).

Simmias agrees once again. With this, he is not agreeing that the soul is eternal, just that at death there is a separation.

For this reason I cannot agree with Ahrensдорf²⁴⁷ who says that Simmias, by affirming Socrates' assumption that death is the existence of the soul by itself, makes plausible Socrates case that the philosopher is attracted to the after-life. Making this even more unlikely is that Socrates' proposal is in keeping with common Greek thought at the time. In Homer, for example, the soul leaves the body at death and travels to Hades and there it lives a feeble existence, like a shadow amongst other shadows.²⁴⁸

And so Socrates' implausible defence continues as before, presented with the confidence that "...a man who has truly spent his life in philosophy is probably right

²⁴⁶ Literally: "to set free or escape" (Liddell and Scott, 1940).

²⁴⁷ Ahrensдорf (1995, p. 38).

²⁴⁸ E.g., *Iliad* 23.71-6 (translations are from Homer, 1991); *Odyssey* 11.51-4 (translations are from Homer, 1996).

to be of good cheer in the face of death and to be very hopeful that after death he will attain the greatest blessings yonder..." (63e8-64a1).

Having gained Simmias' assent, Socrates goes on to draw a parallel between the death of men and the life of the philosopher. The philosopher, agrees Simmias, is not enthusiastic about any of the pleasures and needs of the body. He doesn't desire food, drink, fancy clothes, or sex, thinking of them not as things to be cherished but only as bare necessities (64d1-e1). Not desiring these things the philosopher, more so than any other man, says Socrates "...frees the soul from association with the body as much as possible" (65a2-3). Simmias agrees only in deference to Socrates. Simmias seems to have some hesitation in affirming that the soul can exist apart from the body. He doesn't display any reticence when it comes to the unphilosophical nature of the body though. He readily agrees with Socrates that the soul

...reasons best when none of these senses troubles it, neither hearing nor sight, nor pain nor pleasure, but when it is most by itself, taking leave of the body and as far as possible having no contact or association with it in its search for reality (65c5-8).

Coming at this from his "political" perspective, Ahrens Dorf says that

...all of these statements would seem to call into question the justice of the philosopher, for they would seem to suggest that he despises his fellow human beings...Socrates' defense of the philosopher's readiness to die and, indeed, of the philosophic life as a whole in the *Phaedo* abstracts from the question of the philosopher's relation to his political community and thereby abstracts from the question of the philosopher's justice to men and gods in this life...[focusing] on the question of whether it is wise or good for the philosopher to long for the release of his

soul from his body, Socrates' focuses on the question which is at the heart of his friends' doubts about the philosophic life.²⁴⁹

I agree with Ahrens Dorf when he says that this question is at the heart of his friends' doubts about the philosophic life, however I don't agree that this question is different to the question surrounding the gods. Or, rather, I don't believe that the conversation about the gods concerned justice and now the conversation about the separation of the soul and the body concerns wisdom. Contrary to Ahrens Dorf, I believe that the conversation has remained *within* the purview of wisdom. Lending me support is the lack of evidence supporting his argument that up until now the "...implicit definition of death...has been a political one, namely the separation of the philosopher from his political community as it is constituted by his friends and his divine but earthly rulers (see 62b2-63c7)". The section 62b2-63c7 *does* focus on the separation from the political community, but not exclusively, for it is a question of the good life, and not a question of justice in light of who or what is our best guide. The fact that Socrates refers to what might be the anger of the gods (the possessors) rather than the anger of the political community (friends and divine rulers), if someone did away with themselves (see 62b11), is testament to my interpretation. Moreover, the distinction which Socrates makes between possessor and the possession, gods and men, does not lead to an interpretation which ties them together into a political community. Rather, this distinction serves to *separate* the possessor and the possessed, for the gods as Socrates presents them stand both within and *outside* life – they command life as well as when it will end. Hence, they form not only part of the political community, but also part of the metaphysical

²⁴⁹ Ahrens Dorf (1995, p. 40).

community. Just as Socrates has been separated from his political community within prison, subject to its anger because he contravened the laws, so too he becomes once more no different to his captors when all come up against the mysteries of death. What meaning we can gather here, I think, is not wholly as Ahrens Dorf concludes, but still in keeping with his luminous interpretation of the *theoretical* question of philosophy (his argument from the perspective of Cebes, and not Simmias).²⁵⁰

It's not that I don't think the political question – the question of whether Socrates is acting justly or unjustly in practising philosophy – plays a part in the dialogue, it's that I believe that it is not the question which Plato pursues. It is, rather, the context through which the theoretical question is explored. What is important is not the allegiance of Socrates to his friends, but the difference between his and their allegiance to the gods. Amongst his philosophic friends he need not defend himself against the accusations that his impiety is unjust (by the standards of the city). His defence can be more candid, and it is for this reason it is focused on the charge that his impiety is also untrue (see 63a5 where Simmias asks why "truly wise men" and not "truly just men" would want to get away from masters better than themselves.) His will be a philosophical and not a political defence, and thus justice, if it does show itself, will arise under truth and not the laws.²⁵¹ Thus I believe that the section about the separation of the soul and body is of one piece with the section on the gods (which Ahrens Dorf would call political).

And so it is that we should look for more than political reasons as to why when Socrates says that the soul of the philosopher is most disdainful of the body,

²⁵⁰ See, e.g., *ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

²⁵¹ The difference between truth and the laws makes Socrates' incarceration and coming death tragic from the perspective of justice and ironic from the perspective of theory – the *Phaedo* is *both* tragic and ironic.

and "...flees from it and seeks to be by itself" (65d1-2), that Simmias agrees only with a half-hearted affirmation.²⁵² At each point where Socrates mentions that the philosopher frees the soul from the body as much as possible, Simmias displays only a luke-warm response (see also 67d7-10). But when Socrates speaks about denying the body, he agrees emphatically (see 64d1-6; 64e2; 65a8).

Simmias' willingness to deny the body while at the same time being unsure that this is itself in emulation of fated death – death decreed by the gods – ties in with what I see as his understanding of philosophy. According to Gadamer, Simmias and Cebes:

...in no way represent a religious group of the sort established by the forefather of the Pythagorean sects. Instead they stand for that particular sort of mathematical investigation, theory of music, and cosmological knowledge which has, as not the least of its sources, Pythagorean teachings.²⁵³

And so it makes sense that Simmias would agree with Socrates when he asks "Is it not in reasoning anywhere that any reality becomes clear to the soul?" (65c2-3). And likewise when he says "...the soul reasons best when none of these senses troubles it, neither hearing nor sight, nor pain nor pleasure..." (65c5-6). We could say that from Simmias' perspective the study of mathematics and science gathers the soul from the body but does not necessarily move it beyond this world. Simmias therefore begins with the assumption that it is not outside the boundaries of our own lives (in the after-life) wherein we will find truth, but merely outside the boundaries of our own bodies.

²⁵² "...it appears so", he says (65d3).

²⁵³ Gadamer (1980, p. 23).

This is a pivotal section for Burger's interpretation, for from here she makes the claim that the "true philosophers" referred to by Socrates are none other than Simmias and Cebes, and that these two identify themselves with "...the pure psychē, which will reach its goal when it is released from the body at death and reunited with the 'the true' [66b]".²⁵⁴ Against this though, Simmias' hesitations – of which Burger makes no comment – show that the thrust of Socrates' questions should not necessarily be equated with Simmias' philosophical assumptions. Contrary to what Burger presents, Simmias seems both eager and reticent to follow Socrates. He is eager to transcend the body, yet not so eager to practice philosophy in a way which would emulate fated death. Thus the "true philosophers" we might more appropriately describe as those whose practice is in accord with yet transcend the ends desired by Simmias. The true philosophers see that only with the separation of the soul from the body, rather than just its denial, is wisdom attained.²⁵⁵

Moving onto the *ethical* ends of reason, Socrates asks Simmias whether there is such a thing as the Just itself, the Beautiful and the Good (65d4-7). Simmias is eager in agreement: "We do say so, by Zeus" (65d6). And he agrees further that he has never seen any of these things with his eyes nor any of his other senses, and that to come closest to knowledge of these things is to transcend the body as much as possible and use reason purely and simply (65d9-66a7). With this agreement Socrates can now move on to show Simmias that in fact philosophers – like Simmias and Cebes – implicitly desire what is exclusively soulful when they seek out their own rational truths. And so it is, I believe, no coincidence that now he also speaks of

²⁵⁴ Burger (1984, p. 38).

²⁵⁵ And so I agree with White (1989, p. 49) who says that "...Socrates and company either are not or are not yet 'genuine' philosophers..."

wisdom (66a5-6). Without wisdom, our bodies compel us with their needs to blindly seek wealth, which is the cause of wars and civil discord (66b1-d2). Under these circumstances we have no time for anything else. Caring for the body we care not for philosophy.²⁵⁶ At the broadest level, therefore, only when we lead good and just lives *can* we do philosophy. Simmias' desire to transcend the body through philosophy is thus only possible under conditions which render our whole *lives* philosophical.

Only when we are dead, suggests Socrates, will we observe things-in-themselves (66e1-2). Only then will we gain that which we desire – wisdom (66e2-4). Only in death will our whole lives exemplify wisdom. To get as close as possible to knowledge in this life we must purify ourselves of the body's contamination (67a1-6; 67c3). We must "...separate the soul as far as possible from the body and accustom it to gather itself and collect itself out of every part of the body and to dwell by itself as far as it can both now and in the future, freed, as it were, from the bonds of the body?" (67c6-d2). The true philosophers and Simmias both agree that the body itself is the root of ignorance. And only in the after-life are we without a body. Yet Simmias doesn't fully commit to the statement, following on from Socrates' reminder that death is separation of the soul from the body (67d4-5), that "...it is only those who practice philosophy in the right way...who always most want to free the soul..." (67d3-9). Simmias and the true philosophers would tend to disagree on the ends towards which they should strive in this life. At the core of their disagreement is the question of what we can know. Simmias' epistemology is, as it diverges from the true philosophers, bound by his body rather than his life.

²⁵⁶ Cf., Burger (1984, p. 43).

By showing Simmias that his love of rationality is itself a reflection of, and only possible under, the broader desire to wisely take control of one's own destiny – that is, to practice philosophy without war and civil discord – Socrates shows Simmias that his desire to know is already a desire to take responsibility for what is, ultimately but not exclusively, the gift of the gods. And hence there is a conflict within Simmias' understanding of philosophy, a conflict which stems from ignorance of his own soul. Simmias is unaware that his desire can be more broadly understood as the desire to free his soul from his body. Unaware of this desire for death, he is oblivious to the idea that his pursuit is as much existential as it is rational. No doubt it is the existential terror of death which makes him hesitant, given Socrates' imminent execution, to admit that as a philosopher he should pursue it more thoroughly.

The Dead Philosopher

Socrates is certainly keen for Simmias to see that death by philosophy and fated death follow the same path. The unity of the "two deaths" shows through Socrates' declaration that philosophers "...fear death least of all men" (67e4). Others face death not with contempt for the body, but with the desire to maintain it, and so they regard death as one of the greatest evils (68d7). When they are brave in the face of death, it is absurd, according to Socrates, because it arises from fear of even greater evils (68d9-10). The point being made here is that, despite the fact that these men – the lovers of wealth or honours – are usually considered courageous (see 68c4-5), they aren't really. Rather, when it comes down to it, the difference between them and the common lot is just a matter of degree, not quality. For even though they may fear

less than people in general, they are, nonetheless, like them. They are ruled by their fears. There is a courage of the body, as it were; unmediated by philosophical desire, and not truly a virtue. Weiss says that

...the truly courageous and truly temperate man of the *Phaedo* is not said to be wise but to love wisdom...Virtue is not wisdom but the love of wisdom, hence one can be virtuous without being wise, by devoting one's life to the pursuit of *phronesis*: to thinking, to reason, to the soul – not the body.²⁵⁷

A similar thing can be said about the virtue self-control. A virtue which, we imagine, is nothing other than the transcendence of bodily desire. Judging from what Socrates has been saying about the body we can't help but think *it* to be the philosophical virtue *par excellence*. Not necessarily so. Unphilosophical self-control, says Socrates, is of the body: one set of pleasures is desired so that another set of pleasures is controlled (68e2-69a5). From one perspective what may look like self-control is, when we take it to a broader level, not the transcendence of bodily desire but merely its expansion to encompass weaker desires. Virtuous practice is, from this standpoint, merely an illusion rooted in our mistaking the body for the soul.

To attain virtue, Socrates says, the only valid currency for which pleasures and pains should be exchanged is wisdom (69b1-2).²⁵⁸ Weiss explains it thus:

The right exchange avoids both pitfalls of the wrong exchange: it neither regards pleasures, pains, and fears as coinage with genuine value, nor, therefore, *arete* [virtue] as the achievement of the greatest amount of pleasure and least amount of pain and fear...Since pleasures, pains, and fears are not coins worthy of pursuit, and since *phronesis* [wisdom] alone is the right coin (69a9-10), it follows that the right exchange

²⁵⁷ Weiss (1987, pp. 62-63).

²⁵⁸ Cf., White (1989, p. 58).

of pains and fears is not one whose aim is to avoid the greater by choosing the lesser,
but one whose aim is *phronesis*.²⁵⁹

Wisdom is thus liberation from the exchange which makes bodily desires arbiters of the soul. Put more simply, only by desiring wisdom does the true worth of our bodily experiences show itself. Recognising their true worth we are indifferent to them (pleasures and pains) as they are in themselves. And so Socrates adds that

...wisdom itself is a kind of cleansing or purification [and] he who arrives there purified and initiated will dwell with the gods...those concerned with the mysteries say, many who carry the thyrsus but the Bacchants are few. These latter are, in my opinion, no other than those who have practice philosophy in the right way. I have in my life left nothing undone in order to be counted among these as far as possible, as I have been eager to be in every way (69c1-2).

Socrates' alliance with the true philosophers puts him in their mythical realm.

If truth is only attainable in death then we might suppose that true philosophers themselves only exist in death. The true philosophers would seem to be an ideal towards which the would-be philosophers of this world might strive. Given this, it is disconcerting to find that Socrates justifies his life as if the truth of philosophy had already been vouchsafed him. Since the existence of true philosophy presupposes that the soul continues on in the after-life,²⁶⁰ how can the not yet dead Socrates be so sure that he has been practising philosophy truly? Socrates presents his opinions with the conviction of someone shown the ends of philosophy, and thereby assured that those ends can be fully realised. But if fated death is *also* the full realisation of philosophy then how can we, not being gods, understand philosophy to be true?

²⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 58.

²⁶⁰ See 68a8-b2.

Considering these arguments more fully, we can see a disjunction which arises within death along with the possibility of philosophy. For if it is only through philosophy that one can enter the wise realm so described, then fated death and philosophical death cannot be one and the same thing. If the soul is good in itself then all men are bound to share in wisdom upon their deaths, and thus Socrates' philosophical practice is ultimately without distinction; if it is only through philosophical practice that we attain goodness of soul then fated death and philosophical death do not share the same end. This disjunction makes uncertain both the foundation of philosophy and the hope of an after-life, and without the connection between philosophy and death the existential imperative of philosophy is sidelined. Philosophy and the "bodily" virtue, self-control, would be on a par.

Socrates' bundling together of the temporal (fated death) and the eternal (wisdom) would seem to be the underlying problem. On the one hand, his wish for a life with the gods is a "temporalisation" of death (death is not eternity but that which comes after life, as pleasure follows pain), whereas purification through wisdom is only possible with *eternal* access to the truth, and not just in the after-life. Socrates speaks as if death is both the final separation of the soul from the body, something which will happen *in time* (in the future), and also its exhibition as wisdom in the present (or eternally). As I will go on to argue, though, this seemingly incongruous mix cannot finally be overcome. It reflects the separation of ourselves from death as living *embodied* beings, and our *possible* union with death through philosophy. It reflects both the *doubt* of philosophy's fulfilment and the *hope* which arises with its distinction from the "bodily" virtues.

Concluding his defence, Socrates reiterates his hope that life in the after-world will be similar to, but better than this one: “This is my defence, Simmias and Cebes, that I am likely to be right to leave you and my masters here without resentment or complaint, believing that there, as here, I shall find good masters and good friends” (69d8-e2). That this defence needs greater support is the call made by Cebes. Cebes wants a convincing argument that the soul continues to exist after we die, evidence that it does not just fly away like smoke once it leaves the body (69e4-70b4).²⁶¹ And so too do we, if we are to believe that there is some parallel between the separation of the soul from the body in this life and its final separation in death. Only with this can philosophy make for itself a convincing defence that it is not merely another misconceived virtue of the body.

Proving our Divinity

Cebes requests Socrates to show clearly the *theoretical* foundations of philosophy. Such an exhibition is, no less, justification for Socrates’ life; both his pursuit of philosophy and his courage in the face of death. Discussing this question amongst his friends, on the day that he is to die, does, of course, throw into bold relief Socrates’ fortitude – his self-control. Cobb says “...the discussion of immortality is important, not with regard to its substance nor for the conclusion reached, but as an illustration of an unwavering devotion to philosophy, under the most difficult of circumstances and as embodying a triumph over misology”.²⁶² But if this were the case, if Socrates’ fortitude were the measure of the rhetorical power of the incantation, then any question of the truth or falsity of the incantation is

²⁶¹ Cebes wonders whether it might be “destroyed or utterly killed”.

²⁶² Cobb (1977, p.174).

nonsense. In fact, under the present circumstances, Socrates could put forward *any* argument about the soul, and still create the effect of placebo – the important thing would be that Socrates is putting forward *an* argument. Cobb, although he argues that the substance and the conclusions of the discussion of immortality are not important,²⁶³ must argue against this if it is not only that Socrates' fortitude quells the fear of death, but death itself is not to be feared. There must be a reason *why* death is not to be feared, and not just that fear is not to be feared. What I mean here is that if the argument is to act as an incantation then it must act as such *despite* Socrates and his fortitude. As such, the truth or falsity of the arguments (from the perspective of Socrates' interlocutors) is of utmost importance.

Thus Socrates' behaviour on the day he is to die throws into relief the foundation of his whole life. He has, after all, been living for the end of this very day (see 64a). What exactly is *it* that Socrates has been living for? Without the assurances requested by Cebes aren't we bound to question the reality of this foundation, as had Socrates previously when his death was forestalled? Is it just a fool's errand? With a jab at Aristophanes, Socrates says that the question would be thought important even by a comic playwright. As we saw in Chapter three, Aristophanes sent-up Socrates, portraying him as a follower of chaos. His words were nothing but hot air – he farted his way through life. Evidence that his life's practice *does* end in eternal wisdom would put paid to Aristophanes' accusations.

Thus having outlined the *hope* of the philosopher, he begins the second part of the defence. In attempting to show that the soul is eternal Socrates approaches the question of the possibility of philosophy from the perspective of the body. This

²⁶³ Ibid., p. 174.

perspective brings to the fore fated death or the after-life. However, in making the case for the eternity of our souls, death, as a condition of temporality, is rendered insignificant. With this, our deaths are denied, and philosophy is sanctified only when death does not exist. That Socrates begins by showing the necessity of death for temporality and ends by transforming this into a fictional eternity shows, I suggest, the impossibility of philosophically exhibiting the foundations of philosophy (as well as showing that we leave ourselves behind in any attempt to do so).

The Eternal Cycle

Harking back to an ancient tale about souls existing in Hades, he says to Cebes that there would be sufficient proof that our souls *do* exist in Hades if it were clear that the living can only come from the dead. Explaining himself further, Socrates urges Cebes to look at all of those things which come into being; all of the temporal things, in other words. For all things which have opposites, he says, it is necessarily true that they can only arise from their opposite: the larger, for example, arises from the smaller, the better from the worse, and the weaker from the stronger (70e1-71a10). And not only this, says Socrates, "...between each of those pairs of opposites there are two processes: from the one to the other and then again from the other to the first; between the larger and the smaller there is increase and decrease, and we call the one increasing and the other decreasing?" (71b1-4).

Socrates asks Cebes whether being alive has an opposite; leading him on with the analogy that being asleep is the opposite of being awake (71c1-2). Following this lead, Cebes assuredly answers that it is death: being dead is the opposite of being

alive (71c5). Taking up the analogy of sleeping and waking again (an analogy which speaks of the body and temporality), Socrates says that being awake comes to be from being asleep and vice versa (71c9-d3). He then urges Cebes to apply the same reasoning to life and death, which Cebes does. The end result is captured in Socrates' exclamation that the dead really do come to be from the living and the living do come to be from the dead (72a4-5). Our souls do, so it follows, exist in Hades.

Justifying why this must be so, Socrates explains that if there were no coming to life from death then everything in the end would be dead. "Even if the living came from some other source, and all that lived died, how could all things avoid being absorbed in death?" (72d2-3) says Socrates. Emphasised here is the fact that for life to go on, to regenerate itself, death must be the beginning of things equally as much as their end. Our world is a world of change, of coming to be and passing away. Things die, and other things are born. Death and life are, no less, the ongoing temporality of things. Death is *the* source of life, and life of death. A world without the regeneration of souls, without life *opposed* to death, would not be temporal. Life would not go on, but would instead be swamped by the *eternity* of death, for death would not play a part in the regeneration of life, it would merely be its end. Put another way, if death is the end of unique individuals then it is also their beginning, as uniqueness is something more than the reconstitution of already existing things. If it weren't, then the individuality of things would be mere illusion. This tree here would be no different to any other tree, for its existence *here and now* would not be one of its essential properties. Death is, therefore, a necessary condition of the temporal and ongoing uniqueness of life.

Can we conclude, as does Socrates, that the souls of the dead must exist in Hades (70c4; 72e1)? I argue that we can't, for when we do we fall into the same trap which Socrates sought to avoid; we destroy temporal life, making death eternal. If life and death were symmetrical and we were to exist in Hades just as we exist now, moving through a cycle of life and death would in fact bring no change or regeneration. All things would disappear (i.e., die) only to reappear as the same thing. To make what Socrates is trying to prove about the soul square with his regeneration argument, it makes more sense to think of already existing things having existed "in potential" in Hades. Hades would not, in other words, be just an ongoing replication of life, but instead it would be the mysterious fountain of life which shows itself *through* the frame of life, as it were. Hades would only take the form of what already exists as life regenerates itself.

Socrates oversteps the mark, therefore, with his analogy of sleeping and waking. With this analogy he makes out as if we could step outside of existence, or transcend temporality. Thereby he transforms Hades from a retrospective potentiality (a mystery which takes form through life) into an actuality (the *opposite* of life, within the temporal cycle of regeneration). We can track this transformation by looking a little closer at what is really the parallel between sleeping/waking and living/dying. Socrates would obviously like to make the living person equal to the awake person, and the dead person equal to the sleeping person. In fact, he could not have chosen a more vivid analogy for making such an equation. However, if we look closer, we cannot treat living/dying in the same way that we can sleeping/waking. The reason for this is that by necessity there must be *someone* who is sleeping and *someone* who is waking. It is not so clear with being alive and being dead. Being alive

and being dead we would, as do Simmias and Cebes, ordinarily equate with existing and not existing. Ordinarily, then, if we equate Socrates the living person with being awake, then being asleep, the opposite of being awake, could not then also be equated with such a Socrates. We would have to equate being asleep with Socrates the dead person. And this tells us nothing about what is a *dead* Socrates. All we can say, using the sleeping/waking analogy, is that the living Socrates came from the dead Socrates. Whatever the dead Socrates may be, he is no more than the *potential* for the living Socrates. The only way that we could say that the dead Socrates is *also* the living Socrates is if we make life and death temporal movements, like sleeping and waking, *within* our ongoing existence. Just as *we* sleep and *we* wake, *we* would live and *we* would carry on in death, until that time we are born again. We would not die, in fact; we would just take up residence elsewhere.

This would seem to beg the question concerning the eternity of the soul, for Socrates' argument presupposes an ongoing identity. Nonetheless, I don't think that it completely begs the question, for it must in some way be *Socrates* who exists in potential if death is a condition of temporal life. What it does do, though, is equate Socrates the individual with his origins, before we can be sure of the nature of either of those things.

Despite this, Cebes is quick to agree with all that Socrates has said (72d4-e1).²⁶⁴ He is also quick to bring up another "theory" which he believes will also show that the soul is immortal – Socrates' "theory" about learning and recollection. However, given Cebes' all too easy conversion by Socrates, we should be suspicious of this further evidence he now offers. Indeed, we will see that the recollection

²⁶⁴ Cf., Burger (1984, p. 69).

argument Cebes thinks will support a belief in the soul's immortality is undermined by the reality of generation. Recollection and regeneration do not simply support each other, but together point to the *mythical* realm of death without which life would be impossible.²⁶⁵

Recollecting Death

The *recollection argument* (i.e., that we remember things we could only have learned before we were born), brought up by Cebes (at 72e2), does seem to move these questions into a more satisfactory light. Rather than positioning ourselves outside of ourselves, it moves the argument back within the realm of our own experiences. If memory is essential to hope, then we could say that the recollection argument at least makes possible Socrates' hope. Whether or not Socrates can overcome the disjunction within death to show that we ourselves are eternal remains to be seen.

Making what is a reference to the *Meno*, Cebes says that

...when men are interrogated in the right manner, they always give the right answer of their own accord, and they could not do this if they did not possess the knowledge and the right explanation inside them. Then if one shows them a diagram or something else of that kind, this will show most clearly that such is the case (73a6-b3).

In the *Meno*, a slave-boy is used by Socrates to demonstrate this phenomenon. Being as far from philosophy as we could imagine, and yet still having the ability to recollect truths, which although not "philosophical" are nevertheless universal, we can see by way of the slave-boy the profound difference between learning and recollection. Recollection is the *uncovering* of universal or "transcendent" truths,

²⁶⁵ Cf., White (1989, p. 66).

whereas learning is the mastery of a practice. In the case of geometry the path to recollection is via our senses, and by our senses we can confirm our recollections. With philosophical truths we cannot ever be so certain: we are not seeking out the truth of bodies, but the truth of soul. And the truth of soul is, as we are coming to see, circumscribed by our own existence.

In keeping with this interpretation we find Socrates offering his own explanation of recollection. He begins by saying to Simmias that if we are to be reminded of something, we must at some time earlier have known it (73c1-2). Thus if seeing, hearing, or receiving some other perception of something not only makes us recognise that thing but also puts us in mind of something else then we can say that we have been reminded of the second thing (73c5-9). For example, when lovers see a lyre that belongs to their loved one, they are reminded of their lover; or we may see a picture of a horse and be reminded of a man, or a picture of Simmias and be reminded of Cebes. We could also, when we see a picture of Simmias be reminded of Simmias himself, says Socrates (73d5-e6). In these cases, when we are reminded of something similar, adds Socrates, we try and ascertain whether or not the picture falls short of our memory (74a3-5).

The uncertainty of recollection is shown by way of Socrates' first lot of examples – seeing something and being reminded of something different. In these situations, we have no way of confirming the veracity of our recollection. That is, we have no way of proving the *connection* between what we see before us and our recollection. I see a lyre – which I *know* to be a lyre – and I recollect the lover who owned that lyre. I must have *known* the lover whom I recollect, however the connection between the lyre and the lover is not something now open to

examination. Time has made any such confirmation impossible. If we were talking about mathematics and geometry things would be different. The recollection of mathematical truths can be verified by referring to things we can see in front of us. The truths of mathematics are, in other words, eternal. The same cannot be said for what Socrates is proposing. Our recollection is alone something which we must take on trust. And presumably the best recollections are those which present themselves most powerfully, those which show that at an earlier time we had had a close relationship with that which we had forgotten.²⁶⁶

This is true even of those recollections which are most intimately entwined with the thing we see before us. Indeed, in these cases, relying on the recollection as we must, we are unable even to confirm the truth of what stands before us. In trying to confirm the likeness of the picture of Simmias to our recollection of Simmias we would find that our judgements are ultimately limited to an unknown equivalence between the recollection and Simmias himself.²⁶⁷ Without Simmias himself standing in front of us, without bringing Simmias back from the past, as it were, we cannot “prove” the likeness of either our recollection or the picture. Rather, it is only the strength of the recollection which we can use as the measure of what should be our confidence in the *truth* of our recollections.

This interpretation complements the so-called “dispositional” model of recollection. Contrary to the “non-dispositional” model, which imputes to us innate knowledge waiting to be discovered, the “dispositional” model makes knowledge

²⁶⁶ Cf., Burger (1984, p. 72) who says that “It is *erōs* or desire, Socrates implies, that forges the link between a present perception and an absent object of thought”.

²⁶⁷ Burger (1984, p. 73) makes the insightful comment that “In looking at the picture of Simmias, one is indeed reminded of what is missing: the image falls short of that which it imitates by the absence of *psychē*. If it were not for that absence, there would simply be two “Simmiases”; what distinguishes the portrait from that which it represents is life”.

the end product of an innate potential realised through experience and mental activity. In a recent paper, Rawson²⁶⁸ takes a stand against the traditional view where the *Phaedo* is seen as (consonant with the belief that it is a “middle period” dialogue) offering a “non-dispositional” account of recollection. Rawson, noting the “dispositional” bent of other dialogues like the *Phaedrus*, *Symposium* and *Republic*, argues that the *Phaedo* is not a radical departure from these:

...it seems that the *Phaedo* too uses recollection as a provisional model of philosophical learning – one that suggests immortality as a part of an explanation of our ability to think of certain concepts that transcend sense experience, but one that does not establish prenatal conscious existence with the confidence of Cebes, nor the epistemological extravagance that our minds already possess all knowledge and correct explanations.²⁶⁹

What I would add to Rawson’s account, and what makes the puzzle as to why Plato would use such seemingly “non-dispositional” examples of recollection not so puzzling, is the idea that our fundamental recollections *begin* as non-dispositional. Beginning in death – outside of our lives – they already define us in a way which suggests their ever-presence. Nonetheless, it is this non-dispositional quality which, ironically, makes them not innate, but exceedingly elusive. And thus where Rawson argues that the “non-dispositional” examples – such as being reminded of Cebes when we see Simmias – are used by Socrates merely because they were in keeping with the naïve Pythagorean understanding of Simmias and Cebes,²⁷⁰ I would say that these examples expose the chasm between truth and practice at the heart of the “dispositional” model.

²⁶⁸ Rawson (2006).

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 153.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 154-155.

Keeping this in mind, when Socrates moves on to talk about the “Equal” itself, and that by looking at things like sticks we invoke our recollection of what is true equality (74a6-d1), we can see the ambiguity of such a recollection. But we can also see its irrefutability as well – like the example of geometrical proofs given by Cebes. As Socrates explains it: we get our knowledge of the Equal from seeing things which are equal; seeing these things puts us in mind of “equality” (the quality of being equal) and in this way we could say that we gained knowledge of it (74b3-c7). Of course, if we try and separate the sensual experience from our understanding like this we run into something like the “chicken and egg” dilemma: did we gain knowledge of the Equal after seeing equal things or did our knowledge of the Equal allow us to see equal things? This is, I think, the concern which the “non-dispositional” model attempts to rectify. For if knowledge is innate there is no doubt as to how it came about. Nonetheless, this rectification brings with it even more problems than what it was attempting to solve; for, as I have been arguing, there is no way of confirming the veracity of what already defines our relationship to the world. To say that it is innate is, therefore, to transform and so hide this problem. In the end I don’t think that the “chicken and egg” dilemma is our greatest concern. More fundamental is the notion that without the Equal, without having some inkling of equality’s essence, our judgements would be bound by our subjective experiences. Judgements about equal things would never move beyond the realm of rhetoric. Equality is, therefore, always present to make intelligible the “structure” of the world.²⁷¹ What is not present in the world, as I believe Plato shows us, is the Equal itself, the perfect equality which verifies our recollections. Our recollections, because

²⁷¹ Cf., White (1989, p. 85).

they always arise in this world of decay and generation never attain the status of perfection suggested by their origin. Rather, in the same way that we are unable to prove whether our recollection of Simmias is *truly* like the real Simmias or not (given only what we believe is his image) the Equal itself doesn't ever stand *before* us, open to judgement (if it were, then we would succumb to the infinite regress of the "third man" argument – the Equal itself is the *basis* for our judgement, which must have been preceded by a judgement of what was the Equal itself and so an *ad infinitum*).

For this reason I agree with Dimas, who says that

The pronouncement of the target of recollection as a knowledge at 74b4, as well as the repeated references to knowledge throughout the argument, supports the interpretation that the immediate focus of Socrates' argument, and what he makes use of in order to arrive at the conclusion that we recollect, is not the existence of the form of the Equal, but that the soul retrieves something it finds within itself.²⁷²

Exploring this metaphysical structure, the structure which makes possible "sensuous" recollection we can see why we cannot *show* the truth of any recollection. It is not just that we can't prove the connection of equal things to the Equal – like our recollection of Simmias to Simmias himself – rather, this metaphysical structure provides the very possibility of veracity, and so any comparison would in fact be *invoking* the Equal.²⁷³ So, it is in fact the case that *whenever* we seek to assess the veracity of our judgements, we are recollecting a True memory, irrespective of whether or not our judgements are true.²⁷⁴ The intimacy which shows itself between

²⁷² Dimas (2003, p. 200).

²⁷³ I cannot, therefore, take it as far as Burger (1984, p. 77) who says that "Erōs does indeed seem to be the appropriate, if concealed, model for the recollection thesis, which has proven to be an account of the unwitting projection of the will onto that which is thought to be independent".

²⁷⁴ Cf., Robbins (1997) who says that "On the interpretation of recollection for which I shall argue, the judgement that equal objects appear equal and unequal is not the same judgement as the comparative judgement that objects perceived equal wish to be such as the Equal itself but fall short" (p. 444); and

ourselves and these recollections – they are an essential part of how we make our way in the world – does, ironically, also show itself as an almost infinite gap. As fundamental as they are, their expansiveness means that such recollections would necessitate a step outside of our own lives to prove their veracity. That we cannot take such a step is incontrovertible, for any step is possible only because we are provided the ground by life itself.²⁷⁵ Despite, or because of this, the foundation to life is visible within life; as Socrates shows, when we recognise that things which belong together don't attain the reality of *truly* belonging together (74d3-6). Since we can see or understand that they fall short, indicates to us that we do know something about what they fall short of (74d8-e4). What we do know, rather than just being a recollection of an image (e.g., our memory of Simmias) is the structure which makes recollection itself possible. And this, like the absence of Simmias himself within our recollection of him, is almost as elusive as death. Such structure is, we could say, eternally on the verge of presenting itself to us as the foundation of life.

Our capacity for understanding the “imperfection” of our everyday sensual reality – these sticks are equal, but not perfectly so, for example – suggests, says Socrates, that it was before the moment we gained our sense faculties, that we acquired knowledge of things-in-themselves (74e9-75b8). Because we gained our sense faculties with our bodies, as it were, at the moment of our birth, it must have been before we were born – when we were dead – that we acquired knowledge of

“at each stage in [the] enquiries perceived objects seem to capture some better notion of the Idea, but this notion is still inadequate. The language of striving and falling short represents, I suggest, this use of perceived features to suggest a better notion of the Idea, and the constant realization that it is not good enough” (pp. 449-450).

²⁷⁵ Cf., Roochnik (2001, p. 253) who says that “Socrates does not, perhaps because he cannot, demonstrate the ontological independence of the itselfs. He cannot, therefore, ground his own philosophical endeavor that he describes as purification: the effort of the soul to divest itself of all impediments of the body in order to apprehend purely things themselves”.

things-in-themselves (75b9-76d3). The world is thus, from the very beginning of our becoming aware of ourselves, defined by this and not that; its true shape is inseparable from our recollections. We cannot ever understand the world without being present in it, for the world as it is arose with us in a relationship which stretches back beyond this existence.²⁷⁶ *The world is inextricably our world* (in the broadest sense), and thus truth arises with an understanding of our own understanding. True recollection emerges, then, with philosophy, with the desire to seek out the foundation. This foundation, however, as Socrates has intimated, shares a tenuous likeness with the recollected world that we find before us.

Nonetheless, Socrates doesn't shy away from his argument. He still attempts to prove the existence of our own souls in the after-life: "If these realities do not exist, then this argument is altogether futile. Is this the position, that there is an equal necessity for those realities to exist, and for our souls to exist before we were born? If the former do not exist, neither do the latter?" (76e2-5). Our souls before we were born must, from what has been intimated by the "equality" discussion, exist in a relationship to ourselves now as the things in this world exist in a relationship to the "original" reality of which they fall short. It follows that it is impossible for us to speak about what our souls were like before they were born; for just as with the Equal, any image we could come up with would be merely a dream-image of our temporal existence. Our "true" or eternal nature is clouded in the mystery of eternity,

²⁷⁶ Cf., George Berkeley (1952) who, in his *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, argues that the known world stretches back only so far as our own sensuous awareness, beyond which it is meaningless – e.g., "So long as we attribute a real existence to unthinking things, distinct from their being perceived, it is not only impossible for us to know with evidence the nature of any real unthinking being, but even that it exists... all this doubtfulness, which so bewilders and confounds the mind and philosophy ridiculous in the eyes of the world, vanishes if we annex a meaning to our words, and not amuse ourselves with the terms 'absolute,' 'eternal,' 'exist,' and such like, signifying we know not what... the very *existence* of an unthinking being consists in *being perceived*" (s. 88, italics in original). By this account (metaphysical) truth is always merely a misunderstood fiction.

and yet our existence, like equality, is implicated in any attempt to understand this truth.²⁷⁷

And so Simmias' confidence that *our* souls existed before we were born, along with the reality of the Beautiful and Good etc. (76e6-77a5) seems too easily won, as if he has not fully grasped the almost infinite distance between this world and the world of eternal absolutes. Does Simmias, we wonder, imagine that our souls existed just as they do now, embodied and individualised? In this state, how could they come to dwell with the things-in-themselves? And if they didn't exist like this, what of Socrates' argument that *we* are eternal? In keeping our death within temporality, Socrates has run the risk of denying any real access we may have to death as eternity, to the things-in-themselves. He has thus far described the soul as being with the things-in-themselves, *and* as something which lives and dies, something temporal. This conflict is resolved within a death which is before life, but only properly eternal if we play no part in it as recollecting beings. In other words, one side of death has been favoured to show our existence beyond this life, and with this the consequences which arise from the other side – eternity – have been sidestepped. As a result, Simmias' agreement with Socrates about our souls existing before we were born does not mean that he believes our souls are eternal. Rather, both he and Cebes see that the soul is properly mortal. As Simmias says: "What is to prevent the soul coming to be and being constituted from some other source, existing before it enters a human

²⁷⁷ Cf., Dorter (1982, p. 66) who says: "...he now says that the existence of the forms is logically *equivalent* ('equal necessity') to that of the soul, and therefore, that the prior existence of the soul also implies the prior existence of the forms (stated in contraposition). By this otherwise pointless addition Socrates transforms the conclusion of the recollection argument to resemble more closely the doctrine of purification, which is based on a similarity of status between the soul and forms".

I agree with Dorter; however, rather than concluding that "...it may be more accurate to suggest not that recollection is a metaphorical version of purification but that both accounts are intended only as approximations" (p. 69), I believe that there is a consonance between the two accounts shown by the almost eternal chasm between the forms and their reality in this life.

body and then, having done so and departed from it, itself dying and being destroyed?" (77b5-7).

The concerns raised by Simmias and Cebes, that the soul may have existed before we were born, but may not exist after we die, are addressed by Socrates using his "regeneration" argument. Socrates says that if the soul exists even before birth, and if, when it enters life and is born, it cannot possibly come from anywhere other than death and being dead, the inescapable conclusion must be that it goes on existing after it dies as well, given that it has to be born again (77c5-d3). Seeming to have addressed their concerns, Socrates has really only demonstrated that the phenomenon of regeneration requires the eternal cycle of life and death; and this, as we have seen, is only coherent if we ourselves are a part of this cycle; if we are annihilated by the death which is a condition of life. Our individuality, if we were to combine the regeneration and recollection arguments, arises with our embodiment, *at the moment the absolute realm becomes the forgotten structure of life, and our death is the dissolution of ourselves into absoluteness from whence again, according to the cycle of life and death, arises individuality in this world.*

With this explanation, however, we are separated completely from eternity. In order to save the "recollection" argument a distinction between our individuality and eternity cannot be so sharply drawn. Rather, we might argue that our access to eternity is eternally individualised, that *our* existence in death was not an eternal existence but a temporal existence; that our "true" or "eternal" nature is ultimately inaccessible because it is we who stretch backwards and forwards into eternity. However, as we have seen, to speak of our existence in death is to temporalise it so as to "solve" the ultimate incommensurability of our temporal existence and eternity.

Nothing is really solved, however, for death is merely pushed back one step. Death is mythologised, in other words – a fictional reality is created wherein eternity and individuality or history can live together in peace. The problem of death remains.

And it is this, our existential unity, which concerns Simmias and Cebes. The seeming ephemerality of our individuality, the dread that we feel when looked at from the perspective of eternity, makes us feel that it is only our individuality which binds *our* existence. We are left, along with Simmias and Cebes, little confidence in its existence after *we* die. “What are *we*?” is thus the important question. If we answer that we are *exclusively* temporal individuals, that ultimately our nature is indistinguishable from contingency, then death (and so too, ultimately, philosophy) is certainly something to fear. Death and contingency become the same thing, which is to say the surrendering of ourselves to chaos.

Given that we *are* contingent individuals – we do live and die – proofs of our eternity would seem to forever lie beyond reach. Proofs such as these, sadly for us, would need to show that death does not exist, that contrary to the full significance of the regeneration argument, all things (including us) are eternal, that eternity is life and not death. This would make a mockery of the philosophical practice of dying. The success of these proofs, as we are coming to see, is self-refuting. Our fears would thus seem to require more than proofs can provide. Hence Socrates says to Simmias and Cebes that to calm the child in them who fears that the soul will be blown away when they die, they must use charms, and sing them to him everyday (77e1-8). Charmers, says Socrates, should be pursued throughout Greece, and if necessary foreign nations (78a3-5). But, he adds, there may be none better than Cebes and Simmias themselves (78a6-8) – discussing philosophy between themselves, we are

led to imagine. The implication is, I think, that philosophy is itself partially enchanting, being a practice which seeks the truth and showing that while the Truth – our eternity – is *beyond* us, it is not wholly so, thereby placating our fears that truth will destroy us, that truth in the end is equivalent to an existential nothing.²⁷⁸

What is Soul?

Returning to the argument, Socrates puts to them these questions about the soul: "...what kind of thing is likely to be scattered? On behalf of what kind of thing should one fear this, and for what kind of thing should one not fear it? We should then examine to which class the soul belongs, and as a result either fear for the soul or be of good cheer" (78b5-9). Socrates starts out by pointing to the unity of the soul. A thing which is not compound, so he says, is less likely to be separated into parts than a thing which is (78c1-7). To illustrate this we could give the example of words: words can be easily broken down into letters, but letters, not being compound in the same way that words are, cannot be broken down without changing them into something else – sounds or lines for example. With this example we can see why Socrates says that things which are always constant and unchanging are most likely not to be composite and things which vary and are never constant are more likely to be composite: we interchange letters to make different words, but the letters themselves remain constant. The most constant things, the *unchanging* things, belong to the reality previously discussed, the reality of Beauty itself and the Equal itself. Each of these things, the things-in-themselves, has a single form, and thus never admit any alteration whatsoever (78c9-d6). By contrast, the many *beautiful* things,

²⁷⁸ Cf., Burger (1984, p. 86).

such as cloaks or horses, are hardly ever constant, in relation to themselves or other things (78e1-5). He makes a sharp distinction: the things in this world are always changing, while the things-in-themselves never change. The things which are always changing we can perceive with the senses, while the constant things we can only grasp through understanding.

Thus it comes as no surprise to find that Socrates' next step is to ask Cebes what the soul is most like (79e1-3). Cebes replies that the body is more like the seen things and the soul like the unseen (79e4-8). This does not mean that the soul is unchanging though; for Socrates says that the soul, when it uses the body to look into something by means of sight or hearing becomes²⁷⁹ like the things which are never constant (79c3-8). It becomes "...confused and dizzy, as if it were drunk" (79c7-8). However, when it looks at things without the body (in philosophical conversation, for example), it becomes like the things which are unchanging and immortal (79d1-5). Bringing this back to our own experiences, when can we say that the soul becomes erratic, confused and dizzy? Certainly it doesn't when we are, for example, quietly contemplating the beauty of natural things. Doing this we take pleasure in the sublime mystery of nature. Experiencing nature *only* through the body is different. Instead of being suspended in a state of wondrous equanimity, our attempts to communicate with the things before us are thwarted by the unlimited perspectives presented by the senses. If it is only the senses we are using then we cannot by definition bring any pre-understanding of nature to the experience. Our communion with nature would be absent because, from the very beginning, it would not be orientated by wonder but isolation. We would experience only fractured and chaotic

²⁷⁹ Literally: "dragged by the body" (Liddell and Scott, 1940).

visual or aural noise. Only with some unity to our experiences can we take in the depths and thereby encounter the sublime. This is the soul becoming the soul, as it were.

Still, only in death does it escape the ravages of time and become wholly like the immortal things – or, eternally wise. It is *we* who are subject to temporality. We are born and we will die: we are who we are because we have forgotten our origins; we have forgotten the soul *as* soul. It makes little sense therefore to say that we ourselves, our individuality, will survive death; that we do *not* die. We could say that our true selves are not equivalent to our individuality; that they did not arise with our body and so, even if unattainable in this life, are nonetheless immortal and, despite the almost infinite distance between our individuality and eternity, our true “selves” as eternity properly understood, are “ever present”. Though, of course, this is to think of death not as temporal, but rather as eternity itself. It is, once again, to disassociate ourselves from eternity. Socrates overcomes this by combining the two faces of death. Our individuality, which arises from the cycle of regeneration, is forced into the mould of death as eternity.

This moulding of ourselves as eternity is reflected in Cebes’ comment that the soul is in every way more like what is always constant than what is not. More correctly, we would have to say that the soul has the potential to become many things (or at least take on many qualities): it cannot really be called constant *except* when it becomes itself. This “itself” is, of course, only itself a partial vision of the soul. In excluding the apparent formlessness of the soul – that it can be *many* things – we run the risk of turning what is partially a reflection of the soul into a concrete reality. We would not see that the eternity of the soul is denied by the reality of *our*

existence, nor understand fully that the *presence* of our soul, as an *arising* along with recollection of the Beautiful and the Good etc., suggests to us that its *full* realisation might be found in eternity – with our death.

Backing up his argument, Socrates says that because the soul is by nature master of the body it more closely resembles what is divine and immortal; while the body does not: it is like what is mortal (80a1-9). With this Socrates wraps up, saying that the discussion shows the soul to be

...most like the divine, deathless, intelligible, indissoluble, always the same as itself, whereas the body is most like that which is human, mortal, multiform, unintelligible, soluble and never constantly the same (80b1-4).

And so when a man dies, he says, our body which is located in this world decays, with some parts like bones being almost everlasting. The soul, though, goes to a different place, says Socrates, a place noble, pure, and invisible – Hades, the good and wise god (80c2-e1). At least this is where the soul of the philosopher goes, for it is only he who has, during his life, separated his soul as much as possible from the body; who has, as it were, lived to be dead, with his soul closer to Hades than all others (80e2-81a8).

With this, the philosopher would seem to make a mockery of the cycle of life and death.²⁸⁰ Does Socrates think that the philosopher is a fallen god? How can we speak of ourselves as temporal beings, arising within the cycle of life and death *and* as eternal, transcending this cycle altogether? For the true philosopher, as we have already seen, is mythical.

²⁸⁰ See Dorter (1982, p. 79).

The description of the non-philosopher – the polluted²⁸¹ and impure (81b1) – that Socrates offers seems truer to our present condition.²⁸² This soul, because it is unpurified when it is released from the body returns to this world again after it dies (81b1-e4). With patches of the corporeal grafted onto it, through the habits of a lifetime with the body, the soul is weighed down and dragged back to this realm, for fear of the invisible and Hades. This is the person who fears philosophy because the realm of understanding, the realm of the soul, seems to them vacant or unreal. The body is, they think, because of its undeniable presence, a more dependable guide than the ethereal soul.

Socrates describes most of these souls with corporeality grafted on as evil or depraved, the exception being well-ordered men (81d5-82b7); and yet he cannot explain away the fact that philosophers are themselves men who have returned from death. That any of us exist in this temporal world suggests that every soul, no matter its desire for perfection, arises within this cycle. The practice of philosophy would seem to be forever bound by the cycle of life and death. Philosophy could only ever be an ideal to which we aspire, for if true philosophers are eternal then philosophy has never entered this world and so can not exist.

The motivation of the philosopher, as Socrates describes it, is care for the soul. Philosophers do this by freeing the soul from the body, by bringing the soul to

...gather itself together by itself, to trust only itself and whatever reality, existing by itself, the soul itself understands, and not to consider as true whatever it examines by

²⁸¹ Literally: “stained” (Liddell and Scott, 1940).

²⁸² White (1989, p. 113) insightfully comments that “...soul is not only most like the properties of the absolutes, soul is also most like that aspect of intelligence through which the absolutes are known, and most like the divine... Thus if soul is most like the conjunction of all these diverse properties, then soul is inherently complex... As a result soul itself must have a nature distinct from the natures of those things to which soul is most like”.

other means, for this is different in different circumstances and is sensible and visible, whereas what the soul itself sees is intelligible and invisible (83a6-b4).

The greatest danger, adds Socrates, is when we think that truth shows itself in the realm of the senses, for this is when the soul is most imprisoned by the body: the soul becomes like the body,²⁸³ in other words, and keeps handing itself over to pleasures and pains – the body’s eternal cycle (83c5-e3). And, as I have argued, it is the circumference of the body which Simmias and Cebes fear to move beyond.

The philosopher thus desires to transcend the cycle of life and death, thereby annihilating the separation between the mortal and the immortal. With this practice, says Socrates, there is no fear that the soul will disintegrate when we die (84b3-6). On this, White²⁸⁴ argues that philosophy has replaced the gods as the medium of release from our bodies. I would agree. Nonetheless, it is only partly true, for the gods as I see it still hold sway over our fated deaths. The unfathomable gods – those beings whose domain is regeneration – render any replacement by philosophy incomplete, for with their presence death plays its part in the dissolution of eternity into the ongoing cycle of life. Underlying the practice of philosophy is, therefore, the charm of philosophical theory, the charm which in this life cannot be denied, yet is denied by the very existence of our own life. The truth of this theory – the foundation of philosophical practice – is a question to which there could be no certain answer. It is a question which demands that philosophy *prove* its own truth, that it show itself clearly in theory, dissociated from human practice and perspective; dissociated from itself, in other words. A philosophy dissociated from its foundation is no less than fantasy. Summing up, we could say that the foundation of philosophy – theory – is

²⁸³ Literally: “it agrees perfectly with the body” (Liddell and Scott, 1940).

²⁸⁴ White (1989, p. 123).

only revealed through its practice. Transforming this revelation into Truth we make it charming. But in so doing we run the risk of forgetting ourselves; of transforming ourselves into eternity or truth; of being seduced by philosophy's own charms.

And certainly Socrates has been seduced; so-much-so that he has not even noticed Simmias and Cebes drifting away from the conversation – talking amongst themselves, what's more (84c1-3). Socrates' incantation, rather than making *him* eternal seems to have surpassed his individuality, surpassed his soul, as it were. In *directly* equating our souls with the eternal things, Socrates has taken off on a high-soaring flight, charming and profound, but utterly without connection to the world. Socrates' incantation may quell our fears but it is surely not philosophy. The soul has been immortalised in death, and with it the souls of the living have been denied wisdom.

Soul Boundaries

Picking up on the inadequacies of the incantation, Simmias and Cebes have been debating amongst themselves whether to disturb Socrates (84d2-6). When they share this with Socrates – their desire not to upset him – Socrates assures them that he is truly not concerned about his impending death (84d7-e2). Rather, he says that he is not inferior to the swan in prophecy (84e3-4). Most people think that swans, when they sing before they die – their “swan song” – sing because they are unhappy. This is not so, says Socrates. The reason that they sing is because they belong to Apollo and so can see the future. They can foresee the good things awaiting them in Hades and so are in fact happier than ever. So too is he, says Socrates, devoted to the same god: Apollo, the god of prophecy (84e4-b6). What Socrates is saying, in accord

with what I have been arguing, is that the vision of eternity given to us through philosophy is, in temporal terms, a prophecy, for our death is equivalent to the recollected realm of philosophy, the realm wherein the ends of philosophy show themselves to be true. Keeping us separated from the eternal realm is the cycle of life and death, yet the ongoing structure of that cycle brings the realm of eternity into this life. The realisation in death of what we have an inkling of in this life is, though, the realisation of only a “temporal eternity”, eternity seen from *within* time. Socrates’ swan song thus acknowledges our temporality, as well as our openness to eternity, by showing that philosophical insight – the realisation of our souls by way of the things-in-themselves – is subject to the cycles of regeneration.

The double face of death shows itself once more as the hope and doubt of philosophy. Death as a condition of temporality, as the foe of immortality, throws into doubt the veracity of what it itself delivers by way of its other face: the ongoing form or depth of temporality. Both these aspects of death show themselves at the edges of the soul. It is here that death is united. And it is here that Simmias and Cebes have found themselves, discussing, while Socrates was lost in his own thought, the soul’s circumference.

Before offering his view, Simmias says to Socrates that it makes sense to test everything said on the subject, to the point of exhaustion, and if we cannot find out for ourselves the truth then we can take the

...best and most irrefutable of men’s theories, and, borne upon this, sail through the dangers of life as upon a raft, unless someone should make that journey safer and less risky upon a firmer vessel of some divine doctrine (85d1-4).

The Phaedo: Part 2

At the start of the dialogue we were introduced to the *apparent* opposition of pleasure and pain; which, as we saw, was the appropriate description of how we experience pleasure, and how we experience pain. We came to see that without memory, without the experience of pleasure as the *absence* of pain, or pain as the *absence* of pleasure, we would be unable to experience pleasure and pain at all. And hence the conclusion that pleasure and pain are not truly opposite, for they only exist when we are able to partially transcend, and so unify, their separation. We saw that only because we are more than just bodies are we able to do this. Our transcendence is only partial, nevertheless; for it is only within time, with the rhythms of the body, are pleasure and pain fully realised.

The analogy, as provided for us by pleasure and pain, was echoed in a story recounted by Socrates following a dream about the way he had lived his life. This dream, and Socrates' reaction to it, introduced for us a profound irony whereby death appears within life and yet also lies beyond life. It introduced to us, as I argued, the double face of death. With awareness of this double face of death, on one side brought about by fate and on the other realised through a strange prophetic insight, we were introduced to philosophy: the practice for dying and death. Death is the separation of the soul and the body, and thus too is philosophy in practice. The philosopher, so argued Socrates, pursues his practice with the confidence of one who believes that his soul will survive in the after-life; that his soul is immortal, in other words.

Beginning his defence of this belief, Socrates established death as not merely the limits of the body, but the limits of life itself. The philosophical practice of death, according to my interpretation of Socrates, is in some profound sense akin to what is our life's fated end. The end towards which philosophy strives is thus not the realm of eternal abstraction (within life, beyond the body), but the foundation of life itself. And from this beginning Socrates defended his belief. His first argument was according to the eternal cycle of life and death. According to this argument, the regeneration of the world – the existence of life itself – requires that life come from its opposite, death, and death from its opposite, life. Given this, Socrates argued that just as being awake comes from its opposite, being asleep, so too do the living come from the dead. However, as we saw, this argument destroys temporal life, because by making life and death symmetrical, it makes death (or life) eternal. Death is transformed from the mysterious beginning of things into a reality: as an actuality it is not truly death.

With Socrates next argument we seemed to move into more profound territory. The recollection argument showed that our understanding of the world, because it intimately defines who we are, is almost infinitely elusive. The foundation of our understanding presents itself to us as the absent original from which we recollect an image. So too with whatever we can say about the immortality of our soul: as an absent original it can only be recollected by us as an eternalised image. Yet, such an image is at odds with the fact that our existence is defined by regeneration, or the cycle of life and death. Death, once again, had been denied.

To allay his friends' fears Socrates used a philosophical charm: he looked to what the soul is most like in this life, to propose what might happen to it in death.

Making the soul out to be most like what is eternal and unchanging, Socrates argued that it most closely resembles what is divine and thereby immortal. And thus the philosopher's soul, because it has separated itself as much as possible from the body during life, when it dies goes to the altogether noble, pure and invisible. Other souls remain bound to the cycle of life and death. True philosophy as we saw, is only possible with the transcendence of life and death. The philosopher is not born and nor does he die. Socrates had thereby enchanted himself with the charm of philosophical prophecy. Such a charm, as we saw, denies our own existence – denies death – while affirming the possibility of philosophy.

Throughout this section Socrates transformed death into another version of life, even though he began with the presumption that death is beyond life. In this way he made life and death akin to the bodily rhythms of pleasure and pain; and in doing so equating us, or our souls, with the body, and our lives and deaths as if they were bodily movements. Socrates transcended life and death, in other words, but only to find himself within another image of life. This, as we saw, was inadequate to prove the immortality of our souls, and founded the philosophical practice for dying on a misunderstanding of life.

In the next section of the *Phaedo* (my interpretation to be presented in the following pages) Socrates is forced by his friends to confront death. Both Simmias and Cebes bring out the consequences of Socrates' enchanting philosophical prophecy. For Simmias, the separation of our soul from our body is a movement towards nothing: the fundament of life is the body, in other words. Cebes' disagreement is stronger; it cuts to the heart of philosophy, in that he allows for its possibility (as understanding founded beyond the body) while showing that this

understanding is ultimately an image not of eternity but of nothing. Forced to confront death directly, Socrates reflects back on his own life, and what were earlier attempts by him to understand the genesis of all things. These attempts were fruitless, as each moved beyond the soul and with this dissolved the world as it *appears* to us. Accordingly, Socrates takes a different path to explain the genesis of things, one whereby the appearance of the world is saved from dissolution. This, his “second sailing”, is an inquiry which moves by way of the intelligibility of things. With this, Socrates shows that the soul comes to be from both intelligibility itself and nothingness: it is rooted in both contingency and eternity. Its genesis is, in other words, the double face of death. Exploring this further, Socrates closes his dialogue with a myth about the after-life: by way of this myth we return to the importance of *practice* for philosophy, and come to see that the tragedy of philosophy and what makes philosophy possible is our own death.

Simmiias: The Body in Harmony

And so Simmiias begins to question Socrates. He says that Socrates’ arguments could just as well describe a lyre, the harmony and the strings. A harmony, he says, “...is something invisible, without body, beautiful²⁸⁵ and divine in the attuned lyre, whereas the lyre itself and its strings are physical, bodily, composite, earthy and akin to what is mortal” (85e4-86a3). Simmiias adds that Socrates really does have this likeness of the soul in mind; he describes this likeness thus: “...as the body is stretched and held together by the hot and cold, the dry and the moist and other such things, and our soul is a mixture and harmony of those

²⁸⁵ Literally: “all beautiful” (Liddell and Scott, 1940).

things when they are mixed with each other rightly and in due measure" (86b5-c2).

This harmony – the stability of the soul – according to what Simmias is saying, exists only when the body is midway between temporal opposition. With this, life and death are merely the most expansive of these temporal or bodily extremes.

Consequently, it makes no sense to follow Socrates' argument. For one would have to say that the harmony (the soul) continues to exist even when the strings of the lyre have been cut or the lyre itself has been trashed (86a3-b3). Simmias, who has clearly picked up on the inadequacy of Socrates' attempts to stabilise what is according to his regeneration argument simply the movement between opposites, denies this.²⁸⁶

The truth is that when this balance or harmony is destroyed, through disease or other evils, the soul is destroyed as well, no matter how divine it might be (86c3-5).

Cebes: The Creator

Cebes goes beyond the body but yet not all the way to eternity. He agrees that our soul existed before entering our body (87a2-4), and hence that it is stronger and longer lasting than the body (87a6-7). Nonetheless, he disagrees with the argument that our souls must continue to exist after we die (87a4-5). To show this he too, like Simmias, must use an image (87b3). With this, we should view Cebes' objection in keeping with the image of the soul Socrates has presented thus far. For Socrates, as I have been arguing, presents us with an eternal image of his own soul, arising nonetheless within the ongoing cycle of temporality.²⁸⁷

Cebes explains that the soul is something like a weaver and our body like the coats woven by a weaver (87b4-e5). Even though the weaver is much longer lasting

²⁸⁶ Cf., White (1989, p. 130).

²⁸⁷ Cf., Burger (1984, pp. 109-111).

than the coats, having woven anew and outlasted many of them, he is still, nonetheless, temporal. He will die one day, leaving behind him the last coat that he wove (87c8-d2). He is, when all is said and done, a temporal being himself. And thus, Cebes concludes, any argument based on the premise that the soul is longer lasting than the body, that it is superior in all respects, does not thereby prove that the soul continues safe and sound because the body has not perished. Our soul might *still* exist after our own deaths, but we can never know when it will finally die (88a6-b2). Only the foolish, he says, would be confident in the face of death without proof of the soul's immortality (88b2-4).

Socrates is Dead

It is at this point Phaedo and Echecrates reappear, bringing us back to the present moment of the dialogue, to a dead Socrates recollected through his conversation. Having just heard the challenge from Cebes and Simmias that Socrates *prove* the immortality of the soul, we are soon to be presented Socrates' rebuttal with full awareness that he is dead. What *could* Socrates say to make us believe he is still alive? And thus Phaedo:

When we heard what they said we were all depressed, as we told each other afterwards. We had been quite convinced by the previous argument, and they seemed to confuse us again, and to drive us to doubt not only what had already been said but also what was going to be said, lest we be worthless as critics or the subject itself admitted of no certainty (88c1-5).

The recollected Socrates, which is the reality of a *dead* Socrates, is for us the dramatic expression of Phaedo's doubt. Socrates' speeches live on, and through them we can recollect him, but in so doing we are given merely an image of Socrates, and

thereby some evidence of what Plato is trying to show. If we approach Socrates' speeches in the same way that we would a lover's lyre, then we can't but help, following the recollection argument, anxiously await further proof that Socrates himself really does exist. An image of Socrates serves only to amplify his absence.

This is the approach of Phaedo. As he said at the beginning of the dialogue: "...nothing gives me more pleasure than to call Socrates to mind..." (58d5). Phaedo merely recounts the speeches of Socrates. He is not a participant in the dialogue, but an observer. In much the same way as he narrates the dialogue, he does not engage, rather he listens and remembers. He is thus unable to move beyond the recollection which brings to mind a temporal human being. It is within this realm that Phaedo is eager for proofs of the soul's immortality. Such an immortality, we might add, if it is dissociated from *philosophical* recollection, always finds itself in the temporality of the future. Proof is positive only when we can see that the soul will live forever in the *future* moment of death. The fruits of philosophical practice, by which we may hope to recollect an image of eternity here and now, are not enough for Phaedo. For without proofs, recollecting only Socrates himself is unable to give Phaedo any hope of philosophy's promise.

And so Echecrates, who we imagine has been listening with rapt attention to Phaedo, eagerly awaits "...of some other argument to convince [him] that the soul does not die along with the man" (88d6-7). Finding himself back where he started (88d6), being *reminded* that the soul is what he previously believed – that is, some kind of harmony – (88d3-5) Echecrates is a sign of the (in)adequacy of the arguments thus far. He recollects not images of the eternal things, but merely his own (temporal) opinions about the soul. Recollection of the soul extends no further than his own life.

The death of Socrates is not for us, nor for Echebrates and Phaedo, an illusion; not, at least, from the perspective of our own lives. The argument which Socrates himself uses, that life and death are opposites, encourages us to think of ourselves as temporal living beings who, when we die, will spring forth as life regenerated. This is our temporality, and this is the picture of the soul which Simmias and Cebes use as the backdrop to their disagreements with Socrates. This is a picture which is visible because the soul is embodied; it is not *truly* philosophical in other words. Socrates' presentation of the soul as *both* eternal and embodied is unable to be proved, because eternity, like the almost infinitely distant memory of things-in-themselves, and like death, is *always* just out of reach. Our eternity can never be ours. But despite this, the absence of eternity also shows its limited presence, made more real by the practice of philosophy, and made *absolutely* real, we might say, by *our* deaths. Socrates' dream of eternal individuality is thus the dream of the unity of philosophical practice and theory, the dream which resolves the paradox of eternity within time, thereby making the temporal eternal.

The arguments of Simmias and Cebes affect Socrates' friends so powerfully not because they expose the inadequacies of Socrates' own argument. They expose the all too harrowing conclusions. Socrates' arguments have shown that death is a necessary condition of life and that it is only without this condition we might be eternal. Realising the effect of these arguments, Phaedo says that Socrates was able to heal them by encouraging them back to *join in* on the argument (89a2-5). Their involvement, I take it, being the key to their salvation.

Dead Arguments

And so we too are brought back into the fray. Phaedo recounts the story thus:

He stroked my head and pressed the hair on the back of my neck, for he was in the habit of playing with my hair at times. 'Tomorrow, Phaedo,' he said, 'you will probably cut this beautiful hair.' Likely enough, Socrates, I said. Not if you take my advice, he said. Why not? said I. It is today, he said, that I shall cut my hair and you yours, if our argument dies on us, and we cannot revive it (89b1-c1).

Socrates' speaks in the language of regeneration: growing hair and bringing arguments back to life. Not until the argument is brought back to life will we ourselves be regenerated. Regenerating the argument is to engage in philosophy once more. Bringing the argument back to life will allow them once again to practise for dying.

Socrates is not talking about argument in general, but about a particular argument. And this particular argument, Phaedo thinks, will take more than the strength of Hercules to defend it from the attacks of Cebes and Simmias. Socrates thus says to Phaedo that while there is still light, meaning no doubt that while he is still alive, Phaedo should call on himself to play Iolaus (89c6). Socrates is here referring to the myth of Heracles' "twelve great labours". Iolaus makes an appearance to help Heracles deal with the Hydra of Lerna. The Hydra – a seven-headed serpent – would sprout seven more heads every time Heracles cut just one off. Iolaus prevented this multiplication by taking a lighted brand and searing shut the wounds as soon as they were inflicted by Heracles. Bringing the argument back to life is thus tantamount to killing off the arguments of Cebes and Simmias at their *source*. That Socrates should be the slayer of the Hydra is recognised by Phaedo, who

says that he would rather play the part of Iolaus and Socrates Heracles. "It makes no difference", (89c8) says Socrates, saying that the *important* thing is that we don't become misologues – haters of "reasonable discourse", (89d1-2) that we don't dismiss the Hydra altogether, in other words.

Misologues, says Socrates, arise in the same way as misanthropes (89d3). When a man places his faith in another, because he believes the man to be altogether truthful, sound and trustworthy, and then shortly after finds out that he is in fact wicked and unreliable, he is on his way to becoming a misanthrope. Many more instances of this, especially with people whom he believed to be his closest friends, and he is bound to hate all men (89d3-e3). The misanthrope, says Socrates, doesn't really understand human beings: he doesn't realise that there are very few who are either very good or very wicked, and that those in between are many (89e6-90b2). Misrepresenting people based on his painful and limited experience is thus where the misanthrope goes wrong.

But this, says Socrates, is *not* where the similarity between people and arguments lie (90b4). Rather, when a person with not much knowledge believes an argument to be true, and then later decides it is false, and then other arguments after it, deciding they are both true and false, in the end they think themselves wise. They come to believe that neither actions nor arguments can be trusted and that all is in flux (90b6-c5). If there really were an argument which was true and reliable and could be understood, says Socrates, then this person – the hater of argument, one who has familiarity with only those arguments which seem to be true one moment and false the next – would, because of his distress, incorrectly blame the argument rather than himself (90c7-d5).

The difference between misologues and misanthropes would seem to lie in the degree of acquaintance they have with their respective loves/hates. Misanthropes end up hating men by initially placing “great trust” (89d3) in someone, especially people who they thought were their closest friends (89e1-2). The wickedness of these trusted people is what initiates their turn towards misanthropy. Misanthropes are well acquainted with a few people, and from here judge the rest. Misology, on the other hand, arises not because an argument is true one day and then false the next, but because an argument can present itself as true or false depending on the way that *we* look at it. Without proper acquaintance, the real nature of the argument becomes irrelevant. Misologues, *because* they initially trust an argument, aren’t intimately acquainted with that argument. They end up distrusting arguments because they haven’t really known any. Becoming fully acquainted with the argument, like the misanthrope does with people, would in fact increase their trust in arguments. We could say, then, that arguments cannot be trusted until we know them, and people we get to know because we trust them.

Socrates adds that “We should not allow into our minds the conviction that argumentation has nothing sound about it; much rather we should believe that it is we who are not yet sound and that we must take courage and be eager to attain soundness...” (90e1-4). The onus is on *us* to move or grow through argument guided by truth. By acknowledging our own unsoundness we are making room for philosophy, as it were. We are acknowledging the fact that we are *not* eternal. Yet, in giving legitimacy to argument, to philosophy, and setting ourselves the task of travelling (and not just observing) we recognise that we are ourselves defined by truth, and that in testing the argument, we are also testing ourselves, and in testing

ourselves we are being guided by the shadow of what lies beyond the circumference of our own lives, what is forever receding *into* eternity.

And so whereas we saw previously that the recollection argument, which seemed to be the strongest, was founded on an association which we could only *trust* to be true, Socrates is now pushing his friends to delve further and examine what we saw was previously impossible from a vantage point beyond their own lives. He is urging his friends to examine themselves, and in this way to judge arguments not according to some unattainable theoretical standard, but with an awareness of themselves as lovers of wisdom. It would seem that getting to know arguments is the same as getting to know oneself.²⁸⁸ Hence, Socrates urges his friends to make a brave and determined effort to become sound, adding that he too must do likewise. The difference, he says, is that for them it is for the sake of their life to come, whereas for him it is for the sake of his death (91a1-2). Continuing with this distinction he remarks that it is possible that at the moment his approach to the question is not philosophical but competitive. All his energy, he says, will be devoted to getting himself to believe that what he says is true. The reason being that if what he says is true then it is a good idea to believe it and if it is not true then at least it will have saved him from feeling sorry for himself; and besides, he adds, the mistake will soon come to an end anyway (91a2-b4).

This remarkable passage is surely a turning point in the dialogue. Socrates, the philosopher, is going to present to us not an argument in the spirit of philosophy (although it very well could be true), but a persuasive speech designed to convince himself. Nonetheless, this persuasive speech is of the utmost importance. For

²⁸⁸ Cf., Burger (1984, p. 118).

ourselves, standing in the same place as his friends, there is nothing more important than searching out the nature of our souls. For Socrates, however, it is important that he *believe* in the nature of his soul, for it is not philosophy which beckons him, but death. The end of philosophy – the separation of our soul and body – is, it seems, unable to be realised as promised by the *hope* of philosophy. Put a little differently: our immortality may be but a dream when held up against our own existence, which takes nothing away from it being the foundation to philosophical practice.

And thus Socrates advises Simmias and Cebes to focus not on him, but the truth (91b5-c2). Socrates is about to be put to death and is for this reason keen to convince himself of his own immortality. Simmias and Cebes are not about to die. It is in their best interests to seek out the truth, thereby realising the fruits of philosophy. That the truth, and not the immortality of the soul, is the most important thing for those whose lives stretch out before them is emphasised by Socrates. He says that Simmias and Cebes should oppose in every way any untruths which he may, in his eagerness, expound (91c2-4). And, with this warning, we turn to the arguments.

If the Body is Death, What of the Soul?

The first step taken by Socrates in defending himself against Simmias is to ask both of them which of the previous arguments they reject and which they don't (91e2-3). That learning is recollection, and that our soul existed somewhere else before we were born Simmias says he agrees with most strongly (91e5-92a6).

This argument, as I have noted elsewhere, proves not the eternity of our individuality but rather shows that our facility for understanding the world is rooted

in eternity. From the perspective of our existence here and now eternity presents itself to us as a recollection, as the remembering of things which *we* could only have known when *we* were eternal, when we were dead. From the perspective of eternity, of course, this “knowledge” *always* exists. And so it is absurd to say that we *learnt* or *gained* it before we were born (see 76c5; 76c15), for then we are back in the same position as here in this existence: how did we learn? To say “through recollection” would obviously invoke an infinite regress. Hence our original nature is indescribable using the terms of our existence here and now, and yet shows itself in the shadows, as it were, when we seek *our* foundation.

These matters are important for an understanding of Simmias’ position. By making the soul an epiphenomenon of the body he follows Socrates’ argument that all individuals have souls and that souls themselves are equivalent, because only soul itself is good. Socrates, in order to show that individuals are immortal, democratises philosophy, as it were. Simmias does the same thing. The difference is that he is more consistent than Socrates. He doesn’t temper his opinion with the alternative thesis, as does Socrates, that philosophy arises along with our separation from eternity. What he does do is resolve the contradiction between eternity and individuality presented by Socrates; he resolves it by making the body the realm of eternity, thereby realising the ends of philosophy through our individuality (the soul comes from death which, when translated into Simmias’ account, is the body). Of course, as Socrates goes ahead to show, the idea that our souls have already realised philosophical perfection merely because they have arisen through our bodies makes the very *idea* of philosophy impossible.

Turning now to what Socrates does have to say I will flesh this out with a little more detail.

But you must change your opinion, my Theban friend, said Socrates, if you still believe that a harmony is a composite thing, and that the soul is a kind of harmony of the elements of the body in a state of tension, for surely you will not allow yourself to maintain that a composite harmony existed before those elements from which it had to be composed, or would you? Never, Socrates, he said. Do you realize, he said, that this is what you are in fact saying when you state that the soul exists before it takes on the form and body of a man and that it is composed of elements which do not yet exist? A harmony is not like that to which you compare it; the lyre and the strings and the notes, though still unharmonized, exist; the harmony is composed last of all, and is the first to be destroyed. How will you harmonize this statement with your former one? (92a7-c3).

The theory of recollection is the wedge which Socrates uses to separate Simmias from his argument that the soul is a bodily harmony. With little fuss Simmias agrees with Socrates that the soul cannot both exist before it enters the body *and* be made up of things which only exist with the body. As Simmias describes it, the theory of recollection "...was based on an assumption worthy of acceptance, for our soul was said to exist also before it came into the body, just as the reality does that it is of the kind which we qualify by the words 'which truly is,' and I convinced myself that I was quite correct to accept it" (92d5-e2). Reflecting on this passage for a moment we can still see that Simmias confuses the eternal with the temporal individual. That our soul exists before it enters our body we can take from two perspectives: the first, the temporal perspective (whereby we stand outside of temporality, outside of ourselves as it were), where we assume that the realm before and after our temporal life is the realm of eternity; or the second, where the realm of

eternity is ever present. From the first perspective, our tendency is to take the temporal manifestation of things and make them eternal. The reason for this is because from this perspective eternity is merely a different sort of place and time. And so we find Simmias seemingly extending *our* existence backwards in time, into the realm of eternity, a place where at one *time* (notice the temporal) we learned of the eternal things. The reality bearing the name that “which truly is” would, I think, strike Simmias in the same way – i.e., as a reality much like this, without change, yet nonetheless existing within the temporal horizon of the cycle of life and death. Even so, to come at it from the other perspective, the perspective of eternity, is to deny altogether the reality of individuals; and so dissolve any distinctions we make about souls from within this world – as all is true reflected in the eyes of eternity.

Bringing out the individual characteristics of the soul, Socrates moves the argument back within the present reality of our own lives. He approaches the soul not as if it were just an individual eternalised or eternity itself, but as an *individual*. In our everyday lives people, or individual souls, are good and bad. Souls are distinguished by more than just their existence. In assuming that the soul is an epiphenomenon of the body we cannot speak about good and bad souls, says Socrates. The soul, according to Simmias’ definition, is perfect merely because it exists (92e4-94a9).

In focusing on the existential fact of our individuality, Socrates presents our souls as mysteriously contingent. Unlike Simmias, who would extend our existence backwards into the realm of death, and in so doing make life and death equivalent, Socrates brings out the profound otherness of death. The imperfection of our own souls, their incompleteness, our *individuality*, is a sign of their separation from

eternity, for it is only the perfect soul which can exist along with that “which truly is”. It is only in death that the perfect soul exists. This separation is what brings the soul to life, and shows that *genesis* is a condition of our existence. *Genesis* does not mirror that “which truly is”. Rather, it is the absence of form. Or, we could say, it arises from the other side of death: death as a condition of temporality.

Tied up with the question of our temporality is that of our freedom. The body mirrors eternity in that it moves within the realm of necessity. If we ourselves were eternal then we could not speak of our essence, for our whole nature, our individuality, would be eternal. We would disappear not into eternal goodness, but the meaningless comings and goings of the body’s restless cycle. Eternal stillness replaces eternal movement. This is absolutely so. For if the eternal movement of life and death is bodily, then death cannot also be eternal. Death has only one face, and it is radically temporal. In this case, chance rules. Simmias’ replacement of eternity with the body makes chance the origin of our individuality. From here it is impossible to speak of a philosophical individual, for chance renders all things absurd.

And so Socrates puts it to Simmias that the soul is not the follower but the ruler of the body (94b4-c2). If *we* take command, opened up to us is a world in which we play a part in creating, and in which the orientation of our lives is at stake. The subjugation and limited perspective of our world implied in the exclamation “I am hungry!” stands in stark contrast to Homer’s Odysseus, as quoted by Socrates: “...[he] struck his breast and rebuked his heart saying ‘Endure, my heart, you have endured worse than this.’” (94d7-8). Odysseus is not just captive to the blind and crude rush of anger. His desire to enact revenge on the disrespectful suitors is the

background to his fortitude. Odysseus' soul, we could say, shows itself in his purpose. He isn't just the chance movements of his body, but does himself partly fabricate his own existence. This existence does in Odysseus' case, grow out of his love of honour, a love which orientates him to the world in a particular way.

What Simmias' conception of the soul lacks is thus his own essence – i.e., self-movement. Or, more correctly, it lacks the potential for self-movement. Simmias' concept is the soul perfectly realised, the harmony of all the "bodily" fears and desires. Without a foundation in eternity there is no way that the soul can be separated from what is eternally moving. The soul is bound to the chance movements of the body, and these movements are ever present in this life. Only by acknowledging the separation of ourselves and eternity, and thus the reality of death, are we in a position to move beyond our own circumference. The frame through which we do this is truth, for we *necessarily* speak what we believe is the truth – if not to others then to ourselves. If it is not truth then we have *already* stepped outside of ourselves, and so given ourselves up to chance.

Cebes' argument is more comprehensive and does not thereby suffocate the soul with an eternity already realised. He does not completely literalise Socrates' description of the soul in death and is, because of this, a greater threat. Whereas by Simmias' account philosophy or reflection is rendered impossible because of the subordination of the soul to the body, Cebes rescues the soul to make philosophy at least *appear* possible. To philosophise, as does Simmias, and deny the possibility of philosophy, to reflect and argue for the absence of any stable reflection is, one might argue, already showing that the appearance of philosophy is possible: that we practise philosophy even as we deny its existence. But this appearance of philosophy

is only visible to those who are open to the irony that is presented with Simmias; not to one such as Simmias, who describes the individual as inherently aphilosophical, while philosophising despite himself. It is for this reason that even to imagine that philosophy were possible, given Simmias' account of what it would be to be human, we would need to be able to grasp the irony of our position (that the truth of the matter is that truth is absurd), and to grasp the irony of our position would be to recognise that to be human is in some sense to be (or to appear to be) philosophical; thus transcending or refuting Simmias' argument. It is from this background that Cebes will provide a truer account of the individual.

Cebes does not dispute the argument that our soul existed before we were born, what he does object to is that our soul must necessarily continue to exist after death. He believes that the soul is superior to the body, even though it is not eternal, and may even perish before the body. Just as an old weaver may perish before his last cloak disintegrates, so too our soul may expire even though it has outlasted many bodies (86e7-88b9). Since death is open to us, philosophy, or reflection on an image of the eternal is at least possible; the soul may bring with it a memory of what we knew before we were born. But in another sense, because death is not just the separation of body and soul but is ultimately the destruction of the soul, then the soul must return to nothing. Death cannot, in the end, be eternity.

Whereas Simmias would have to deny the possibility of philosophy, Cebes could at least admit its simulacrum: a "philosophical" desire rooted in our own limited, and so misunderstood, understanding of death. And with such an understanding we cannot see that, ultimately, any theoretical insights are beyond us. Only if we could prove for certain that the soul was immortal, says Cebes, could we

approach death with confidence (88b3-9). Socrates interprets Cebes thus: “You say it makes no difference whether it enters a body once or many times as far as the fear of each of us is concerned, for it is natural for a man who is no fool to be afraid, if he does not know and cannot prove that the soul is immortal” (95d4-7).²⁸⁹ Without proofs of the immortality of the soul we could not be sure whether the desire for *what is* may at bottom be no different to the desire for *what is not*. All appearances of *what is* could just as well be disguises of *what is not*. Cebes’ concerns are consistent with his conservative position regarding philosophy and the gods of the city.

The positive or constructive aspects of Cebes’ concerns allow us to see the aporiai of wisdom, brought about by the schism between theory and practice (of which I will speak soon). By Socrates’ account, in death the soul will remain but philosophy will cease – that is, the desire for wisdom will be fulfilled by wisdom. What Cebes’ argument shows us is that this is as if death were nothing; in attaining wisdom we would be blind. Only as an individual in this life does self-awareness and so too philosophy exist, and if in death this ceases then being may be no different to non-being – we can’t know. The destruction of the individual, or the mortal aspect of the soul, is for Cebes the destruction of the soul *in toto*. Cebes’ conservatism is a consequence of his radical understanding of the soul and death, an understanding which, while exposing the aporiai of wisdom, transcends and thereby makes it meaningless. By preserving an image of the individual in death, Socrates preserves the things-in-themselves, and keeps them from dissolving (or appearing no different to nothing) in the absence of practice. The image of the individual in death is also an image of the philosopher in life, and so serves as an enchantment to settle

²⁸⁹ See also 95c1-5.

Cebes' fear that to give up the gods of the city, to liberate oneself from the gods of the city, is to give oneself up to nothingness.

It is because Socrates' arguments are charming that Cebes' disagreement is undeniably powerful. What makes the argument so powerful is that it points to the very nature of philosophy itself. Philosophy when examined by itself, cannot provide an adequate distinction between true and false images of its own ends or foundations. We are in the same position as when we see an image of Simmias which then reminds us of Cebes; there is no way of verifying our recollection of Cebes. We cannot *prove* the truth of our recollection from the outside but must, as it were, *experience* it as the truth. For this reason, the philosophical insights of Cebes are, when directed toward philosophy itself, potentially fatal. A *theoretical* account of philosophy describes all instances of philosophy as at bottom concerned with images which cannot be philosophically distinguished. Philosophy becomes Sisyphean. And since philosophy is not adequate to provide a true and firm foundation for itself, since philosophy undermines itself, the highest things cannot be fully revealed with theoretical objectivity. This is the reason why Socrates will propose an alternative route – his “second sailing”. This alternative route is not an alternative to philosophy; instead it is a safer approach to philosophy, moving upward by way of hypothesis based on what is the practice of philosophy in this life.

Socrates' Search

Because Cebes makes the soul more divine than the body (but not yet eternal) Socrates cannot approach the question of its eternity by way of the limitations of the body simply understood. By Cebes' account the soul is not limited to the body but

has emerged from the realm of death; not death as eternity, but death as the condition of temporality. *True* death is (as Socrates interprets Cebes' account) the annihilation of the soul after having worn out numerous bodies (91d3-5). To approach this argument, says Socrates, we must come to it in the fashion of Homer (95b8). We must, in other words, overcome the fear which arises when we search out the circumference of our own lives. We should rebuke our own hearts, telling it that it has endured worse than this (see 94d6-8).

The whole problem, says Socrates, involves the question of the cause of coming to be and being destroyed (95e5-96a2). The way that Socrates goes about dealing with this question is not by pursuing it directly but by giving an example of his lifelong search for wisdom.

The *whole* question of the cause of coming to be and being destroyed can't, we imagine, be settled from within a broader, more encompassing perspective, because there is no perspective safe from this question. The cause of coming to be and being destroyed must be investigated from within the world of creation and destruction. Such an investigation is thus always limited to expression by way of images; expression by way of things which come to be and are destroyed. The body was previously our point of departure, and from that standpoint we spoke in the language of cycles, of generation. From here, Socrates described the soul as eternally repeating itself throughout the realms of life and death. Now Socrates is speaking metaphysically; led on by Cebes who has taken the soul beyond the body into the realm of death. To ask about the cause of the soul coming to be and being destroyed will be to question whether we can fathom its limits, whether we, as does Cebes, can see *beyond* the individual soul, to its beginning and its end.

And so Socrates begins by talking about *his* keenness when he was young to know, as promised by natural science, the causes of everything (96a6-9). Using this method he thought he might capture the essence of existence by building up the world from some basic material foundation. Socrates presents a series of questions which he asked himself. These questions began with asking about the formation of creatures and ended with an inquiry into the nature of knowledge (96b2-7). Despite the movement of the questions from the physical to the metaphysical, they never leave behind the assumption that all things arise from some basic material substratum. With this understanding knowledge would, in the end, be merely an historical solidification of the chaos of sense-experience. The cosmos could only ever present itself to us as a temporary truth, in other words. That we could start with any material and go on to construct humanity – constantly shifting our ground as remarked by Socrates (96b1-2) – would point to the absence of truth as a guide to our connection with the cosmos. If our beginnings are material, it makes no difference where we come from. The plurality of things which initially struck us is with analysis would, very soon, dissolve into homogeneity. Things come to be from other things which come to be from other things *ad infinitum*. The essence of a thing, what it truly is, would thereby be no different to any other thing. Difference would reside in chance configuration and nothing else. The cosmos, in this guise, would be a fiction, our own creation: for knowledge, or opinion for that matter, would be no different to fantasy.

It is this lack of stability which does, I think, lie behind Socrates' exclamation that he had unlearned all the things he once knew, and was blinded by this enquiry (96c3-5). Ahrens Dorf puts it well: "By attempting to understand things in terms of

their elements, then, we miss the wood for the trees and the trees for the molecules”.

²⁹⁰ In particular, Socrates says he had unlearned the answer to the question “what makes a man grow?” (96c5-6). He used to think that it was eating and drinking: by doing this flesh is added to flesh and bones to bones thereby making a small man large (96c6-d5). This account, contrary to the natural scientists’, retains the *natural* distinction between things while still allowing for things to pass away and emerge. It stays within the common sense experience of the world, where food does not miraculously become flesh, but rather flesh grows because of the “addition” of food.

The confusion that arises through the perspective of natural science is elaborated by Socrates with further examples of what knowledge he had lost: “...I thought my opinion was satisfactory, that when a large man stood by a small one he was taller by a head...Even clearer than this, I thought that ten was more than eight because two had been added...” (96d7-e3). Considering these problems under the light of natural science, we find that the dissolution of a *true* distinction between things prohibits us from speaking about change altogether. Natural science, in looking to material history for the explanation of causes, ends up dissolving the distinctions which appear to us *within* history.

And thus Socrates:

That I am far, by Zeus, from believing that I know the cause of any those things. I will not even allow myself to say that where one is added to one either the one to which it is added or the one that is added become two because of the addition of the one to the other. I wonder that, when each of them is separate from the other, each of them is one, nor are they then two, but that, when they come near to one another, this is the cause of their becoming two, the coming together and being placed close to one

²⁹⁰ Ahrens Dorf (1995, p. 170).

another. Nor can I any longer be persuaded that when one thing is divided, this division is the cause of its becoming two, for just now the cause of becoming two was the opposite. At that time it was their coming close together and one was added to the other, but now it is because one is taken and separated from the other (96e6-97b4).

Socrates' confusion arises because he effectively makes all things equivalent by calling them "1" – he transcends history (or our common sense experience), in other words – and at the same time attempts to maintain distinctions which show themselves *within* history.

And so we find him wondering about the appearance of two when putting one and one together. Following the path laid out by natural science we would look to the "ones" to find the cause of the "two". The "two" we would say is really *nothing* more than the "ones" combined. From here, we would ask ourselves, as does Socrates: if "two" is *no more* than this, then what stops it from appearing whenever there are two "ones"? Why is there any distinction at all between "2 x 1" and "2" when from the perspective of natural science they are the same thing? Our common sense experience, which arises *within* history, can distinguish them. This, though, is the realm of untruth, according to natural science; it is the realm wherein we are presented *false* categories. Nevertheless, natural science itself must begin from what it takes to be false – the appearance of two. This is the heart of the confusion. By the lights of natural science we have already uttered a lie even before we start to wonder about the cause of things coming into being. Yet natural science only exists because of the distinctions which we take for granted in our everyday world. Still further, natural science *makes* history the realm wherein we find the source of all things. Natural science looks to what has come *before*, to define what is now. For this reason

Socrates wonders where “two” came from: was it from one of the “ones”, the other one, or from both of them? Natural science makes “two” distinct from “one” only as an historical separation. “Two” is, in other words, just another form of “one”. The insurmountable problem here is that essence is defined historically, but this essence makes historical appearance a fiction. What then, we must wonder, of the essence of “one”, the number which is the designation of all things individual. Can it have any essence at all?

It can't, when we follow natural science. Socrates' confusion regarding the coming to be of “two” when “one” is divided, shows this. With this we can see that one can be divided infinitely, making all individuals equivalent to nothing. As a consequence, history, or the cycles of coming to be and being destroyed, cannot exist. The world, for the natural scientist, must dissolve with the coming to be of one thing into another. In mathematics this translates into the reduction of numbers to their historical manifestations. The “ones” in the first part of Socrates' example are not yet “two” because “two” exists only with their *historical* union. And, conversely, the “two” in the second part of the example arises only after they are created from the splitting of “one”. In both cases Socrates retains the significance of number as a whole yet treats it as if were merely the sum of its historical parts. Following natural science to the letter, it would be a deviation from the truth to speak about “2” or “1” in terms of their unity, because the everyday dimension of mathematics has been dissolved – the dimension within which we can say this unity is different to these parts. The question of the status of the *existence* of the parts, of the existence of anything individual, is further highlighted by the fact that what is whole (the

number one) is, under this perspective, no different to a part (the ones making up two).

This is in stark contrast to our everyday or pre-theoretical orientation. Socrates finds no difficulty, for example, “when a large man stood by a small one he was taller by a head” because he has not taken the next step, given by the method of natural science, of seeking the causes of things in their parts. The unity of “large” and “small” have not become, in other words, links within the chain of becoming, but have retained their unity despite the fact that each *does* play a part in the coming to be of the other. The difference lies in what we *seek* from the everyday. An “unaffected” orientation retains the relativity of things – this man is bigger than that man by a head – and seeks nothing more from the “pre-theoretical” presentation of the world. The coming to be of the world neither arises from itself nor simply replicates its origins. The “cause” of the everyday is to be found in both its historical unfolding *and* its inexplicable rootedness in eternity. Everyday speech retains this ambiguity because it does not seek an *explanation* of the world, merely a description. The natural scientist, by contrast, seeks the emergence of everyday things from *within* other things of the everyday, and this is where he goes wrong.

Having determined that the science of parts – natural science – is unsuited to establishing the cause and destruction of things, Socrates moved onto the science of the whole – Anaxagoras’ theory. Anaxagoras, says Socrates, considered Mind to be the organising principle and cause of all things (97c1-2). He was delighted with this cause, and thought that if this were so, then Mind would organise all things according to what is best (97c4-5).

His reasoning for doing this, I take it, is that if we can have *knowledge* of the whole, then we must also have knowledge of the goodness of the whole, *from* the perspective of the whole. All organising principles, all minds, organise not according to chaos (we would call this not mind but chance – something we could know nothing of) but rather according to what is good. Goodness and Mind must necessarily be the same thing at the ultimate level, the level of the whole. And hence Socrates' comment: "If then one wished 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" (97c6-d2). What exists is, simply, what is best. What is best, though, if it to be more than *just* what exists, must be distinguishable from what is *not* best. This is where Anaxagoras finds himself. Only in being able to distinguish the best from the worst can he say anything at all about Mind. Without this discernment, Mind would be *nothing* more than existence; it would in fact be nothing. The difficulty faced by Anaxagoras, discerning what he takes to be the cause of *all* things, is reconciled by him in a way which Socrates finds unsatisfactory. A satisfactory reconciliation is, as we will come to see, not possible if we claim that the cause is both universal *and* identifiable.

Socrates thus hoped that Anaxagoras would tell him why things are best as they are:

...he would tell me, first, whether the earth is flat or round, and then would explain why it is so of necessity, saying which is better, and that it was better to be so...I was ready to find out in the same way about the sun and the moon and the other heavenly bodies, about their relative speed, their turnings and whatever else happened to them, how it is best that each should act or be acted upon...Once he had given the

best for each as the cause for each and the general cause of all, I thought he would go on to explain the common good for all... (97e1-98b3).

Needless to say, Socrates didn't get from Anaxagoras what he was after.

Anaxagoras, when explaining his theory would evoke not Mind but bodies:

...the man made no use of Mind, nor gave it any responsibility for the management of things, but mentioned as causes air and ether and water and many other strange things. That seemed to me much like saying that Socrates' actions are all due to his mind, and then in trying to tell the causes of everything I do, to say that the reason I am sitting here is because my body consists of bones and sinews, because the bones are hard and are separated by joints, that the sinews are such as to contract and relax, that they surround the bones along with the flesh and skin which hold them together, then as the bones are hanging in their sockets, the relaxation and contraction of the sinews enable me to bend my limbs, and that is the cause of my sitting here with my limbs bent (98b6-d4).

Why did Anaxagoras see Mind as the cause of all, and yet make so much of bodily causes? The reason, it seems to me, is that Mind must be both visible as the cause of this and not that, as well as universal across all possible causes. Resorting to bodily explanations is an attempt to satisfy these criteria. The body shows itself in all the motions of the world, and it also shows the possibility of alternatives. That it cannot be used as an explanation of why things are as they are is indicative of the schism inherent to the original conception. The absolute all-pervasiveness of Mind is also its inscrutability. This is thus likened by Socrates to the blindness of the cosmic *body* – of which we happen to be a fully integrated part:

For by the dog, I think these sinews and bones could long ago have been in Megara or among the Boeotians, taken there by my belief as to the best course, if I had not thought it more right and honourable to endure whatever penalty the city ordered

rather than escape and run away. To call those things causes is too absurd...Imagine not being able to distinguish the real cause from that without which the cause would not be able to act as a cause (98e2-99b3).

Anaxagoras, bound as he is to a *universal* explanation, must always revert to the lowest common denominator in his explanations; which is, of course, the body. Socrates, by contrast, is looking for soul. This is the realm of intelligence or mind, simply understood; distinguished from bodily causes by its *indeterminacy*, or the mystery of self-movement. Such mystery is at the end (or beginning) of our search for prior causes. Not just a meaningless movement engulfed in the universal physical cosmos, its meaning is contained *within* this movement. Anaxagoras' lack of appreciation for this mystery shows where he went wrong. He thought he could understand *all*, and so explain the whole of existence. In approaching the whole like this, though, he thereby transcended it. And in transcending it we reduce our appreciation of the whole to chance.

In sum, we could say that Socrates has moved from parts to the whole in order to explain how things come to be; in order to explain, in other words, the essence of this world that we find ourselves *in*. The natural science perspective, that things can be explained by their parts, obliterates the world, through the dissolution of unity into an infinite number of homogenous parts. Ironically, following Anaxagoras, we end up in the same place: an endless chain of insignificance. Common to each is a lack of appreciation of the inexplicable. Believing that we have given, at least in theory, a complete account of the ground or origins of this world makes *inexplicable* this world.

This interpretation complements Shipton's²⁹¹ philological analysis. He shows that in this section, wherein Socrates has been presenting his "first sailing", we shouldn't take his overall theme to be of merely mechanistic or teleological accounts of causation, but rather as knowledge which is guaranteed to be indubitable.²⁹² Shipton harks back to Simmias' description of philosophical surety, where he says that we should seek out the truth for ourselves or adopt the most irrefutable of men's arguments and sail through life on that, unless someone gives us a firmer vessel of divine doctrine (85c6-d4). Socrates' first sailing and Simmias' views support each other, in that each has as their aim divine knowledge. Socrates and Simmias are also in agreement, says Shipton,²⁹³ in understanding that this knowledge is unattainable. With keen observation, Shipton argues that where they differ is in their respective use of religious terminology. Simmias describes the imperfect knowledge of this world in non-religious terms. Socrates, by contrast, has throughout the dialogue described our gaining of this knowledge – philosophical practice – as akin to a mystical rite of purification. Socrates has greater confidence than Simmias in our human abilities to acquire divine knowledge, Shipton²⁹⁴ concludes. Drawing from these observations, Shipton²⁹⁵ concludes that the cautious Socrates at the beginning of the dialogue has become the certain Plato at the end.

In a previous chapter I outlined why I cannot agree with a conclusion such as this. The argument which I would draw from Shipton's insightful observations is thereby, and in keeping with my hermeneutical approach, philosophical rather than

²⁹¹ Shipton (1979).

²⁹² Ibid., p. 34.

²⁹³ Ibid., pp. 35-40.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 41-43.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 44.

historical. Socrates' caution at the beginning of the dialogue is in keeping with a temporal understanding of death – death as always beyond our life. His increased confidence as the dialogue progresses accords with his presentation of death as also structuring our everyday lives. The ongoing equivalence of philosophical practice and death necessarily makes philosophy religious or mystical in a way which Simmias, with his temporal understanding of the soul, cannot share.

Hence, Socrates' declaration that people do not look for "...their [i.e., all things] capacity of being in the best place they could possibly be put" (99c2). They don't believe it to "have any divine force" (99c3), he says. The power of this force is consonant with its elusiveness. Such elusiveness is the reason why people easily bypass it and look to more tangible, accessible causes. They expect to find "...a stronger and more immortal Atlas to hold everything together more..." (99c4-5). The elusiveness of the force, the reason that people bypass it, is because it is right under their noses. People think there must be something more. They do not believe that "...the truly good and 'binding' binds and holds them [all things] together" (99c5-6). The force does, in other words, assert itself in the very appearance of things. Looking to what is good and binding literally, we are immediately confronted with our understanding of what is good and binding. We are confronted with the question of what *is* good and binding and not *what* is good and binding. With this we remain, unlike the natural scientists and Anaxagoras, within the world as it presents itself to us. Every step to uncover what *is* good and binding, is a step within the circumference of soul.

Socrates' Second Sailing

And so we come to Socrates' "second sailing". Of his sailing, Socrates says:

When I had wearied of investigating things, I thought that I must be careful to avoid the experience of those who watch an eclipse of the sun, for some of them ruin their eyes unless they watch its reflection in water or some such material. A similar thought crossed my mind, and I feared that my soul would be altogether blinded if I looked at things with my eyes and tried to grasp them with each of my senses (99d5-e3).

Socrates' abandonment of his enquiry into things, is an abandonment of that type of enquiry which seeks the universal thing – as Anaxagoras did – or the very first thing – as did the natural scientists. By taking "...refuge in discussions and investigat[ing] the truth of things by means of words..." (99e4-5) Socrates, as I take him, is here making a distinct move from the metaphorical to the literal. He is taking the world as it presents itself *not* as representative of something else, as do the natural scientists for example, but – strange as it sounds – representative of itself. Whereas previously his soul had been blinded, because in looking to things as causes the world dissolved (see 96c), now, in taking the safer path, he retains the unity of things as they appear. The unity of things is presented to us through our own understanding, and so it is that in seeking out the truth of things through words we will be seeking out our own understanding: we will be examining more than just things, we will be examining soul.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁶ On this I agree with Burger (1984, p. 147) who says: "Like the light, in Socrates' image, that serves as a bond between the eye and the visible object, the truth must be the bond between the mind and the noetic object. Just as the light makes possible the visibility of the phenomena, as well as the capacity of the eye to see, truth makes possible the knowability of the beings, as well as the capacity of the mind to know: investigation of the truth of the beings is investigation of what makes knowledge possible".

These “words” says Socrates, as the path to uncovering the cause of things, are no more “images” or “likenesses”²⁹⁷ than what is given by studying facts or deeds (99e5-100a2). Anaxagoras and the natural scientists imagine that they have moved beyond the soul, beyond their own perspective of things, when they give their ultimate and first causes. In believing that they are studying things directly they *deny* the realm of understanding. They do not see themselves. Regaining the soul’s sight, Socrates’ starting point is the appearance (“images” or “likenesses”) of the world to our understanding. The “words” are a more faithful account of the whole for they retain ourselves in the act of representing the world.

Socrates goes on to explain himself to Cebes. First, he gains agreement that the Beautiful, itself by itself, is something; and the Good, Large and all the rest (100b4-c1). Starting with this, says Socrates, he can go on to show that the soul is immortal. Socrates had already gained agreement from Cebes and Simmias that these things-in-themselves exist and that the soul extends back before our embodiment – i.e., that its recollections reflect eternity. If he cannot also show that the soul ends in the same place where it supposedly begins – in eternity – then any beginnings which we may recollect are not themselves eternal. If the end is not a return to the beginning, then the beginning can only ever be temporal. Thus even if we hold as true the argument for recollection, if the soul is not somehow eternal then philosophy is impossible.

Although Simmias and Cebes believe in the metaphysical foundations of philosophy (the things-in-themselves), these foundations they keep within the realm of the temporal. They believe that it is within the realm overseen by the living gods

²⁹⁷ See Rowe (1993, p. 240).

that we will find the foundations for philosophical practice. They believe in the possibility of philosophy, but cannot sustain this possibility in theory. Socrates, by contrast, starts out with the possibility of philosophy and looks for the way which will preserve this possibility, a way which he says will presuppose the eternity of the soul (100b8). Searching out the possibility of philosophy, given that its possibility was first shown to us through the structure of the everyday, will be tied in with preserving the reality of the everyday, including ourselves. This was not achieved by the hyper-philosophies of the natural scientists and Anaxagoras. Each, like Simmias and Cebes, were looking to something which comes *before* soul to explain our existence. To believe in philosophy and at the same time believe in conditions which would *deny* it, as they did with the denial of our mysterious beginnings, is, however, to reduce our understanding of the world to a fiction. They misunderstood themselves and their place in the world. The preservation of philosophy (the preservation of ourselves as beings who understand) is thus a positive sign that we are practising philosophy correctly. Such a practice is self-exhibiting. With it we acknowledge our desire for and submission to the truth, and so thereby our roots in eternity and genesis.

Origins of Understanding

Having gained acceptance from Simmias and Cebes that things-in-themselves like the Beautiful etc., do exist, he moves on to assert that there is no other reason for something being beautiful other than the fact that it shares in the Beautiful; and the same goes with all the others, he adds (100c2-5). Given all this, says Socrates, he becomes confused when someone says that the reason something is beautiful is

because of bright colours or shape etc. (100d1-3). Decomposing the “look” of things, the senses break them down into their parts. Rather than addressing the question they merely push it back one step further (why is the shape beautiful?), and as with the method employed by the natural scientists we end up in an infinite regress. By addressing *directly* the question of what is beautiful we step into the centre of our understanding, as it were. And this is the important thing, it is our understanding which we are searching out; we are not looking to objects, but to the *truth* of objects, to objects as they appear to us, as a reflection of our soul.

In what I think brings out the mysteriousness of the soul’s foundations, Socrates emphasises at this point what little he knows about this type of cause:

...I simply, naively and perhaps foolishly cling to this, that nothing else makes it beautiful other than the presence of, or the sharing in, or however you may describe its relationship to that Beautiful we mentioned, for I will not insist on the precise nature of the relationship, but that all beautiful things are beautiful by the Beautiful (100d4-8).

He says that this is his safe answer and adds that “...if I stick to this I think I shall never fall into error” (100e1-2). The safety of Socrates’ answer is that it (unlike the Natural Scientists’ and Anaxagoras’) does not destroy the coherence of our everyday reality, and most importantly it does not destroy that through which this coherence emerges – the soul. It takes seriously the significance of our initial wonder. The presumption is made that the conditions which give rise to this wonder, the appearance to us of the world in both its unity and multiplicity, cannot be transcended. Through this appearance emerge the depths, because only through this do the depths open up as *our* reality.

Socrates' next lot of examples do, however, appear to call into question this interpretation. After having spoken of the Beautiful, he then moves on to say "...that it is through Bigness that big things are big and the bigger are bigger, and that small things are made small by Smallness..." (100e5-6). How do Bigness and Smallness expose the depths of our soul? Even though, with a reflection on these, we might not be given the same "fullness" of soul as when we reflect on Beauty, what we do realise is that even our "least" soulful realisations of the world are no less fundamental to realising ourselves. This intimate connection with the world, our first point of departure for saying anything at all, brings us back to ourselves because it shows the origin of our arising – we arise *with* the realisation of the world. The question of our essential nature is thus the same as the question concerning the essential nature of the world.

That this essential nature is qualitatively different to the temporal nature of things in this world; that we can't have reached the edges of our soul until we plumb the foundations of our understanding, is emphasised by Socrates. His playful paradoxes in this section, where he says that to say someone is bigger than someone else by a head would mean someone was made bigger by something small (100e7-101b3) show what happens when we treat the *origins* of the everyday as the same as those things which fall *within* the everyday: Socrates is asking us to look to the stability within relativity, to the origins of our everyday speech. These origins only show themselves through what is the inescapable "givenness" of the world. As such, "Bigness" is, for example, qualitatively different to its temporal arising: the first defines the boundaries of the world; the second arises within those boundaries.

These differences allow Socrates to playfully mix the two “realms” and come up with silly absurdities.

Given that soul is exposed by way of the foundations of our everyday understanding, the theoretical preservation of these foundations is one with maintaining the integrity of soul. The fear which Socrates has many times referenced throughout this section²⁹⁸ does, I argue, hold us back from destroying the coherence of the world, and with it ourselves. Hence, the safety which Socrates seeks is vouchsafed us by intelligibility itself. Absurdity is intelligibility’s own warning that we have stumbled and so destroyed the ground without which our questions could not arise in the first place – destroying this destroys everything. And thus the safety of the “...movement by way of hypothesis...” (101d2) proposed by Socrates is, I argue, attained with the unity of intelligibility. Let me explain.

Moving by Way of Hypothesis

Having outlined that, like Bigness and Smallness, the safest hypothesis is to claim that the cause of two is Twoness (not one plus one), and the cause of one is Oneness, Socrates outlines how we move by way of hypothesis:

If someone then attacked your hypothesis itself, you would ignore him and would not answer until you had examined whether the consequences that follow from it agree with one another or contradict one another. And when you must give an account of your hypothesis itself you will proceed in the same way: you will assume another hypothesis, the one which seems to you best of the higher ones until you come to something acceptable, but you will not jumble the two as the debaters do by discussing the hypothesis and its consequences at the same time, if you wish to discover any truth (101d2-e3).

²⁹⁸ 101a5, 101b3, 101b5, 101b8, 101c8.

The debaters, those who love paradox, care not for the truth. They would have no hesitation in destroying the world in order to amuse themselves with oddities. Lovers of paradox would be happy to place the ongoing unity of the everyday – the ungraspable origins of intelligibility – on the same level as the historical manifestation of things. Paradox does, for them, occupy their wonder. Lovers of truth – philosophers – are, as Socrates urges his companions, not happy to leave it at that (102a2). Philosophers search for an all-encompassing intelligibility, one which, we are coming to see, encompasses and distinguishes between the ground of appearances and appearances themselves. Every hypothesis will, thereby, somehow have to account for itself if it too is not merely just another appearance among many. No hypothesis could, it seems, stand alone. No hypothesis can both explain the world *and* explain itself. And thus the truth, by this account, always shows itself as the boundary of its own expression. Where does this end, we wonder? Indeed, there can be no end, for this is where the lovers of paradox go wrong. Rather, hypotheses move upwards and outwards by way of their comprehensibility, and comprehensibility necessarily aims at a true account *and* an account of truth's own intelligibility.

Thus the “wisdom” of the debaters, to which Socrates refers (101e4), stems from their reticence to search out the ultimate unintelligibility (not *as* a paradox, but as an adequate expression of its own intelligibility) of paradox. Lovers of paradox are “wise” because for them the truth is contained within the hypothesis. They give no thought to what makes intelligible the paradox itself.²⁹⁹ Hence, the paradox of the coming-into-being of two (and the implication that two is absurd) is only possible

²⁹⁹ Cf., White (1989, p. 186).

because two presents itself to us as having *already* come into being. The paradox only arises with a presupposition which when recognised provides the ground of intelligibility apparently denied by the paradox.³⁰⁰ This is itself not a paradox but an irony. The irony is hidden because the self-reflection is absent; a self-reflection which ultimately exposes the *true* origin of things via their intelligibility. And intelligibility, we must remember, is the realm of the soul. (Thus a point to ponder is the irony of self-knowledge, the irony arising from any hypothesis about what the soul is.)

At this point Echebrates interjects, saying that these things have been made "...wonderfully clear to anyone of even small intelligence" (102a4-5). Echebrates had previously lost trust in the arguments unable, as we saw, to move beyond his own recollected opinions. Socrates, by moving the arguments beyond ourselves into the realm of intelligibility, has re-established Echebrates' trust in argument, and made it possible once again for him to believe that the soul does not "...die along with the man" (88d7). Echebrates we might say, is beginning to trust the arguments because he is getting to know them, and in getting to know them he is beginning to recognise his own circumference. Echebrates, like us, is beginning to see that his circumference is only visible under the light of intelligibility. And only with this visibility is he not blinded by the light cast by things, as can happen with an eclipse of the sun (see 99e).

The conversation continues with Socrates searching out the consequences of the hypothesis that the things-in-themselves exist and give to things their intelligibility. This hypothesis he attributes to his friends, thereby allowing him to enter into a dialogue with a viewpoint which he himself posed just moments ago. "If

³⁰⁰ Cf., Burger (1984, p. 156) who says: "The ascending movement to a higher hypothesis is thus an archeological movement uncovering the deeper levels of assumption concealed in the initial hypothesis: every step forward would actually be a step backward in recognizing an apparently self-evident starting point to be in fact derivative".

you say these things are so, when you say that Simmias is taller than Socrates but shorter than Phaedo, do you not mean that there is in Simmias both tallness and shortness..." (102b2-5). Cebes agrees. We should not say, however, as Socrates makes clear, that Simmias *is* taller than Socrates (102b6-c1). The tallness of Simmias only arises in partnership with its complement. Simmias is *only* tall when he can be so defined by the shortness of another – and vice versa.

As Socrates puts it, Simmias just happens to possess tallness. Socrates presents this here as something which although is *not* us, it is something amongst which we can't but help stand. We stand midway between the two says Socrates: we can be either "short" or "tall" depending on where we find ourselves. The universals such as Tallness and Shortness show themselves *as* the structure of the temporal world. Without them, with the denial of this hypothesis, the temporal world would slip into chaos – there would be no temporality, in other words.

The stability of the world is analogous to the stability and unity of the things-in-themselves; the difference being that our everyday experience approximates the things-in-themselves only by way of *relative* judgements. The truth of which is, nonetheless, exposed not by a metaphysical subjectivity but a metaphysical objectivity. It is not we who make these things, in other words, but we who can discover the trail which leads back at every step *uniting* us with the world, as our *true* place within it. This objectivity thus shows itself to us in the ineluctability of everyday appearances. These, as much as anything objective, are non-negotiable *qua* their intelligibility. Thus:

Now it seems to me that not only Tallness itself is never willing to be tall and short at the same time, but also that the tallness in us will never admit the short or be

overcome, but one of two things happens: either it flees or retreats whenever its opposite, the short, approaches, or it is destroyed by its approach...nor does any other of the opposites become or be its opposite while still being what it was; either it goes away or is destroyed when that happens (102d5-103a3).

However, just as we are coming to terms with the eternal foundations of the world, we find ourselves falling back into temporality. It is at this point Plato returns us to the arguments put forward in the first half of the dialogue – the cycle of life and death argument. An unknown participant in the discussion interjects with the concern that what is now being said conflicts with what was said before: opposites coming to be from each other is incompatible with the idea that opposites are complete in themselves and do not thus arise out of anything but themselves (103a5-10). These can co-exist, though, says Socrates (103a11-c1). As he points out, before we were talking about *things*, whereas now we are talking about the opposites themselves or what, as I have been arguing, we may call the grounds of intelligibility. We might wonder at this point, what of our souls? Are they temporal things and also visible through an eternal intelligibility? Given that death is the soul's temporal opposite and it is in death, as I have been arguing, wherein resides the grounds of intelligibility, does a soul also *come to be* from its own intelligibility? And if so, what *is* the soul's intelligibility?

Some things, as we know from the previous arguments, come to be from their opposites: from a temporal or cyclic perspective a thing becomes big only from previously having been small. The cause of things as they present themselves to us in the ongoing present is, though, not what they were, but rather what they truly are. As I said previously, here we are moving not within, but at the very edges of, our

world. Still, the question of what it is we are, given that the world arises with our soul, begs for further comment. What does it mean to say that life comes from death? What *sort* of life comes from death? And what is this death from which life arises? We have thus far been working with two perspectives of death: one eternal, transcendent, and the other temporal, relative. Each, though, *is* the edges of this our worldly existence. Eternity is for us forever temporalised (but not merely temporal), and thus we find it *through* this temporal life, and not by transcending it. Our soul becomes itself by way of this movement towards the grounds of intelligibility, redefining its own boundaries as truth is sought and realised.

Weaving this together in the next section, Socrates moves backwards from the ground of intelligibility to things once again, showing that in fact we cannot clearly separate them. The things he uses as examples in this section are not cyclic. They arise as individuals, as it were. With this, we are edging closer to how we would intuitively characterise the soul. As we will come to see, though, there are similarities and differences between those things of this world which do not repeat themselves within an ongoing cycle, and the soul. I will argue that the soul is the same as those things because it also arises contingently, from nothing, as it were. Each soul is unique. It differs from those things because the intelligibility of all things arises within its domain. It is not just bound by its own uniqueness, but by ongoing existence itself. There is no escaping this except in death. The soul both comes to be from nothing and arises from the realm wherein all other things would manifest themselves eternally.

Being both Eternal and Temporal

There is something you call hot and something you call cold – There is. Are they the same as what you call snow and fire? – By Zeus, no. So the hot is something other than fire, and the cold is something other than snow? – Yes. You think, I believe, that being snow it will not admit the hot, as we said before, and remain what it was and be both snow and hot, but when the hot approaches it will either retreat before it or be destroyed. – Quite so (103c8-d6).

In contrast to tallness and shortness which are only accidental properties of humans, hot and cold are essential properties of fire and snow, respectively.

Although snow is not the “cold” itself, it exists *as if* it were. Snow can “retreat” but it will *never* be hot. That Socrates does not stop at saying that snow is “destroyed”, but adds that it “retreats” when approached by the hot has stimulated some argument around whether he is here referring to a Form (thing-in-itself) or an everyday thing.

Frede, prefers the latter option. She says

That fire and snow are not regarded as forms seems to me obvious...the way Plato talks in our argument itself about snow immediately suggests that he is talking about the physical entity. For he explains (106a) that if snow in addition to being essentially cold were also indestructible it would retreat at the attack of something hot...safe and unmelted. But, in whatever way an immanent form of snow may retreat, it would have to leave behind its ‘corpse’ i.e. warm water.³⁰¹

Ahrens Dorf takes a different tack. He looks to the mutual necessity of Forms (or things-in-themselves) and their embodiment in particular things. Given Socrates’ ambiguity on whether snow is destroyed or retreats, Ahrens Dorf³⁰² argues that the

³⁰¹ See Frede (1978, p. 34).

³⁰² Ahrens Dorf (1995, pp. 179-180, 183).

point being made is that only if snow is imperishable can the Form of the cold be also. However, since snow clearly isn't imperishable neither is the Form.

For my part I agree with Frede.³⁰³ Fire and snow are suggestive of instability and impermanence. With these particular examples Plato can show that even the most variable or ephemeral things can be characterised by an eternal opposition. The fact that Socrates says that snow can "retreat" adds even further weight to his argument that it can never be hot. Since we have already seen that tallness upon the approach of shortness either flees or is destroyed, we are presumably allowed to make this connection to fire and snow. Fire and snow act as if they are really the Hot and the Cold in so far as they cannot admit their opposite. In contradistinction to ourselves, who are not destroyed or who do not flee with the approach of shortness, for example, fire and snow act like their essential properties. The tallness within us retreats to Tallness itself, just as snow, we could argue from what Socrates has been saying, disappears and retreats to Snow itself...or maybe it is destroyed. Socrates' vacillation over whether it does indeed retreat or whether it is destroyed is the same as the ambiguity concerning tallness and shortness, in so far as fire and snow are essentially defined by the opposition of hot and cold just as tallness and shortness are essentially Tallness and Shortness. The nature of the thing-in-itself – the ground of intelligibility – has not been explicitly questioned by Socrates (as proposed by Ahrens Dorf); what has been, though, is the relationship of the thing to the thing-in-itself. We know, for example, that tallness in us will never admit shortness, but we do not know why tallness is intelligible. Are the things-in-themselves and their particular instances intimately bound? If so, do we believe that over and above

³⁰³ As does Dorter (1982, p. 147).

particular things stand the things-in-themselves, such that when things cease to exist they aren't destroyed but retreat, as it were? Or do things-in-themselves arise only with their manifestation in things, such that things-in-themselves are destroyed along with things? And most importantly for what we have been discussing: what of those things defined essentially by an eternal opposition? Are they destroyed or do they flee when up against their opposite? I don't believe that these questions can be answered. All that we can say is that these things do not exist anymore when so transformed. The intelligibility of a thing must always be our starting point. Intelligibility is fundamental and does not have a prior cause. As we will see, the upcoming dialogue delves into this question, exploring in what way the soul is itself eternal.

The point concerning the intimate connection between the intelligibility of things as opposition and their instances is driven home by Socrates with his examples of mathematics. Maybe he thinks that his friends need greater convincing considering that it is not impossible to imagine a cold fire, or snow hot to touch. Both fire and snow, because they are unstable, could be thought to be in themselves unstable. Of course, once we start allowing fire to be cold, then it is not fire of which we speak anymore, but a false imitation: we would have severed the connection between the instance of the thing and the intelligibility of that thing by way of its participation in an eternal opposition. With mathematics we cannot be so easily fooled.

Thus Socrates introduces the example of the Odd. First he says:

It is true then about some of these things that not only the Form itself deserves its own name for all time, but there is something else that is not the Form but has its

character whenever it exists. Perhaps I can make my meaning clearer: the Odd must always be given this name we now mention...Is it the only one of existing things to be called odd? – this is my question – or is there something else than the Odd which one must nevertheless always call odd, as well as by its own name, because it is such by nature as never to be separated from the Odd? (103e2-104a4).

The number three, along with the rest of the odd numbers, satisfies this condition. Each of them can be called by its own name as well as odd, without also being the Odd (104a4-b1). The ontology of opposition is *as* fundamental as the existence of the thing itself. It cannot, in fact, be separated from the thing itself, *qua* the thing. Only as the *ground* of intelligibility can we make a separation, when, for instance, we say that it is without which this thing would not be what it is. And hence we can say that we have no way of describing how the numbers came to be historically (without running into absurdity), and yet we can describe how an essential property of each comes to be by referring to what it is not. We might say that their abhorrence of each other is what keeps them together eternally.

This antagonism we have seen previously – with pleasure and pain. If we reflect on the argument now, as compared to pleasure and pain, we come up against the difference between true and apparent opposition. With apparent opposition the “what it is not” is exhibited historically. Apparent opposition is the expression of opposition within life – it is the exhibition of the intimate connection between opposites – e.g., pleasure from pain. Pleasure and pain, as described by Socrates at the beginning of the dialogue, arose as historical oppositions. Because pleasure and pain, as experienced through the body, are not themselves reducible to a more general ontological opposition, the opposite of pleasure *is* pain. Pleasure is both the

thing and the exhibition of its “oppositional Form”. Pleasure comes from pain *and* cannot also be pain.

True opposition, by contrast, is exhibited eternally. True opposition is exhibited in death. Thus we find that in this life true opposition only exhibits itself as a *thing* if that thing doesn’t itself exhibit the opposition as an historical cause. The number three and the number four are not opposites; one doesn’t come from the other and thus they can express an opposition (odd/even) which is not temporal. Similarly, the origin of fire is not snow, and neither does snow arise in fire’s absence. Thus fire and snow can exhibit a true opposition (hot/cold). By contrast, a hot thing which comes to be from something colder or a large thing from something smaller (see 70e) can’t express true opposition; for opposition is accidental and historical, not essential. Socrates has made the same point about living things – life and death were treated as accidental to the soul. The living came from the dead, and the dead from the living. From this viewpoint, the soul could not express a true opposition, merely an apparent one. With our broader perspective, now, we might claim that only from *within* life can things come to be something else, and given the intelligibility of things death-as-eternity is somehow *essential* to soul. Life is where opposition shows itself, but we can only see this opposition if the soul is not thus bound. And so it is that I will go on to argue that Socrates describes the embodied soul as a contingent individual *because* its essential nature is tied up with death.

Socrates says that another safe answer is possible, one which moves beyond the first whereby things were posited to be what they are by sharing in the things-in-themselves (105b5-6). And so he says that if he were asked what comes into a body to make it hot, he would not give his initial safe and ignorant answer, heat, but give the

more sophisticated or refined answer, fire (105b6-c3). The subtlety of Socrates' second answer is that it re-appropriates the *individuality* of things – which is to say their contingency, their birth from nothing and their return to nothing, when viewed historically. Snow and fire come from nowhere, historically, but are, nonetheless, bound to the true opposites in which they share.

Important for us to remember, when considering the soul, is that an apparent opposition – the arising of things from their opposites – does not denote an essential property of a thing. A variety of hot things can be cold, and vice versa, without losing their essential nature. We might then wonder whether it is only *within* life broadly understood, within the realm where bodies exist, that soul comes from death (as transformation, not annihilation). If so, we would come to be by way of our own potential, as it were. The fountain of our potential would be the life which we have not yet lived. This is not enough to prove the eternity of our own soul as we have seen, but it is enough to make us ponder the *essential* origins of ourselves, for we have learned that death is *also* the boundary of life.³⁰⁴ Could it be that the soul comes from death – the foundation of intelligibility – arising as itself when death is realised in this life? Is the soul *essentially* its opposition to death, to the end of all things, and yet *becomes* itself by way of the intelligibility vouchsafed by these ends residing in death?

³⁰⁴ Cf., O'Brien (1967, p. 210) who says: "In the first argument death meant separation of soul from body, and the living came from the dead as if life and death were attributes characterizing the soul. ...But before the last argument there has been, as we shall see, a change in the definition of death, to make death the destruction of the soul. If the law of the first argument were to be applied to this definition of death, then existing soul would come from non-existing soul. But there can be no substrate to underlie existence and non-existence".

Origins of the Soul

And thus we come to Socrates' safe and subtle answer concerning our soul. Following the lead-up questions about what coming into a body makes it hot etc., Socrates asks Cebes "...what is it that, present in a body, makes it living?" (105c8-9). Cebes, not surprisingly, replies that it is a soul (105c9). With other questions posed by Socrates, and replies offered by Cebes, we find out that it is always true that the soul brings life to the body, that the opposite of life is death, that the soul will never admit death, that what we call such a thing is "deathless", and hence the soul is itself deathless (105d1-e5).

Socrates is coming at the soul from the everyday perspective, from *within* life, as it were. The analogy using fire puts us in mind of the contingency and individuality of the soul. Individual souls appear and disappear; their birth and their death are the boundaries of their existence. A soul does not itself come from death, but arises spontaneously. Like fire, an embodied soul has no past. On this point, I think Burger puts forward a convincing argument:

...only embodied psychē can be called 'deathless.' For psychē earns this ascription by virtue of being the cause of life in the body it occupies, and to say that it cannot be dead is to deny the possibility of its existence apart from that defining function. Nevertheless, when Socrates reaches the conclusion, 'Then the psychē is something *athanaton* [deathless],' what Cebes hears is the ordinary understanding of the term *athanaton*, which would be ascribed only to the gods, who are deathless because they never cease to exist.³⁰⁵

The argument thus serves to draw our attention to the uniqueness and contingency of the embodied soul. Along with this, because of the particular

³⁰⁵ Burger (1984, p. 176).

opposition which life brings with it, we are left with a paradox, however: the soul is only truly deathless when it does, like fire, appear as a unique thing. What are we to make of this? As I will argue below, the best way to make sense of this is to take death seriously, in a way which, unlike the cycle of life/death argument, acknowledges its profound otherness. This is in keeping with our approach thus far, which involves looking to things from within the givenness of the everyday. It also serves as a rejoinder to those who argue that Plato is begging the question when he equates the soul with immortality: i.e., soul is immortal so long as it exists.³⁰⁶

To say that the soul is immortal so long as it does not die is to say that an essential property of the soul is existence. Soul can never admit non-existence. Unlike a fire, which can either be destroyed or depart and hence is not characterised by the perpetuity which makes it intelligible, a soul cannot be thus disconnected. The essential character of soul – life itself – is more comprehensive than, for example, the essential character of fire – heat. Life itself, we have seen, comes from death; which is, as defined here, non-existence. Arising from non-existence it defies description according to our understanding of generation and destruction. Hotness, by contrast, comes to be from coldness. It is generated and destroyed; it arises and retires within this life. All things show what they are from *within* life. At the boundaries of life we find both the source of our own existence, the intelligibility through which our soul is realised, and the edge beyond which all things cease to exist. Thus to even speak about the eternity of the Hot, for example, is already to have presupposed the eternal comprehensiveness of life. Fire arises when all the historical conditions are fitting; a soul, by distinction, arises with the necessary eternal conditions. A soul is unique in a

³⁰⁶ See, e.g., Hackforth (1955, p. 163).

way which fire is not. A soul's uniqueness transcends history. O'Brien puts this well: "For soul in the last argument, as we shall see, is characterized implicitly by existence, and there can be nothing which is characterized by non-existence".³⁰⁷ Our lives are not wholly ours, because we have no part to play in the very fact of our own existence. On one hand, Socrates keeps the relationship between life and death on a similar level to the relationship between opposite qualities which show themselves within life, but on the other hand he shows that this relationship is inadequate. It is inadequate because life and death are themselves *fundamentally* different. The fundamental difference between life and death shows itself with my own existence. Death is equivalent to my non-existence, and my non-existence is, no matter what I do, think, or become, simply unfathomable. My non-existence does not and can not exist. This is not to say that non-existence makes no sense – if it didn't then we couldn't understand what it is for a thing to die – rather, only from *within* our lives can non-existence show itself. And hence death is more than just the lifeless, which would be our origin if we were merely a movement in the cycle of an ongoing opposition. Rather, we are bound (or, more correctly, liberated) by what does not exist in this world: our beginnings are neither simply historical nor eternal; they are profoundly mysterious and, thereby, endless.

Apart from being deathless, the soul, says Socrates, is also indestructible. For, he says, if the non-hot were necessarily indestructible then whenever snow came up against fire, the snow wouldn't be destroyed but would retreat without melting. The same thing would happen with fire if the non-cold were indestructible (105e8-106d2). Since the deathless lasts forever, Socrates proclaims that, unlike the non-hot etc.,

³⁰⁷ O'Brien (1967, p. 213). See also Dorter (1982, p. 158).

“...the god, and the Form of life itself, and anything that is deathless, are never destroyed” (106d6-7). The soul, then, since it is deathless is also indestructible, he concludes.

It comes as no surprise to find scholars describing this as little more than gloss on the “deathless” argument. On this, Scarrow³⁰⁸ has provided a neat categorisation. He breaks views of this kind into two types: (1) those who think that Plato believed the deathless to be *by definition* indestructible, and (2) others who believe that the argument blatantly begs the question.³⁰⁹ He also describes a third, more positive interpretation, which sees Plato in this section concluding an argument whose premise was not explicitly stated. This premise being: “...the only way for the living to be destroyed is for it to die”.³¹⁰ At first glance, each of these interpretations would seem to fit the bill. Nonetheless, even if they might be able to provide us a quick and ready answer, they do little to answer the question why Plato introduced the distinction at all. For, according to the first type, if the deathless and the indestructible are by definition the same, the addition of one adds nothing more to the other. Indeed, as a rhetorical move it merely serves to subtract from any confidence we may have had in the immortality of the soul, as we are left wondering why the argument for immortality isn’t strong enough to stand on its own feet. If the gods are immortal and the soul is somehow akin to the gods, then the indestructibility of the soul goes without saying. The second type, mentioned above, leaves us in the same position, but with the added disappointment of feeling like we have been duped, taken for idiots by a Plato who thinks he can pull a swiftie. The

³⁰⁸ Scarrow (1961).

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

third, although it gives Plato a bit more credibility, does, however, purchase logical rigour at the cost of insight. We are really none the wiser after having found the implicit premise.

Diverging from these interpretations, and in keeping with what we have seen of the dialogue thus far, I will argue that the deathless and the indestructible *can* be distinguished. In seeking out a more coherent context for the arguments than the sterile world of logical validity, I argue that death, as Plato presents it, is non-existence *as well as* the lifeless. For if death were merely the lifeless and the Form of life itself the deathless, we would be defining them as if in a cycle of opposites. Life itself would indeed be deathless, but not in essence indestructible. To find what was indestructible we would need to look for something more fundamental of which the living (deathless) and non-living (lifeless) are mere accidental properties. *This* would be where we would find the edge of existence. Without making non-existence the boundary of *this* we would fall into infinite regress. The Form of life itself, or what is an essential property of our soul is, in other words, bound by non-existence.

What though, we might wonder, of the Beautiful-itself and the Good etc.? Socrates has not mentioned these *lifeless* things. How can these exist outside of the Form of life in the realm of death, when death is non-existence? Socrates has adamantly maintained throughout the dialogue that only if these exist is the soul immortal. Are these things-in-themselves lifeless, brought to existence through the Form of life itself?

I think it is important to consider here the concern of Cebes', to which Socrates is aiming his comments. Cebes' concern was that the soul is damaged by its many births and deaths into bodies and that in the end it is destroyed in death (87b-

88b). The end of the soul is by this account, and as I have argued previously, not eternity but nothing. If what I have been saying above is right, then the concern of Cebes' would still seem to hold. For what Socrates has shown is that the soul is immortal because its essential opposite is non-existence, because it doesn't die *within* the realm of life. Outside of this existence the question would appear to remain open, no less so because we are now equating death with non-existence. Is the end towards which philosophy strives, as the practice for dying, false because merely our interpretation of nothing? Despite our uncertainty, we've already been shown by Socrates why this is not so. For, the question of our ongoing existence *outside* of life is open only if we make the mistake of transforming this existence into a part within a greater whole – as if we were looking for "...a stronger and more immortal Atlas to hold everything together more".

And thus the indestructibility of the deathless expresses, I argue, the capacity of the soul – in this life – to manifest its essential nature despite, and because of, approaching the lifeless things-in-themselves. If the things-in-themselves do truly exist, as has been supposed throughout the dialogue, then, as we have seen, they exist in a way which make them describable only obliquely – through myth or analogy. We cannot refer to the things-in-themselves except by way of our experiences from within life. As we saw in the section on recollection, we have no way of distinguishing the things-in-themselves from our everyday reality except by saying that they somehow underlie it. The things-in-themselves, not being subject to life, are lifeless. Being lifeless, yet also casting a shadow within life, they fall both

within and outside of existence.³¹¹ They are non-existent from the perspective of life itself, yet from within life their presence is suggested as the foundation of life's ongoing structure. On one side of the coin life is bound by non-existence, and on the other it comes to be from the lifeless. Non-existence saves life itself from being destroyed by the lifeless. For life regenerates itself, as it were, from what does not exist; while at the same time regenerating in accord with the lifeless. Awakening to the things-in-themselves, we approach death along both these paths. Hence, contrary to the concern of Cebes', we are not destroyed by death, for we are regenerated in becoming aware of the existence of the things-in-themselves. In approaching the things-in-themselves we separate the things from their intelligibility and in so doing realise our soul's own nature.

This is in accord with Socrates' summing-up statement that "...when death comes to the man, the mortal part of him dies, it seems, but his deathless part goes away safe and indestructible, yielding the place to death" (106e3-5). In this statement we can see the two aspects of death. Death is the separation of the mortal from the deathless, whereby the mortal part dies and the deathless part comes into existence, as death (non-existence) takes its place. If, as I have interpreted the *Phaedo*, existence is the limit of our soul, then we can see that in dying, when the mortal part dies and the deathless part retreats, the soul's existence is expanded. The process of dying for the mortal part of the soul is one of transformation. This part of the soul ceases to

³¹¹ Perl (1999, pp. 351, 353) says a similar thing about the "middle dialogues" in general: "What Plato presents in the middle dialogues, then, is not two worlds, a world of sensible instances on the one hand and a world of transcendent forms on the other, but rather one world, that of intelligible form, and the appearances of that world which constitute sensibles...it is only the dualist interpretation, which regards the instance as one real being and the form as another, which therefore equates 'independent of' with 'able to exist without.' The understanding of instances as appearances of universal intelligible natures, on the other hand, enables us to see how a form is ontologically independent of its instances even while it cannot fail to have them".

exist by becoming its opposite – lifeless. It is stabilised by the things-in-themselves, in other words. The deathless part of the soul is not so transformed, it retreats with the presence of death (the lifeless as non-existence) and in so doing the boundaries of the soul are expanded. What was previously non-existent now exists as the lifeless, while at the same time the soul comes to existence (becomes itself) when non-existence takes the place of it what was before.

The immortality of the soul, according to this interpretation, thereby hinges on us bringing into existence the things-in-themselves. It hinges on the possibility of philosophy. Denying this, we deny the foundation of existence, and come to believe, like Cebes, that outside of our own existence there is nothing. However, since from the standpoint of life itself this is true, we cannot prove the possibility of philosophy without also denying the conditions which make philosophy possible (as we saw in the first half of the dialogue). To come to fully understand what it means for the soul to be immortal therefore requires that we practise philosophy. And it is for this reason, I believe, that Socrates urges Simmias – after he expresses concerns about the weakness of humans – to make a clearer examination of the first hypotheses (107b1-7). For these first hypotheses established the existence of a Beautiful itself by itself, a Good and a Great and all the rest. If the existence of these things-in-themselves were granted, so Socrates said, then he could show the cause which he had been seeking, as well as find the soul to be immortal (see 100b1-8). Urging his friends to return to the first hypotheses he is pushing them to seek out the true nature of what had initially only been granted. Why do this when Simmias and Cebes have maintained throughout the dialogue that the things-in-themselves exist? A likely reason, and one that ties in with the part that the things-in-themselves play as both causes of things

and of the soul's immortality, is that Simmias and Cebes have not yet grasped their true nature. For them, the things-in-themselves exist within life (along with our guardian gods – 62d). Hence, beyond life there is, as they see it, nothing. Returning to the first hypotheses and “analysing them adequately” (107b5) Simmias and Cebes would come to realise that the things-in-themselves can only play their part as causes, in a temporal world, if they don't exist within life. This being so, the soul, we come to see, is both limited and liberated by death.

True and Fated Death

What is liberating and also limiting about death plays itself out within the context of our own lives. For our fated deaths are, as Socrates makes clear, and in distinction to what we learnt in the beginning of the dialogue, not simply liberation into goodness (107c4). Rather our deaths would seem to be where we come face to face with ourselves. Eternity, as Socrates presents it here, is not the realm of the things-in-themselves, but a realm wherein the circumference of our own lives takes on eternal significance. And so the wicked, those who have cared little for their soul, are left to dwell with their own wickedness for eternity (107d1-2). Only by becoming good and wise in this life, only by seeking out *true* death, in other words, are we vouchsafed goodness in the after-life. By doing this we harmonise ourselves with death, as it were. Thus we can make sense of Socrates' comment that “...if the soul is immortal, it requires our care not only for the time we call our life, but for the sake of all time...” (107c1-2). For only by practising for death do we take care of the soul under the light of the eternal things. Without this, when death comes upon us, our previously unexamined edges are exposed. With no other perspective than our own,

what we encounter is not the liberating edge of our own existence, but the prison within which we have held ourselves.³¹² We cannot see anything more, and thus suffer accordingly. Only *true* death, it seems, is truly liberating, for only by awakening to death in this life are we given the eyes to see what lies in the next. This is the prophetic heart of philosophy: realising death within life and thereby liberating soul.

We realise our *true* nature by seeking out ourselves through the practice of philosophy. Yet this practice, as we see throughout the dialogues, aims to expose in what manner different ways of life are founded. What this means is that philosophy is not itself strictly a way of life but is, rather, also the medium through which ways of life show themselves. It is both theoretical and practical. The philosophical way of life is the reflective life, as a reflection on the ways of life which make up the political fabric of our everyday world. The *Phaedo* is thus, in some ways, doomed from the beginning. The way of life of the philosopher is presented as the way of death, the contemplative life par excellence – the eternal dwelling with the gods, nourished by the delight of wisdom. That this way of life is a fantasy – is false – is shown when we reflect on the reality of the philosopher. The philosopher perfected does not exist – he is never born, and nor does he die. Despite and because of this, though, he is the theoretical foundation to philosophy in this world; he is the mythical truth of the philosophical soul, just as the things-in-themselves are the mythical truth of things in

³¹² Cf., Burger (1984, p. 188) who says: "...he [Socrates] transforms the conclusion of the last argument into a hypothesis: It is just to consider that, *if* the psychē is immortal, it is necessary to care for it not only for this time we call life, but for all time. In making his exhortation conditional, Socrates implies that the immortality legitimately demonstrated in the previous argument does not mean the continued existence of the psychē apart from the body in death". I think, though, that it is important to consider in what way we could say that the psychē is immortal, based on the previous arguments, and then what *this* means for the care of our soul.

this world. He is thus both true and false: true in theory, but also false because theory is mythical. Bringing these things to the surface is Socrates' myth of the underworld.

To the Underworld

The myth of the underworld presents death as something like an extended moment of the state of our souls at the end of this life. A place from where we are "...led back after long periods of time..." (107e4-108a1). It shows thus a separation of our souls from eternity, from the things-in-themselves, as well as eternity's appearance through our souls.³¹³ If eternity is only visible against the backdrop of its opposite, then it only becomes visible as death, as the end of life. The myth makes eternity visible by bringing it up against our own lives. As an image of eternity, it is thereby false, but as a reflection on death it shows something of the truth. We can see this in the way that it both supports and undermines the theory of recollection. If in death our souls learn nothing more of eternity, then the theory of recollection can only hold if birth and death are asymmetrical, if our souls arose from eternity but will not return there. This asymmetry does in fact accord with our experiences, for we have *already* been born, but are *yet* to die – we remember the past, not the future. The theory of recollection presupposes that life and death *are not* strictly cycles, that death is the origin and not just a transition. This presupposition, that death is our origin, only holds when we look at it from within our own lives, when we look to the ongoing structure which makes intelligibility possible. When we take a step back and look at ourselves, however, we see that we only come to be through the *intelligibility*

³¹³ White (1989, pp. 222-223) notes this as well: "Life is only 'part' of time because time measured by human lifespans is metaphysically derivative. True reality as represented by the Forms is timeless; and soul, also timeless in its fundamental nature, is 'in' time as 'alive' only insofar as soul is conjoined to body".

of the things-in-themselves. Our soul comes to be as the things-in-themselves recede (or depart), at the same time, into the eternal. Death as eternity is always another death away, as it were. And yet it is also what presents itself to us as our origins, the shadowy beginnings of our philosophical quest for wisdom:

We are told that when each person dies, the guardian spirit who was allotted to him in life proceeds to lead him to a certain place, whence those who have been gathered together there must, after being judged, proceed to the underworld with the guide who has been appointed to lead them thither from here (107d5-8).

The well-ordered and wise soul, says Socrates, is not unfamiliar with its surroundings (108a7-8). It has, we imagine, attained some sort of understanding of the path which leads to death. It has not attained a vision of what we might come to expect in death, though. Neither can we look to our allotted guardian spirits for such a vision either, for they merely take us to the place of judgment (107d6-e1). Although they can in this life be affirmed or denied, only in death do they command.³¹⁴ Yet, the guides who take us to the underworld merely follow their limited path as well. The only “character” who must, by necessity, see the whole is the unnamed judge mentioned at 107d9. Each and every judgment for this character is not an act of recollection, thereby; it is an ongoing expression of eternity’s presence.

What does this mean for the souls described by Socrates? The soul passionately attached to the body is loathe to leave the visible world, and must be led away by force by its appointed spirit (108b1-3). This soul, we must assume, is fearful of being judged, of appearing naked before eternity. Well-ordered and wise souls are, by distinction, already familiar with the path in this life which in the next leads

³¹⁴ I cannot thus fully agree with White (1989, p. 224) who says that “Soul, never without its *daimon*, exists necessarily in the presence of a reality higher than itself, thus associating soul with that aspect of the good that is accessible through the divine”.

to the final judgment. These people, we could say, have sought judgment upon themselves and in so doing have gradually appropriated the perspective exhibited in the final judgment. In the final judgment, the truth of souls is exposed. This is, if anywhere, the place of true philosophy. The final judge is the truest of philosophers because he need not philosophise: he has attained wisdom. The final judge would not and could not pass judgment on him or herself. For us, beings who have fallen into the temporal world, we attain our judgment through philosophy. What unites us and the final judge is the things-in-themselves. For we seek, in theory, what only the final judge who, without the rupture of birth and death, can deliver. In seeking the soulful qualities, such as true goodness and true beauty etc., we become intimate with their ungraspable presence and ever transcending absence. In so doing we ourselves transcend our own circumference. Our former habits are shattered and we come to see the world with a perspective less tainted by our usual "bodily" fears. Thus it is that by distinguishing between true and illusory instances of goodness we are better able to distinguish between true and illusory instances of goodness. The philosopher does not thereby recollect the beings, but recollects what was in the first instance a recollection. What saves this from infinite regress is that the non-existence which renders all things temporal is also, from another perspective, the foundation of life or existence. It is as the appearances of things that life's foundation casts its shadow. The unity of appearances indicates to us that this is an ongoing regeneration of a certain look, while the inherent instability of appearances turns our mind's eye away from the everyday things themselves. Within our own lives, philosophy is the ongoing dialectic of eternity (the ongoing look of things) and non-existence (the

absence of phenomenal qualities). Only as recollection are we able to keep one from being reduced to the other.

The After-Life

In the myth of the after-life, as elaborated by Socrates, he describes what the earth is really like. Vision, prophecy and death come together in this Socrates' final myth. The first thing Socrates says is that:

...if the earth is a sphere in the middle of the heavens, it has no need of air or any other force to prevent it from falling. The homogenous nature of the heavens on all sides and the earth's own equipoise are sufficient to hold it, for an object balanced in the middle of something homogenous will have no tendency to incline more in any direction than any other but will remain unmoved (109a1-7).

With this we are reminded of Socrates' earlier admonition against those who would look beyond what is truly good and binding for another "stronger and more immortal Atlas to hold everything together more" (99c4-5). Socrates' opening comments thereby orientate us towards the fact that the whole of the earth, or the earth itself (which equates to the whole of our own earthly existence), is itself the exhibition of what is truly good and binding. We need not look beyond our earthly existence for such a cause, for in one sense the good and binding manifests itself as the stability of the earth. It is also what unifies a soul. Socrates presents a hierarchy of souls – as I will soon show – beginning with the limited vision of mortal men and moving upwards to an intelligibility which approaches the good and binding itself. This "earthy" myth keeps us within the realm of our own lives, while all along stepping beyond this life to make visible the prophetic nature of philosophy. And thus Socrates says he doesn't think it requires the skill of Glaucus to describe the true

earth, but that to prove it true requires more than that skill.³¹⁵ Socrates, in presenting the whole of philosophy as a true myth, presents it as essentially incomplete but not thereby circular.

The lowest lives are our own. We live in hollows of the earth where water, mist and air have gathered. Unaware of the true nature of the earth, we think that we live on the surface. The “earth itself”, though, is pure and lies in the “pure sky” (109b5). This realm is what most people who discourse on these subjects call the “ether” (109c1-2). As the water, mist and air are the sediment of the ether (109c2-3), our existence is tainted with the dregs of reality, as it were. When we look up we see not true reality, but merely its corrupted image (see 110a1-3). We don’t see the earth itself. What we do see we mistake, because of our ignorance, for what is good and binding.

This is not say that we are completely ignorant, for we must have some understanding of the good and binding to be able to distinguish its corrupted image from all other things. What we don’t have, it seems, is access to a vision which would allow us to distinguish the corrupted image from the good and binding itself. Without this we can all too easily mistake corruption for perfection. A vision of the good and binding is the source of our understanding *and* our ignorance, in other words. Mistaking the nature of the source of our understanding, we mistake our understanding itself. Only with a philosophical vision, do we realise this, and thereby redefine the limits of our soul: our understanding has its source in death,

³¹⁵ See Clay (1985, p. 236) who says that “The marvellous art of Glaukos is that of passing beyond the mortal, *trasumanar*. Socrates returns to the difficulties of this art as he describes the dwellings beyond the world beyond: they are ‘not easy to describe nor is there time enough at present’ (114c2-6)”.

and because death cannot be transformed into life what we seek can never be ours.

Death is the ground of our understanding because it is also the place of its absence.

Such absence is not yet known by those who dwell in the regions above ours.

For Socrates says that:

If anyone got to this upper limit, if anyone came to it or reached it on wings and his head rose above it, then just as fish on rising from the sea see things in our region, he would see things there, and if his nature could endure to contemplate them, he would know that there is the true heaven, the true light and the true earth... (109e2-110a1).

Fish die when taken out of water. So would we if taken beyond the limits of this world. If we *could* step beyond these limits, though, we would not encounter eternity; we would see a truer image of the good and binding. The stones, hills, plants and flowers would show themselves as more beautiful and pure than they appear here (110d2-111a1). The men living there are without disease, and are endowed with superior faculties and intelligence. They communicate directly with the gods through speech, prophecies and visions (111b8-9), and are happier than us (111c3). Still, these men live only long lives, not eternal lives; and in purity of eyesight, hearing, intelligence etc., the improvement on us is only as much as ether is to air (see 111b4-5). Their divine prophecies while being clearer than ours are yet to attain Truth.

As with the "final judge" who delivers true justice, the earth itself is structured according to, or expresses, true and eternal justice. Socrates describes the whole of the earth as being interconnected by subterranean rivers of hot and cold water, mud and fire. These rivers flow eternally, oscillating back and forth, into and out of Tartarus – the chasm which stretches from one side of the earth to the other

(111d-e). Four of these rivers are of note, says Socrates. The biggest – Oceanus – flows on the outside of the earth in a circle. Opposite this, flowing in the opposite direction, is the Acheron. It flows into the Acherusian³¹⁶ lake, to which most souls go when they die, and then from there are sent back to earth as living creatures. The third – the Pyriphlegethon – flows into a region with a lot of fire, thereby becoming hot and muddy. It flows to the edge of the Acherusian lake without mixing with it, and then into Tartarus. The fourth river flows into a lake called the Styx, where it acquires dread powers. It then flows downward, in an opposite direction to the Pyriphlegethon, and into the Acherusian lake. Its waters don't mingle with any others. It then flows into Tartarus, on the opposite side to Pyriphlegethon. The name of this river is Cocytus (112e-113c).

The earth, as Socrates describes it, is a place where souls suffer or are rewarded according to the worthiness of their deeds while living (or embodied). “Average” souls are sent down the Acheron where they arrive at the Acherusian lake. There they are purified through penalties and rewarded accordingly. After a time they are sent back to earth as living creatures (see 113a2-5). Some souls, because of the enormity of the crimes committed while embodied, are deemed incurable and are punished by spending eternity in Tartarus. Others, who have committed great but curable crimes are retrieved from Tartarus by way of the Cocytus or the Pyriphlegethon. Persuading those they have wronged they are able to step out into the Acherusian lake, and then return to earth.

None of these souls could have acquired knowledge of the Good itself or the Beautiful itself before they were born; being forever bound to the earth. They are,

³¹⁶ Literally: “first saving” (Liddell and Scott, 1940).

rather, *subject* to the Good in death, as the expression of an “earthly” true justice.

Their purification is by way of admonition not philosophy. Their nature is not rooted in understanding, but in the natural justice of the earthly body. Returning to the earth they would, we imagine, find happiness in living well and suffer accordingly when not. Not having had a vision of the Good or the Beautiful, they would be lacking the means to mythologise on the theoretical relationship between nature and goodness.

The earth is not wholly responsible for the natural state of souls, however. Souls condemned to an eternity in Tartarus do not, obviously, return to the earth. Evil souls we might define by the severed connection between nature and goodness (or natural justice). This connection is intact at birth (these souls have returned to the earth as a consequence of natural justice), but through what we could only describe without reference to *true* nature (the natural accord between truth and goodness), it is irrevocably severed. Such souls do not return to the world again. The appearance in the world of “untrue” nature is tied-in with what can only be our limited vision of the whole. Unlike Anaxagoras, who rendered all nature true, the nature of the true earth as Socrates describes it is mythical; for his description of the natural accord between truth and goodness is tempered by the reality of evil: nature is rendered both true and false within our broadest understanding of her ways.

Participating fully in the natural accord between truth and goodness (exhibiting the mythical whole) is the soul sufficiently purified by philosophy. This soul lives in the future without a body, in “beautiful dwelling places” (114c5) which are, says Socrates, difficult to describe clearly, and besides he has not the time now (114c3-7). This soul does not, therefore, return to earth. The philosophical soul is like

the things-in-themselves. Just as the things-in-themselves don't exist here on earth, no one is born a philosopher. There are no "true" philosophers. Rather, potential philosophers are always two steps removed from the truth. Born from the holy soul, the soul which in death has been the receptacle of divine prophecies, the philosopher in this life seeks to regain these lost memories. The foundation of these memories, the things-in-themselves, can never be recovered, however. The immortal part of our soul, our true soul, is a resident of death itself, of eternity. Our true soul is mythical. Nonetheless, through coming to know ourselves, searching out the boundaries of our lives, we tread the path which leads to truth, and so too eternity. Only through our own lives does truth show itself, and it is only in death that we and truth become one. Our access to death is always as temporal beings. The tragedy of philosophy, and that which makes philosophy possible, is *our* death.

And so we find Socrates in the moments before he drinks the poison saying that:

No sensible man would insist that these things are as I have described them, but I think it is fitting for a man to risk the belief – for the risk is a noble one – that this, or something like this, is true about our souls and their dwelling places, since the soul is evidently immortal, and a man should repeat this to himself as if it were an incantation, which is why I have been prolonging my tale. That is the reason why a man should be of good cheer about his own soul, if during life he has ignored the pleasures of the body and its ornamentation as of no concern to him and doing him more harm than good, but has seriously concerned himself with the pleasures of learning, and adorned his soul not with alien but with its own ornaments, namely, moderation, righteousness, courage, freedom and truth, and in that state awaits his journey to the underworld (114d1-115a2).

Socrates says the philosopher should be of good cheer about his own soul because it is immortal. That it is immortal should, he says, be repeated to oneself *as if* an incantation. And thus the preceding tale: its truth can never be attained by us, all we can hope to do is be calmed by its repetition. And so it is fitting that when it really comes down to it – when Socrates is on the verge of dying – he refers to this “fated” death in the words of “...a tragic character...” (115a5). The tragedy of philosophy, which confronts us along with its possibility, as the double face of death, is the reason why Socrates chose a safer passage in his second sailing. It is the reason why philosophy is also mythical, for Socrates must seek out death from within the circumference of his own soul. Death will never be attained by this route. Only with temporal death does the soul truly become what it seeks, and only then does it become what is not. Only then does it become eternal, or what, in full acknowledgement of temporality, is non-existent.

Socrates' Death

As Socrates drains the poison all of his friends break down into sorrowful weeping. Socrates urges them to keep quiet as he has been told that one should die in silence (117e1-2). Whereas philosophical death is approached by way of *logos*, fated death is silent. And so too is the end of philosophical practice. Philosophy cannot fully bring into the light its own ends, for what it seeks is beyond rendering.

As Socrates lies back down on the bed his body becomes numb (117e3-118a3). We can compare this with the beginning of the dialogue. There he sat upright, and felt pleasure as he was liberated from the pain of his bonds. He now suffers neither pain nor pleasure. His soul, in separating from his body, is senseless. Like the things-

in-themselves it becomes only a memory in this world: invoked through recollection, but never fully rendered true. This is indeed the reality of our separation from the ends of philosophy. This separation is also the possibility of our own self-recognition. We see ourselves when we realise the limitations of our own understanding. Such limits are the edges of our own existence, the place where life becomes death. And yet in seeing ourselves we do not ever step into death; with the unending generosity of death life is expanded. Philosophy is truly the prophetic art, for only with such practice is death transformed into life, and life separated from death.

And with this we can make sense of Socrates' last words: "Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius; make this offering to him and do not forget" (118a2-3). Given that Asclepius heals life-threatening illnesses, we could say that Socrates owes a cock to Asclepius because he has been saved from living a sleeping or "deathly" life by philosophy. That Socrates is about to die, and that philosophy is described as a practice for dying, is Plato's irony. There *is* some equivalence between death commonly understood and the ends of philosophy, but from within this life philosophy is also a *deliverance* from death – and so the irony of Socrates' remark. That from the perspective of this cyclic life the hemlock which Socrates drinks and the medicinal value of philosophy both appear the same – death as eternity, death as a transcendence of life – does not extinguish the interpretation that from within this life, as a searching of our own soul, philosophy gives what Davis has described as an "access to a mortal immortality".³¹⁷ Such a mortal immortality is, mythically, a

³¹⁷ Davis (1980, p. 80).

transcendence of the body, a transcendence of what does not live; a movement towards life itself. It is also a movement towards eternity, or death.

Most argues that these last lines of Socrates' were put in by Plato to refer to the recovery from his own sickness on this day. He says that:

Before this illness he had been just a disciple: now Socrates has legitimated him as his heir. Plato's second life, into which he has been reborn by Asclepius' intervention, must be dedicated more completely to philosophy than his first life had been. If Asclepius has saved him, it is so that he, by his philosophy, can save Socrates' arguments, Socrates' disciples – and us. As the author of Plato's seventh letter puts it, the single event that persuaded Plato to abandon his hopes of a political career and instead to direct all his energies to philosophy was the death of Socrates.³¹⁸

I cannot argue with this interpretation of Most's. It does not conflict with anything that has been said in my interpretation. Nonetheless, I disagree with Most when he says that Socrates' *cannot* be referring to his own death.³¹⁹ Most, in making this statement, equates death solely with the after-life, and thus he sees that any interpretation along these lines is mystical; such as an interpretation which sees "Socrates...thanking Asclepius for healing him of the sickness of life by the cure of death".³²⁰ This, he says, does not accord with the rest of the dialogue for nowhere is life viewed as an illness, nor death as its cure. I agree. By my reading, however, death is not just the opposite of life, and thus my interpretation of Socrates' debt skirts the criticisms put forward by Most. At the broadest level the dialogue presents what is Socrates' *mythos* or dream of his own death. Death is not just the after-life, it is also present in this life, even though not fully accessible by us. As Lloyd-Jones says: "At

³¹⁸ Most (1993, p. 110).

³¹⁹ Ibid., p. 101.

³²⁰ Ibid., p. 100.

[Asclepius'] shrines and those of other healing divinities the patient might sleep in the precinct and then have a dream that helped him to recover...³²¹ Socrates' dream of death is thereby the foundation to his philosophical practice, a practice which liberates him from the death that is a soulless life.

Phaedo's last words bring us back to Socrates. And despite Socrates' protestations that we should forget him and search out the truth, we would do well to follow *his* example "Such was the end of our comrade, Echebrates, a man who, we would say, was of all those we have known the best, and also the wisest and most upright" (118a8-10).

³²¹ Lloyd-Jones (2001, p. 458).

Chapter 6: The Possibility of Philosophy

At the beginning of this thesis I argued that philosophy, finding itself on the edge of truth, is eternally at risk of falling to seemingly more stable ground; either: (1) an objective and consistent set of logical proof-statements, or (2) the subjective justification for how a life is to be led. In each of these forms philosophy is detached from wisdom, and thus cannot be said to offer the path leading us towards the good life. Ironically, it is truth itself which would seem to demand that philosophy exist only in a form detached from its end. And thus this problem, the problem of the truth of philosophy, is, I believe, pre-eminent. Its resolution, following truth, would seem to spell the end of philosophy. And yet philosophy demands a resolution, for the question of truth *is* equivalent to philosophy. In the end, it would seem that all we can do is to follow truth, or turn away from philosophy – in each instance finding ourselves in the same empty place. It is this impasse, an impasse which spells the end of the examined life, which I set out to explore in this thesis.

Laying down the terrain over which I would traverse in exploring this problem, I first looked to Aristophanes, and his “anti-philosophical” comedy – the *Clouds*. Aristophanes showed us the cracks in the philosophical enterprise and why, from the perspective of everyday life, philosophy is both comic and dangerous: a comedy when parading as natural philosophy, and a danger as sophistry. Natural philosophy and sophistry were, we saw, related foes. Natural philosophers, with their unimpeded vision of the material world and the void, believed themselves to have moved beyond the false or conventional understanding of nature as promulgated by the traditional religion and to have stepped into the unassailable

truth. Aristophanes, through his caricature of Socrates, showed that with this “transcendence” of the conventional the everyday world is misunderstood. For no matter the freedoms attained by way of theoretical vision, in practice the body is, as Aristophanes showed, the liberated king. And hence the appearance on the political stage of sophistry, which played with the conventional understanding to validate the liberated desire of the body. As Aristophanes would say, only by curbing the selfish desires of the body once again, through the good habits encouraged by the admonishment of the fathers, as well as the reserved wisdom of the ancient gods, can the city be saved. Aristophanes saw clearly the problem at the heart of philosophy, and in order to allay the dangerous consequences endorsed the path leading away from philosophy, towards the revered and respected wisdom of the ancients: the path of traditional piety.

Nonetheless, as I argued, the problem of philosophy was not resolved. For without truth, the path which leads back to the wisdom of the ancients is rendered insubstantial. This was not addressed by Aristophanes, who left us in the impossible position of choosing a life wherein the notion of choice is absurd. Resolving this, as we saw in Plato’s *Euthyphro*, is the religious prophet. The religious prophet brings the speech of the gods back into the present. In so doing, in attempting to speak what are eternally wise words, he aligns himself with the philosopher. In the *Euthyphro* this philosophical outlook, as my interpretation showed, made visible the “eternal” foundation of the religious tradition. The religious prophet, in making the tradition philosophical, is caught in a bind, however. For the foundations cannot be described as eternal, as another character in the *Euthyphro* – Meletus – showed us, if the

tradition is to be defended. Defenders of the tradition can only defer to history, otherwise they give credence to philosophy.

What Plato showed is that the religious tradition can only save itself from the questions posed by philosophy if piety is truly philosophical and not merely historical. Euthyphro believed he possessed such philosophical knowledge; knowing piety in a way which would allow him to act with justice in all situations. This, as we saw, was not possible. Euthyphro's knowledge, which took form against the background of his naïve belief in his own vision and the relentless questioning by Socrates, was shown to be really just a reflection of his own desire to transcend traditional practice. Euthyphro's "philosophical" desire was too easily quenched with what he believed to be direct communication with the gods. With no thought for the traditional way of just practice, Euthyphro brought justice within the realm of his "theoretical" vision. This served to make justice among men an historical artefact, and made divine justice a consequence of his own specialist knowledge of the gods. And with this, Euthyphro believed that he was able to act with justice in every situation. His wisdom, as my interpretation showed, arose from his denial of history; such a denial leading him to believe that he could understand as a god. As a coherent understanding of piety, though, Euthyphro's wisdom was circular. In the end, my interpretation showed that Euthyphro's belief in his own intimate relationship with the gods prevented him from recognising his ignorance of justice among men. Euthyphro, in bringing together theory and practice, made a mockery of them both.

In chapter five I offered an interpretation of Plato's *Phaedo*. With this interpretation I explored the possibility of philosophy broadly understood, the possibility of the union of theory and practice. This exploration sought to address

Aristophanes' biting critique, wherein the foundation of philosophy is nothing but the void, where to reach beyond tradition is to reach for nothing, and where to lead a praiseworthy life means following the wisdom of the ancients. Setting the scene for this exploration I outlined two alternatives to Aristophanes' vision – as proffered by Marcus Aurelius and Friedrich Nietzsche. Each dealt with the problem of practice and theory very differently. For Aurelius, a Stoic, the practice of philosophy is necessary in order that we might attain our rightful place within Nature. The philosophical way of life, encompassed by the virtues of self-control, equanimity, and courage brings us to this place. With these virtues our stance accords with both the ceaseless flux of Nature and her wise ends; for with these we are imitating the wisdom of divine providence by recognising what in this world is superficial and insubstantial and what is profoundly meaningful. In this way we live in accord with Nature.

Taking issue with this was Nietzsche. He felt that the Stoics were fooling themselves, using Nature to justify their own understanding of what is a virtuous life. Nietzsche believed that with insufficient honesty the Stoics substituted their own ends with the end of Nature. Nature viewed rightly is brutally free, and so should we be if we are to realise our depths. Such an understanding leaves us, though, in the untenable position of desiring what we know to be untrue or absurd. For without some accord between the nobility of living well and Nature, truth itself becomes meaningless. We might speak with brutal honesty to expose Nature as she is – cold and distant – yet at the same time we would be denying that there is any difference between honesty and deceit. Our desire for truth would be at odds with the

meaningfulness of our quest. We would, in other words, in the very practice of reflecting on our lives, belie what we boldly proclaim of truth.

And this would seem to be the problem of our post-modern age. Our boldness, like Euthyphro's lack of reverence, has taken us beyond ourselves. Unable to grasp or become the divine truth we boldly proclaim that we've seen all, that there is nothing more. Like lonely gods we have only our cleverness for spiritual company.

With this as background, my exploration of the *Phaedo* showed, that for Plato, philosophy is only possible as *a way of life*, as a reorientation within the realm of soul. Nonetheless, philosophy is rooted in death; for the possibility of philosophy stands or falls with our access to eternity, and eternity is not found within life. And thus throughout the *Phaedo*, Socrates contends that philosophy is a practice for dying. Sanctifying this practice, as presented in the *Phaedo*, are the two faces of death: non-existence and eternity. As non-existence, death makes life possible as regeneration. As eternity, death is the realm whereby regeneration is given form. The *Phaedo* shows that non-existence and eternity are both conditions of everyday life *and* excluded by life itself.

According to my interpretation, in the first half of the *Phaedo* Socrates examines the soul from the "outside", attempting to prove its existence beyond this life, as it were. Death is from this perspective the after-life, and according to Socrates' argument combines with birth or life to form the ongoing cycle of regeneration. Death is, in other words, treated by Socrates as a *condition* of temporal life while, in order to satisfy the eternal soul argument, implicitly plays the part of eternity – what lies *beyond* this life. Establishing the foundation for philosophy from this perspective we found that Socrates created a fictional place for death, a place wherein our souls

are eternal, but where death, as a condition for temporality, loses all significance. In the end, we saw that a denial of our *own* deaths as non-existence (a condition of temporality) from within a view of death (the cycle of regeneration) where the opposite should be true, meant that philosophy is sanctified only if death so understood is unreal.

In the second half of the dialogue, according to my interpretation, Socrates saved philosophy from the absurdity of an unreal death, by approaching the question of the soul's eternity from within this life. He showed that in seeking out the limits of this existence, we do at the same time unify ourselves and *become* "eternal". This seeming paradox – a becoming eternity – is the result of our human condition, wherein death both defines our temporality and is the path through which we approach eternity. For Plato, philosophy arises because of both "aspects" of death: the temporalisation of death as seen from within this life means that we enter the path of eternity only through the doorway showing the possibility of our existence as unique mortal beings.

The *Phaedo* showed us that it is only from within this practice that philosophy is possible. This practice leads us to reflect on the limits of our own lives; limits which, because they appear only against the profound otherness of death, are partly prophetic. Appearing at the horizon of our soul's existence are, as my interpretation showed, the things-in-themselves. From the perspective of life itself, which is bound by non-existence, the things-in-themselves do not exist. Yet from within life their presence is suggested as the foundation of life's ongoing structure. In approaching the things-in-themselves, as the *Phaedo* presents it, we separate things from their intelligibility and in so doing realise our soul's own nature. The immortality of the

soul, according to this interpretation of the *Phaedo*, thereby hinges on us bringing the things-in-themselves into existence. The possibility of philosophy is at one with the structure of our existence. And in denying this, as we saw by way of the character Cebes, we equate the foundation of existence with nothing. Nonetheless, as the *Phaedo* showed, since from the standpoint of *life itself* this is true, we cannot prove the possibility of philosophy without also denying the conditions which make our own lives possible (as we saw in the first half of the dialogue). To come to fully understand what it means for the soul to be immortal therefore requires that we practise philosophy, orientating ourselves in a way which does justice to the fundamental significance of our everyday existence.

Practising Philosophy

As I have presented, the *Phaedo* shows that no proof is possible to sanctify philosophy. For when philosophy is confused with proof the world is rendered false. With proofs we are, ultimately, denying the significance of our own mortality. Yet without truth we render the world meaningless, including what makes us truly human; as exhibited by the universal desire to proclaim what truly is. Only by delving into the nature of soul might we find our way about this impasse. The *Phaedo* shows that the soul is worth caring for because the soul moves in the realm of truth. Given this movement we cannot completely separate truth from soul. To practise philosophy is, as Plato intimates throughout the dialogues, to care for the soul under the light of truth.

In the *Phaedo* we were shown not so much the practice of caring for the soul, but an exploration of its essential nature. This entailed a movement for us through

what is most intimately soulful, and for this reason most elusive. Allowing us to see both the depths and limits of our soul are, as Plato showed, recollections rooted in eternity. The things-in-themselves bring to life our soul, by defining its edges and by showing what the soul is not. The things-in-themselves exhibit who we are and what we cannot be. And thus we might say that the practice of philosophy is never ending, and that it cannot be assessed as futile except by those for whom life itself is meaningless. To try to step outside of life, as the first half of the *Phaedo* showed, is to step into a fictional death, and a fictional death misrepresents non-existence. The irony is that along with practising philosophy we come to realise our profound separation from the truth (and come to realise that proclamations about the end of philosophy are themselves indicative of a standpoint presumed to be timeless). Philosophy must, it seems, remain within the realm of opinion, only stepping outside of it with its dissolution.

Are these, when it is all said and done, empty words: mere rhetorical flourishes with a veneer of profundity? If there is no connection between what has been said in this thesis and the practice of living then they must be. If, in the end, we are disconnected from anything beyond ourselves, then the expansion of our souls (or indeed the idea that we are soulful) is mere fantasy. From a perspective outside of ourselves, we would be seen to be merely puffing ourselves up with ignorance, nothing more. This is the danger of soliloquy. As soliloquy, philosophical reflection can all too easily float beyond itself, becoming itself the dream of its own existence (as we saw in the first half of the *Phaedo*). We might say that this is the risk which philosophy faces, and which we saw exemplified (albeit crudely) through the

character Euthyphro. Aristophanes would be the first to concur; pointing out that philosophy is merely sophisticated dreaming.

This is the reason, no doubt, why Socrates was imprisoned. From the outside, from the perspective of many Athenians, Socrates looked like a walking blasphemy. Only by entering into the philosophical dialogue does he look otherwise; for on entering we are delving into the realm of soul. Yet only with a reflection on our own understanding, which cannot show itself without the contingent details of our own life, can we fully understand this. Philosophy only finds its fulfilment in this life through practice, therefore; as a confrontation with contingency (or from the perspective of theory, death). On this point, we saw that Euthyphro's belief in his own wisdom showed a lack of respect for contingency. He did not show any concern for his father because he was ignorant of the everyday particulars; he looked instead to the "eternal" significance of his father's action as dislocated from the context. We saw something like this with Aristophanes' Socrates: he was unable to see the nuances of everyday life because all he saw was a reality abstracted through reason. For each, love of their own wisdom was a barrier which prevented them from viewing themselves from a broader perspective; a perspective which acknowledged the contingency of their own perspective. The liberation which comes with a theoretical perspective is, therefore, also the thread out of which we spin the cocoon of our own fantasy. A concern for living a true life can easily lapse into a self-satisfied state of having attained the truth. This is the danger of theory. Only with a genuine desire to examine our own lives, in the way that we live them, is this danger averted. This is to open ourselves up to a truth which arises with our presence in the

everyday world: the fact of our limited perspective. From the perspective of theory, it is to acknowledge the significance of death.

This is what makes us human. Taking care of the soul is, unlike for the other animals, our responsibility. Of course, to say that we *have* a soul is misleading (ultimately, it is *we* who live and *we* who will die). To take care of the soul is to nurture and orientate ourselves in a certain way. It is, as expounded in the *Republic*,³²² to engage our whole selves. It is with truth that we orientate ourselves, distinguishing between proper and improper care. The questions put by Socrates to his fellow Athenians, and their justifications for their own lives, were offered in this spirit. With these dialogues he examined his own way of life as held up against the lives of others. Socrates' genuine desire to examine himself and seek out the best way to live, in dialogue with others, saved his understanding of himself from fantasy. His concern for the soulful, which was a concern for living a truly good life, was what delivered him to himself. Philosophy is by this account a practice for dying. As a philosophical practice, death is the separation of the mortal from the deathless, initiated when we bring into existence the things-in-themselves. For this reason, only with the examined life does the soul realise itself.

On these final words I defer to Aristophanes:

Marvels yet unknown to Science

Have I seen in bird's-eye view

Miracles and wonders new.

Growing in the land of giants,

Miles removed from Fort Reliance,

Stands the great Cleonymus tree,

³²² See 518.

Tall and spreading, but, ah me,

Naught is here but vanity.

In the spring this vegetation

Blossoms into legislation,

But in winter trepidation

Makes it shed its panoply!³²³

³²³ Aristophanes *Birds* (translation is from Aristophanes, 1962).

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