

Truth and Tradition in Plato and the Cambridge Platonists

by

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## **Abstract**

Both Plato and the Cambridge Platonists hold the view that moral knowledge depends primarily on cognitive resources which are innate to the mind. There is, nevertheless, a need for our minds to be prompted through experience in order for knowledge to occur. The following study is an attempt to reconstruct and compare the accounts in Plato and the Cambridge Platonists of the empirical conditions that are required for knowledge.

For Plato, these conditions are a result of a decline in political and psychological constitutions, through which the intellect is increasingly developed. Dialectical analysis of received customs, laws, opinions, and language may then reveal the moral ideas upon which the polity was initially based and which remain implicit in common sense throughout the historical decline. Philosophical knowledge consists of a recollection of the ancient wisdom which was revealed to the original lawgiver by the gods.

In the Cambridge Platonists, philosophical knowledge likewise consists of a recollection of revealed knowledge that stood at the foundation of a form of life, namely, Judaism. The revival of ancient Greek and Jewish philosophical theories in modern times heralds the end of history, in which the complete system of knowledge is both attainable and necessary for salvation. From the perspective of humanity as a whole, knowledge is initially granted through revelation, then generally forgotten, and finally recollected in a highly intellectual age of deteriorating morality and stability. The esoteric traditions of knowledge, coupled with recent developments in science and philosophy, act as the prompts for knowledge, given an intuitive basis that has been formed through the spread of Christianity. This intuitive basis serves as the concrete way in which the natural

anticipations of the mind are gradually shaped in order to recognize the truth when it appears in a shrouded manner in modern philosophy.

Both Plato and the Cambridge Platonists are critics of the similar intellectual trends in their times and they respond with similar arguments; however, unlike Plato, the Cambridge Platonists are unable to connect their rational critique with their genetic critique of modern ideas, rendering the latter ineffective.

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## Chapter 1: General Introduction

### A. Purpose and thesis of the following study

Plato gives an account, why he judged it necessary in those times, publicly to propose that atheistic hypothesis in order to a confutation, as also to produce rational arguments for the proof of a Deity, after this manner: r r

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. . . . . ~ “Had not these atheistic doctrines been publicly divulged, and made known in a manner to all, it would not have been needful to have confuted them, nor by reasons to prove a Deity; but now it is necessary.” And we conceive, that the same necessity at this time will justify our present undertaking likewise; since these atheistic doctrines have been as boldly vented, and publicly asserted, in this latter age of ours, as ever they could be in Plato’s time, when the severity of the Athenian government must needs be a great check to such designs; Socrates having been put to death upon a mere false and groundless accusation of atheism, and Protagoras, (who doubtless was a real Atheist) having escaped the same punishment no otherwise than by flight, his books being notwithstanding publicly burnt in the market-place at Athens, and himself condemned to perpetual exile. . . . Whereas atheism, in this latter age of ours, hath been impudently asserted, and most industriously promoted; that very atomic form, that was first introduced (a little before Plato’s time) by Leucippus, Protagoras, and Democritus, having been also revived amongst us, and that with no small pomp and ostentation of wisdom and philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

Written in 1678 by the Cambridge Platonist, Ralph Cudworth, this passing remark serves to introduce his refutations of atheism, a project which dominated his philosophical endeavours. The fact that philosophical positions, such as the “atomic form” of atheism, re-appear in different times and places has been duly noted by scholars who rightly attribute the Renaissance notion of *philosophia perennis* to Cudworth and to the rest of the

Cambridge Platonists.<sup>2</sup> But the remark by Cudworth indicates more than just this, for it

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe: wherein all the Reason and Philosophy of Atheism is Confuted and its Impossibility Demonstrated*, with *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, 3 vols., ed. J. L. Mosheim, transl. John Harrison, (London: Thomas Tegg, 1845), vol. 1, p. 274. Henceforth, this book will be referred to as *TIS*.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Sarah Hutton, “Edward Stillingfleet, Henry More, and the decline of *Moses Atticus*: a note on seventeenth-century Anglican apologetics,” in *Philosophy, Science, and Religion in England: 1640-1700*, eds. Richard Kroll, Richard Ashcraft, Perez Zagorin, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 68-70; and John A. Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth: an Interpretation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge

explicitly states that the intellectual climate of Plato's Athens and seventeenth-century Europe were similar in certain respects. To my knowledge, neither the remark nor its contents have given other scholars much to think about. Yet in considering the basic question of why the Cambridge Platonists were and are considered Platonists, one might ask whether this apparently contingent similarity is related to the more typically or essentially Platonist tenets and perspectives.

The Cambridge Platonists are usually considered Platonists for two main reasons: the first, as can be recognized in the quotation above, is their association with Plato and later Platonists against materialist atomists, from Leucippus to Hobbes.<sup>3</sup> The second main reason is that their innatist theories of knowledge hearken back to Plato, both explicitly and implicitly.<sup>4</sup> Throughout the course of this study, I intend to show that the issues of both atomism and innatism are intimately related to the similarity in historical circumstances which Cudworth notes. While this entire question will likely appear arbitrary at this point, my purpose is to show how all of this is connected internally.

The issue of the materialist version of atomism and its connection to historical circumstances is fairly straightforward and can be summarized briefly: atomism is the preferred explanatory system of the materialists; materialism tends to be a challenge to theism; and atheism was on the rise in both Plato's time and in the seventeenth-century. While more will be said about the issue of atomism in Part II of this dissertation—for

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University Press, 1951), pp. 12-4.

<sup>3</sup> See Alan Gabbey, "Henry More and the Limits of Mechanism," in *Henry More (1614-1687) Tercentenary Studies*, ed. Sarah Hutton, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990), pp. 19-35; and Richard H. Popkin, "The Spiritualistic Cosmologies of Henry More and Anne Conway," in *Henry More (1614-1687) Tercentenary Studies*, pp. 97-114.

<sup>4</sup> See Dominic Scott (1990), "Recollection and Cambridge Platonism," *Hermathena* 149, pp. 73-97; and Vili Lähteenmäki (forthcoming), "Cudworth on Consciousness," *British Journal of the History of Philosophy*. The article by Scott will henceforth be referred to as "Platonism".

example, Cudworth's insistence (and Henry More's concurrence) that the proper version of atomism is dualist and is Mosaic (yes, Mosaic) by origin—it will be more suitable for the purposes of an introductory orientation to address the issue of innatism, which is at the heart of this dissertation as a whole.

As Dominic Scott has argued in *Recollection and Experience*, “the distinction between innatism and empiricism can be construed as a matter of degree.”<sup>5</sup> On one hand, all empiricist theories of knowledge admit of at least innate propensities or desires, without which knowledge would be impossible. Locke, to take a standard example of an empiricist, admitted that “...there are natural tendencies printed on the Minds of Men; and...from the very instances of Sense and Perception, there are some things, that are grateful and others unwelcome to them; ... But this makes nothing for innate Characters on the Mind, which are to be Principles of Knowledge....”<sup>6</sup> Though Locke did not think that such innate attractions and aversions are related to knowledge, Leibniz pointed out that “...an inclination that is expressed in the understanding becomes a precept or practical truth; and if the inclination is innate then so also is the truth—there being nothing in the soul that is not expressed in the understanding...”<sup>7</sup> Scott claims that Locke might have even conceded this point to Leibniz, in which case the real debate would not be about whether there was *any* innate endowment, but rather about the extent and richness of the innate endowment.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, all innatist theories acknowledge some necessary role of sense perception and experience—be they starting points, prompts, or even constitutive elements

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<sup>5</sup> Dominic Scott, *Recollection and Experience*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 95; cf. p. 214.

<sup>6</sup> Locke, John, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), I.iii. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Leibniz, G. W., *New Essays on Human Understanding*, transl. Peter Remant and Jonathan Bennett, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 90 (I.ii).

<sup>8</sup> Scott, *Recollection and Experience*, p. 95.

of knowledge. In Leibniz' theory of latent knowledge, for example, knowledge must be aroused by the stimulus of experience in order to emerge from latency.<sup>9</sup> In Descartes, to take another example, the innate disposition towards the formation of a certain group of ideas still relies on learning through perception.<sup>10</sup> The difference between innatism and empiricism can therefore be quite subtle, especially when only dispositions are claimed to be innate rather than ideas or principles themselves.

If this line of thinking is followed, one may always inquire into the role of the empirical in innatist theories of knowledge. The following work can be understood as a whole as just such an inquiry with respect to the innatism of Plato and the Cambridge Platonists. More specifically, though, its goal is not so much to assign the proper place of sense perception in knowledge, but rather to determine whether and how history is relevant to philosophical knowledge. For it seems that discoveries of higher truths depend, in part, on prior concept and belief formation, and concept and belief formation are based, in part, on experience. The particulars of one's experience, in turn, are related to the historical circumstances in which one lives. Though this seems to be obviously true, I will also make it clear that Plato and at least Cudworth took this to be true. Given such a connection between history and experience, accounts of history might very well have significance for the epistemological matters if these accounts concern the circulation, discovery or loss of certain ideas within a culture or historical group of people. In both Parts I and II, I attempt to show that such accounts are present in both Plato and the Cambridge Platonists, and I will indicate what this epistemological significance is.

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<sup>9</sup> Scott, *Recollection and Experience*, p. 92.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 92-3.

So far I have only given a very general perspective from which the unity of this dissertation can be gleaned. Yet its aim can be more focussed by seeing it as a response to a more specific claim being made by Scott concerning the dissimilarity between Plato and the Cambridge Platonists on the issue of recollection. In Scott's analysis, there is a fundamental difference between two main strands of ancient innatism, namely, Stoic dispositionalism and Platonist recollection: the former is concerned both with ordinary concept formation and philosophical knowledge, while the latter seeks only to explain the attainment of higher truths and takes ordinary learning for granted. While noting the similarities between the innatism of Plato and the Cambridge Platonists, such as their common goal of the attainment of higher philosophical and religious truths rather than ordinary concept formation, his main argument is that all seventeenth-century innatism, including that of the Cambridge Platonists, is actually best understood as being Stoic in origin, having its basis in a notion of disposition rather than Platonic recollection. While I am convinced by his argument about the affinities between Stoic dispositionalism and Cambridge Platonist innatism, it is his account of the role of the empirical in Plato that I think can and ought to be expanded and which, once expanded, will reveal an interesting and hitherto unacknowledged similarity with the Cambridge Platonists. Given this newly articulated common basis, a set of differences becomes apparent as well, which differences I explore by the end of this work.

According to Scott, it is only in the Hellenistic period that the problem of how we form the basic concepts of everyday thought and language come to be taken up with any diligence. This begins with Epicurus' interest in 'primary concepts' or *prolepses*, especially of the gods;<sup>11</sup> and the problem really comes into the fore in philosophical

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<sup>11</sup> Scott, *Recollection and Experience*, p. 159; cf. pp. 169-178; 190-201.

discourse with Chrysippus, Epictetus and Seneca, for whom the impetus stems from their position that we have a natural disposition towards virtue. For “innate starting-points or resources towards certain patterns of behaviour automatically lead to and imply the formation of beliefs corresponding to this behaviours,”<sup>12</sup> and belief-formation implies concept-formation.

While Plato does, according to Scott, have an empirical theory about ordinary concept formation, it is very minimal, as he is simply not very interested in that problem.<sup>13</sup> Instead, he is much more concerned with the transformation from the ordinary human perspective to the philosophical perspective. Taking the formation of mundane concepts for granted, Plato postulates the recollection of Forms, a process by which one departs from one’s given understanding of the world towards an entirely revised perspective based on eternal truth rather than the ephemerality of perception and opinion. When one assesses the Cambridge Platonists in this light, it is easy to see that Scott is correct in regarding the Stoics as their true precursors, for though they are ultimately interested in the attainment of higher, religious truths, their accounts of how this is possible indicate that higher learning is *continuous* with ordinary concept formation and language acquisition. For the Cambridge Platonists, philosophical discoveries are not “startling revisions of ordinary ways of thinking,” as Scott reasonably says they are for Plato.<sup>14</sup> Hence their accounts focus on ideas that are employed in everyday thought, from the categories of unity and similarity to the ideas of clocks and animals. Indeed, Cudworth himself borrows the Hellenistic concept of *prolepsis* quite explicitly when arguing that the formation of ideas is a result of the

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

combination of stimulation by external sense and the innate power of the mind to form ideas.

Furthermore, Scott's argument against the Platonic origin of Cambridge Platonist innatism includes the important claim that the theory of recollection requires the belief in knowledge prior to birth—one which, as Scott has shown elsewhere, the Cambridge Platonists reject.<sup>15</sup> Though they employ notions of recollection and re-acquaintance metaphorically, the real similarity that Scott detects in regard to innatist epistemology is, rather, their shared conception of learning as a maieutic process as opposed to sophistic methods, which Scott subtly likens to Puritan education.<sup>16</sup> The essential point that is common to both Plato and the Cambridge Platonists, Scott argues, is the emphasis on drawing on one's own resources.

While I think that Scott has put his finger precisely on an essential point of affinity between Plato and the Cambridge Platonists, I believe that his treatment of Plato is overly simplified, and that if it is adjusted, some interesting—and perhaps even peculiar—similarities appear between Plato and the Cambridge Platonists. More specifically, there is quite a bit more that can be gleaned about the role of ordinary concept and belief formation in the Platonic corpus than Scott acknowledges. My claim is that what constitutes “one's own resources” when moving from the mundane to the philosophical perspective goes beyond the powers of the individual mind, insofar as one belongs to the collective entity of the *polis*. Hence, political history is linked to philosophical education inasmuch as it determines some of the conditions that are necessary for philosophical education and hence salvation. For the Cambridge Platonists, in turn, the fact that one belongs to the collective

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<sup>15</sup> Scott, “Platonism”, pp. 87-9. This is a simplification of Scott's point. See Part II, Chapter 2, §C for the full account.

<sup>16</sup> On the distinction between ‘Socratic’ and ‘sophistic’ teaching, see also Daniel Devereaux (1978), “Nature and Teaching in Plato's *Meno*,” *Phronesis*, 23: 118-126.

entity of the Church (which, as we will see, Cudworth understands on a metaphysical, or perhaps mystical, level) has a similar function in their innatist theory of knowledge. This is to say, the intellectual climate of one's time has a determining role in the extent to which one may attain philosophical and religious truth in both Plato and the Cambridge Platonists.

## B. Position of this work in relation to secondary literature

The whole of this dissertation can be understood as a response to Scott; however, it should be made clear that it did not originate as a response to Scott and therefore contains neither a detailed exposition or critique of Scott's work. In fact, I will be treating Scott's work closely only on occasion. My use of Scott here is intended rather to give the reader a sense of the overall aim of the dissertation. For its two parts treat of subjects that, for the most part, are separate areas of specialization within the history of philosophy. While there has been some recent work in linking the ancient with the early modern period,<sup>17</sup> Scott's in particular is the only one to examine both Plato and the Cambridge Platonists with rigour.

Taking the two parts separately now, Part I may be understood as a response to Scott's claim that Plato is a "full-blown pessimist" when it comes to his assessment of the role that common sense plays in the attainment of philosophical knowledge.<sup>18</sup> One of the main issues that Scott treats throughout *Recollection and Experience* is the extent to which the various philosophical positions are (as he puts it in a truly democratic spirit)

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Phillip Mitsis, "Cyrenaics, Epicureans, and Gassendi" in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Ethics*, ed. R. Crisp, (Oxford, forthcoming); Jennifer Whiting (2008), "The Lockeanism of Aristotle," *Antiquorum Philosophia 2*; Jon Miller and Brad Inwood, eds., *Hellenistic and Early Modern Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Myles Burnyeat, ed., *The Skeptical Tradition*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); and Godfrey Vesey, ed., *Idealism Past and Present*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>18</sup> Scott, *Recollection and Experience*, p. 52.

“optimistic” or “pessimistic” in this regard. Aristotle, in contrast to Plato, is more of an “optimist” because philosophical knowledge is, for the most part, a refinement of common sense, and not a radical revision.<sup>19</sup> While I do not dispute that there is such a difference, I also do not think the issue is as straightforward as Scott presents it. My claim is that whether an overhaul of common sense is necessary for philosophy depends on one’s historical circumstances, for the common opinions and conceptions that one inherits through ordinary socialization and education may be relatively closer or farther from the truth. Scott’s claim that Plato is nearly an extreme pessimist in this regard presupposes that common opinion is always far from the truth—so much so that it can be likened to the obscuring layer of wax which conceals the true message engraved in the wood of the fabled tablet of Demaratus.<sup>20</sup> I will argue that the truth value of common opinion is variable for Plato.<sup>21</sup>

In order to make my argument, I depend quite heavily on the claim that, for Plato, there is an essential link between the soul and the polity, for it is in this link that history becomes pertinent to philosophy as recognition of what has been known in former times. My project in Part I can thus also be understood as an inquiry into the ramifications of the soul-state analogy in the *Republic*. In this regard, I will be following Jonathan Lear’s argument against Bernard Williams over the meaning and validity of the analogy. More generally speaking, though, I am following Lear in his claim that “...*psyche*-analysis and *polis*-analysis are, for Plato, two aspects of a single discipline, psychology, which has at its

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-9.

<sup>21</sup> I am making an argument similar to Leo Strauss’ in his book on Hobbes, where he argues that Hobbes misunderstood Plato to be entirely opposed to opinion (i.e., “paradoxical”), whereas dialectic is actually the working through of opinion. See *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, transl. Elsa Sinclair, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), pp. 139-170. I will not, however, be following Strauss on his readings of Plato, though my interest in the social and political aspects of Plato’s works is partly indebted to him.

core the relation between inside and outside.”<sup>22</sup> Lear’s hope is that his “discussions of the polis-psyche relation and of poetry will illuminate the approach to Plato’s psychology that [he is] advocating, and help confirm it.”<sup>23</sup> My treatment of the historical aspects of Plato’s works should also help confirm this approach: if political change is a dynamic result of successive “internalizations” of cultural products (i.e., beliefs, opinions, values, language, etc.) through education and subsequent “externalizations” in adult life (i.e., the “fashion[ing of] something in the external world according to a likeness in [the] psyche,”<sup>24</sup>) then it follows that any account of the history of political change should be related to the condition of the individual soul and the parameters of its cognitive possibilities in any given time and place. Part I is thus an inquiry into the question of how the larger history of the *polis* is related to the history of the individual soul, from its mythic origins, through its bodily constitution and worldly education, to its possible salvation through philosophy. Whereas Lear only advocates his approach to Plato’s psychology by treating the *Republic*, I endeavour to extend this notion of politico-psychology to other Platonic dialogues.

While several scholarly works on Plato have been informative in this study and will be referred to throughout the text of Part I (mostly in footnotes), there is one more which deserves special mention—namely Daniel Dombrowski’s *Plato’s Philosophy of History*.<sup>25</sup> This is, to my knowledge, the only full volume dedicated to synthesizing the various historical materials and relating them to some standard themes in Platonic philosophy—for example, that becoming wise requires knowledge of the past.<sup>26</sup> Though I am, in effect,

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<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Lear (1992). “Inside and Outside the Republic,” *Phronesis* 37(2): 184-215, p. 185 in particular. Henceforth, this article will be referred to as “Inside”.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 192-3.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Dombrowski, *Plato’s Philosophy of History*, (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981). Henceforth, “*Philosophy of History*”.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

presenting a version of a synthetic philosophy of history garnered from a variety of the dialogues, my project differs from Dombrowski's in both spirit and content. Dombrowski's general purpose, it seems, is simply to establish that there is enough scattered historical material throughout the dialogues to constitute a philosophy of history, which, for Dombrowski, is equivalent to answering (at least in part) many of the basic questions that are typically treated in the philosophy of history.<sup>27</sup> Though my discussion does touch on a few of these problems (e.g., whether there can be progress in history for Plato, and whether history is ultimately the history of the soul for Plato), I do not treat every dialogue in search of answers to these problems, as Dombrowski does. While his work is valuable as a collection of the historical material (which turns out to be quite extensive), his results are fairly scant in terms of the theory they yield. My goal is not to be comprehensive in accounting for every mention of history and myth in Plato's dialogues; rather, it is to suggest that latent in some of those dialogues is a logical structure of historical change which accounts for the possibility and need for philosophy. In effect, I am responding to Cudworth's remark above by showing why, according to the Platonic dialogues, Plato found himself in his intellectual climate.

Returning to Scott's work, Part II can be understood as a probe into the dispositionalist innatism of the Cambridge Platonists to see how the empirical is operative. While both More and Cudworth make it quite clear that sense perception provides the prompt or invitation for the mind to exercise its own formative power, there is more to be said about the nature and the history of this prompt—for not all prompts suffice for knowledge that saves the soul, and some prompts can lead the soul astray. What I will show is that a tradition of religious and philosophical knowledge is a necessary grounding

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-4 for a list of these questions.

in the world for the possibility of salvation of future souls. Finally, I will be able to compare Plato and the Cambridge Platonists in regard to the function of tradition in the attainment of truth and their views on history in general.

In relation to the more specifically Early Modern secondary literature, Part II can also be understood as an exposition of the Cambridge Platonist solution to the soteriological problem as outlined by Fredrick Beiser in his book, *The Sovereignty of Reason*.<sup>28</sup> Beiser illuminates the Cambridge Platonist conception of reason as it contrasts with the nominalist conception which was becoming prominent at the time (e.g., Hobbes’); what I add to Beiser’s characterization is the historical dimension to reason which necessarily follows from their fundamentally practical idea of truth as a mode of life. In addition, the later chapters of Part II may be regarded as a response to the only book-sized work dedicated to the thinking of Ralph Cudworth as a whole—namely, Passmore’s *Cudworth: an Interpretation*.<sup>29</sup> In particular, it is a response which addresses the less typically philosophical aspects of Cudworth’s thinking (e.g., his philological method and his Millenarianism), which Passmore largely passes over. While more recent scholars, such as Richard Popkin, Sarah Hutton, and Joseph Levine have written about these latter aspects, none has undertaken a thorough investigation into the relation between them and Cudworth’s epistemology, as I have attempted here.

### C. Method

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<sup>28</sup> Frederick C. Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason: The Defense of Rationality in the Early English Enlightenment*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>29</sup> *Op. cit.*

This dissertation is a ‘personal’ work, in the sense that Gregory Vlastos used the term in his preface to *Platonic Studies*. Though it seems wildly implausible that the following work will have a comparable effect on scholarly literature, I can relate to the sentiment and the attempt to write something ‘personal’—that is, to approach the historical texts in a way that is not typical of current scholarship, and in a way that “betrays [a] sense of strangeness of these things....”<sup>30</sup> My proposals are the result of asking questions of the texts out of curiosity and thinking through them as far as I am able, with the rest of the texts in mind. To take a salient example, Cudworth’s *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, while containing many philosophical arguments (against atheism), is a massive compendium of philological associations and quotations. His later *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*,<sup>31</sup> on the other hand, is almost one single philosophical argument constructed to demonstrate the existence of eternal moral truth, and it is much more sparing on the philological argumentation than *TIS*. Yet he still dedicates a section of a chapter of *EIM* to showing the philological origins of atomism, and that this goes back to Moses, the Jewish lawgiver. Struck with the strangeness of this inclusion, I had to ask why it is there, when it has no ostensible impact on the actual argument he presents. The origin of the theory would seem to be irrelevant to its truth. Is Cudworth merely committing a genetic fallacy or a lame appeal to tradition here in an attempt to bolster his opinion? Or is there a necessary connection between the origin and the truth of the theory in Cudworth’s view? After putting the question on the back-burner, I found that in trying to think through his innatist epistemology as much as I could, the question of the Mosaic origin of atomism filled in a gap in his own account. What I then did is make this connection clear. In trying

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<sup>30</sup> Gregory Vlastos, *Platonic Studies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. vii.

<sup>31</sup> Ralph Cudworth, *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality, with A Treatise of Freewill*, ed. Sarah Hutton, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996 (first printed in 1731)). Henceforth, this book will be referred to as *EIM*.

to make connections such as this one clear, I am trying to expose the implicit unity of the authors' works, or, to put it another way, the implicit meaning of these texts taken as groups (i.e., the Platonic dialogues and the Cambridge Platonists' works).

I am trying here to explore a broad question about the relation between the individual and world history in Plato and the Cambridge Platonists. As neither are very explicit on this matter, most of my claims are inferred by piecing together various claims, depictions, and attitudes. The claims I make here are thus intended as means of exposing the general perspective which I take to be underlying the variety of each authors' works and ideas. Though one may understand the latter without regard to the perspective of the author, it is, in my opinion, more fruitful to reconstruct this unifying vision as much as possible in order to learn from their writings. Hence, none of what I have written can be demonstratively shown and, to be frank, much is easily disputable. The value of the proposed answers and theories I offer lies, I believe, in exposing and exploring implicit problems in the texts that have not generally been noticed. In particular, one may ask of any philosopher who believes in eternal ideas about the history of the manifestation of those ideas in the world. Answering this requires drawing on the non-philosophical aspects of the available texts—i.e., the historical, the mythical, the religious and the philological—and linking them to the more standard philosophical passages.

As with the content of this work, the method is not very conventional either. Very broadly stated, it is reconstructive. Usually this term is applied in one of two ways. First is the method of rational construction of arguments, as Jonathan Bennett has done with several Early Modern thinkers,<sup>32</sup> and many have done with Plato's arguments.<sup>33</sup> The task

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<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume*, vol. 1. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> For example, Øyvind Rabbås (2004), "Definitions and Paradigms: Laches' First Definition," *Phronesis* 49(2): 143-168.

there is to state as clearly as possible what the logic of their arguments is, and, as Paul Grice put it, to “treat those who are great but dead as if they were great and living, as persons who have something to say to us *now*.”<sup>34</sup>

Though there are occasions when I undertake minor rational reconstructions, my overall method differs from rational reconstruction insofar as it is not particular arguments that I reconstruct, but rather “big picture” perspectives or whole views. My assumption is that all of the thinkers at least sought a coherent account of everything they could, even if their writings are not always consistent or manifestly coherent. This seems to be a common enough assumption: Scott, for example, does this with every philosopher or school he deals with. In my own case, this assumption stems from an attempt to understand them on their own terms—to be as sympathetic as possible so as to learn from them; thus my attitude is similar to the collegial approach, but it is not modelled after the relationship between adversaries in debate. The point is rather to see whether they afford insight into our world—not by listening to what they have to say about problems that are important in contemporary debates, but by trying to understand how supposedly out-dated problems (which people like Rorty believe have been left behind by philosophical progress) may become alive once again, thus providing contrast to the rest of our current thinking. It is essentially in the interest of revealing the contingency of our own starting points in philosophical investigation.

It follows that my intention is not to assess the soundness of the philosophical arguments that I reiterate. My own opinion in this regard is largely tangential to the main purpose of this work. Whether Plato or the Cambridge Platonists actually had good arguments for their views is a secondary concern here because the goal is to compare how

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<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers*, p. 1.

these thinkers understood themselves and the function of philosophy in light of historical change. I will therefore be presenting their views in a very sympathetic manner as if to explore their thinking from the inside—which is to say, with certain presuppositions in mind which I may not endorse. Only then do I believe it is valid to draw the comparison. At times, I will comment on certain arguments, but this is only to remind the reader that I am indeed a separate thinker and do not passively accept the arguments I am presenting here. Since the issue of whether their views are actually true or not is not of primary concern, this work may be loosely regarded as a work in the history of ideas.

I should also distinguish my method from what Rorty has called “historical reconstruction”, which he describes as the kind of work which locates philosophers and works of the past in their historical context, describing primarily the debates that were going on in order to better understand the intention of the philosopher.<sup>35</sup> While the question of the intellectual climate is quite relevant in this dissertation, my aim is not to give an objective depiction of that context as a whole or to explain who or what exactly Plato or the Cambridge Platonists were responding to. My aim, rather, is to reconstruct their own views on their intellectual climate, as opposed to the intellectual historian’s view of their intellectual climate. My method is therefore closer to exposition than to contextualization, as my purpose is to understand the positions from within as much as possible.

That being said, it should be made clear that I do not wish to lionize any of the figures I am discussing here, though there is much to be learned both about and from them. I say this because I regard them as part of a continuous and complex history of thought, and understanding the latter is my primary goal. Presently, however, my construction of this

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<sup>35</sup> Richard Rorty, “The historiography of philosophy: four genres,” in *Philosophy in History: Essays on the historiography of philosophy*, eds. Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 49-76.

history is nowhere near developed enough to constitute a *geistesgeschichte*, as Rorty calls it.<sup>36</sup> Though I am inclined towards those grand historical narratives that are more prevalent in continental philosophy, my claims here do not depend on any particular narrative.

For each of Plato and the Cambridge Platonists, my method is synthetic in the sense that I explicate what I regard as implicit connections among the various texts. In the case of Plato, this method will be objectionable to those who insist that each of the dialogues must and can only be taken individually.<sup>37</sup> While I am sympathetic to this approach insofar as each dialogue is indeed a complete work unto itself and deserves consideration as a whole, I do not think this restricts us as readers from comparing the dialogues and making proposals for a generally Platonic position or development of positions. I cannot help but see the recurrence of several themes and claims as being a result of a general continuity in thought and intention in the dialogues, despite their many differences.<sup>38</sup> Even still, it may well be objected that I am not sensitive enough to the possibility or fact that Plato changed his views over time, as seems to be the case with the theory of forms or the theory of recollection.<sup>39</sup> The objection would be that, since there is no good reason to think that Plato held the same views from the early to the late dialogues, it is therefore dubious to combine ideas or passages from this whole gamut. In response, I should begin by saying that this objection would hold if I were treating some of the highly thematized problems in the

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Victorino Tejera, *Plato's Dialogues One by One*, (New York: Irvington Publishers, 1984).

<sup>38</sup> The mode of interpretation I am using lies in between what Gerald Press calls the “doctrine-oriented” and the “dialogical” modes. That is to say, my aim is to discover “doctrine”, or “theory” (more loosely speaking), among the dialogues; yet I consider literary and contextual concerns to be relevant in this task. For further explanations and examples of these modes of interpretation, see Gerald A. Press, “The Dialogical Mode in Modern Plato Studies,” in *Plato's Dialogues – The Dialogical Approach*, eds. Richard Hart and Victorino Tejera, (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), pp. 1-28, especially pp. 3-7.

<sup>39</sup> In regard to the theory of forms, see, for example, Allan Silverman, *The Dialectic of Essence: A Study of Plato's Metaphysics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). In regard to the latter, see Dominic Scott, *Recollection and Experience*, chapter 1.

Platonic corpus, such as the theory of forms, the structure of the soul, or the unity of virtue. However, it is precisely because Plato did not thematize his logic of history very much—instead presenting it in the background, as it were—that it is more safe to assume that the underlying view is roughly the same. For it seems that only in considering matters in great depth and detail did he come to modify his positions (as with the theory of forms). His characterization of Sparta, for example, seems relatively continuous, despite differences in emphasis on the positive or negative aspects of its constitution or way of life. Rather than trying to show that he, say, initially had more respect for Sparta than he would later in life (or vice versa), I have collected the views and synthesized them into a coherent, though multi-faceted, picture of the whole. Since this depiction is not a showcase in any dialogue, each mention that does occur throughout the dialogues contributes roughly to fill in the picture of the whole. While I have tried not to read in between the lines too much, as that runs the risk of violence to the texts through excessive or arbitrary projection, I have tried to read in between the dialogues, as it were. With respect to each individual dialogue, my method is extrapolative; but with respect to the dialogues as a whole group, my method is interpolative. As for the question of which dialogues to be included in the corpus, I will address each of the questionable ones when they are relevant.

As for the synthesis of the texts of the Cambridge Platonists, a few issues arise here. First is the collection of certain figures into a group at all. While this is not a raging debate, there has been the occasional objection that there ought to be no such single group called the Cambridge Platonists; or, rather, that there is no “Cambridge Platonist” position or doctrine in general; the individuals within this group of colleagues ought to be taken

individually.<sup>40</sup> This objection arises because there are indeed significant differences in their positions, and there is no consensus on who exactly should be included in the group.

However, it has never been disputed that Whichcote, More, and Cudworth are part of the group and share fairly similar views; and these are the thinkers that I stick to. On specific points, such as the relation between reason and revelation, significant differences among them will be noted, though the underlying or essential similarity should be quite evident.

Finally, I must be clear about the question of influence here. Since I am trying to uncover the empirical underside of innatism, as it were, it is perhaps impossible to make a claim of influence, and that is not my intention. It is true that, in some cases, the Cambridge Platonists were clearly influenced by Plato, both directly through the dialogues and indirectly through the Platonist tradition. Cudworth, for example, explicitly follows the argument of the *Theaetetus* fairly closely in *EIM*, and both he and More drew freely from later Platonists, especially Plotinus. However, after constructing their respective views of the relation between history and knowledge, I do not want to claim that the Cambridge Platonists were influenced by Plato in this regard. Though the opening remark here by Cudworth shows that he noted similarity with Plato, my claim is almost the opposite of

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<sup>40</sup> Ernst Cassirer responds to the objection without mentioning the source: “Cambridge Platonism represents a coherent philosophical position, which is maintained throughout the whole extent of the most heterogeneous problems, and which, in spite of all differences of individual thinker, continually recurs as the central theme. Thus the name ‘Cambridge School’ cannot, as has been the case with few exceptions in previous historical accounts, be taken merely as a collective term for a particular circle of thinkers or for a certain group of individual doctrines. It refers rather to a certain line of thought of independent force and significance, which is deliberately and violently opposed to the prevailing direction of English thought in the seventeenth century.” (*The Platonic Renaissance in England*. transl. James P. Pettegrove, (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953), p. 6) John Tulloch agrees with Cassirer: “Apart from the affinities of thought, which bind these men together into one of the most characteristic groups in the history of religious and philosophical thought in England, they were all closely united by personal and academic associations. In this respect they stand much more distinctively by themselves than our former group [consisting of Hales, Chillingsworth, and Taylor]. They constitute a school of opinion in a far more real and effective sense.” (*Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England in the Seventeenth Century*, vol. 2. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1874), pp. 6-7.) Other commentators refer to the group as a “school” without hesitation. See Eugene Austin, *The Ethics of the Cambridge Platonists*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania (dissertation), 1935), pp. 31, 57); and Beiser, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

showing influence: it is that there is more similarity that is apparent both to us and to the Cambridge Platonists themselves as readers of Plato. Indeed, I partly suggest that their limited reading of Plato contributed to their relative lack of force in determining the future intellectual landscape. My claim is ultimately fairly odd: that there is an unarticulated relationship between the account of history and the epistemology of the Cambridge Platonists, and that a similar relationship, also mostly unarticulated, can be found in Plato. Plato is thus a precursor, but not a direct influence in this regard.

My claims do not depend on the thesis that the Cambridge Platonists had a special affinity for Plato. For it has been very reasonably claimed that they are more Plotinians than anything.<sup>41</sup> The truth is that, like others in the Platonist tradition, they are syncretists, and so draw on whatever resources are known to them. Plato is thus only one figure among many to whom they are indebted. They are ‘Platonists’ mostly because Plato stood at the beginning of this tradition. Now, in exposing the historical dimension in both Plato and the Cambridge Platonists, I do not want to suggest that they are more similar than other pairs within the Platonist tradition. In truth, I do not know enough about the latter to make any such claim. My point is simply to highlight a similarity at the poles of this tradition which perhaps might stimulate pursuit of the same problem in the nodes that link them. At the very least, I find it interesting that the historical supplement at these poles of the Platonist tradition are similar and this makes me curious to see whether or in what way it is present or implicit in others.

To be candid, my goal is simply to make the texts fresh without doing violence to them. I have been acutely conscious of the risk I run of straying from the texts too much

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<sup>41</sup> Cassirer, for example, called Plotinus “their preceptor” and claimed that Plotinus’ doctrine of the soul, i.e., that “the soul could never see beauty, unless she herself became beautiful,” was “the core of English Neoplatonism.” (*op. cit.*, pp. 135, 28)

and projecting ideas into them instead; I believe, however, that I have collected sufficient textual evidence for premises which, when combined in novel but reasonable ways, yield significant and, I hope, interesting theses which are not explicitly argued by the authors. If the objection arises that the author never said this or that, I would ask the reader to assess which of the premises is insufficiently supported or how my reasoning based on those premises is flawed. For I readily grant that my conclusions are not to be found explicitly. Yet they ought to be at least plausible and bring coherence to aspects of the texts that appear to be disparate. Since this is an attempt to read and explain the materials in an original manner, I ask the reader for an open mind.

#### D. Synopsis

In the most general terms, I show in Part I how certain intellectual trends are the result of an historical development in Plato, and that Plato is loosely working with the notion of recognition on an historical level which is structurally akin to the notion of recollection. In Part II, I show how historical circumstances play an important role in the general Cambridge Platonist project of defending reason as proper means to salvation. Though the two parts are quite different and could even stand independently of one another, for the most part, the underlying unity of the two consists in a hypothesis that in both Plato and the Cambridge Platonists, there is an understanding of history wherein a collective entity undergoes a process of an initial revelation of truth, to an implicit forgetfulness of this truth, to a late philosophical revival and recognition of that initial truth in times that are approaching the end of that collective's history. That is to say, philosophical salvation of the soul, and, in Plato's case, of the polity as well, depends on a set of historical conditions being met. This work is an attempt to show textual support for this hypothesis and to

suggest that one of the reasons for the failure of the Cambridge Platonists to be more effective in their caution against modern times is the failure to be more explicit about this historical dimension to their thinking.

Turning to Part I, I do not mean to ‘historicize’ Plato, as though his entire philosophy could and should be understood from the perspective of history. On the contrary, the philosophical history that I am reconstructing out of Plato’s works depends entirely on the ontological priority of eternal, intelligible forms (or at least mind), with which a knower is in contact through thought. On the other hand, I do not regard this history as being merely compatible with the rest of Platonic philosophy. Rather, I take it to be supplementary in such a way that the standard part is not fully coherent without the historical supplement. For my claim is that the conditions for philosophical knowledge depend on the phase of a polity’s or people’s history, and that the world of common opinion, custom and language provides the means by which philosophical knowledge is possible—the starting point from which philosophical discovery must begin. In other words, though the objects of knowledge and the nature of knowing remain the same in all times and places, the possibility of the occurrence of knowledge is contingent, at least in part, on historical circumstances. (Personal talent and circumstances would also be contingent factors.) Though no single dialogue takes this question of historical circumstance as its central problem, there is, I believe, a fairly clear outline to an answer to the problem.

In Chapter 1, I provide a sketch of a development of the soul which is possible for a philosopher, moving from what I call “immediacy” to “self-antagonism” to “inner reconciliation”. This is only an adumbration of an analogous historical development; its main purpose is to give the reader a preliminary sense of the various phases in the

development to come. I am proceeding in the opposite direction, as it were, as Plato does in the *Republic*: the formal outline of the psychological development should be to helpful *to us* in discovering the analogous one in the historical-political realm. Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of the relation between soul and polity. Here I defend Lear's approach from Ferrari's objections and extend it into other dialogues. Granting the legitimacy of the analogy, I begin to look at the broad historical strokes in Plato's works, taking the account of the decline of constitutions as a point of departure for more concrete historical discussions, which focus on Athens. In Chapters 4 through 7, I will give characterizations of the phases of historical development which mirror the development treated in Chapter 2. In Chapter 4, I will focus on the first stage of simple virtue in depictions of ancient societies; this stage corresponds to the psychological mode of immediacy. Chapters 5 and 6 concern the mode of self-antagonism, which is divided into "self-superior" and "self-inferior". The former will be treated in Chapter 5 through a discussion of the timarchic constitutions of Sparta and Crete, in which polity and soul are self-divided, though the 'better part' controls the worse (for the most part). In Chapter 6, we will see the domination of the soul and polity by their lower parts in modern Athens. In Chapter 7, I will characterize the citizens and rulers of the best polity that can be achieved in this world—a polity whose parts are internally reconciled. The purpose of these political characterizations is primarily to show that the ripening of the conditions for a philosophical recovery of virtue is inversely proportional to the excellence of the current constitution. That is to say, I will be demonstrating (to the extent that this is possible) how philosophy becomes possible only after the decline of constitutions; for with this decline comes the development of the intellectual power which is necessary for philosophy. Finally, in Chapter 8, I will provide an historical interpretation of the notion of prior knowledge in

order to show the place of philosophy within this historical development and, conversely, the place of history in the philosophical process. It is in Chapter 8 that I take up Scott's discontinuity thesis most explicitly.

The main point of Part I is that there is in Plato a loose theory of how truth appears and is maintained, lost, and recovered in the world, and that this history of truth involves both reason and revelation. The two come together through the theory of recollection, which I draw on in order to explain how philosophical knowledge constitutes a kind of historical recognition. What I will be focussing on in Part II is the relation between reason and revelation in the Cambridge Platonists, and their position on the theory of recollection and innate ideas. I will be showing that despite their overt rejection of the theory of recollection, their writings do imply a very similar theory given my historical interpretation of knowledge as recognition.

In Chapter 9, I present the problematic positions of Whichcote and More with respect to the relation between reason and revelation. My primary intention here is to give the reader a sense of the significance of the problem which I take Cudworth to be attempting to solve in his epistemological work. In Chapter 10, I examine the meaning of innatism and the problem of recollection again in Whichcote and More. What will be shown here is that the actualization of innate ideas as full knowledge is most plausibly understood as a process that occurs in degrees and depends on the specific prompting that is occurring in experience. Since More and especially Whichcote do not say enough about this process, I turn in Chapter 11 to Cudworth's epistemology to look for more explanation of the role of the empirical in the actualization of ideas in human minds. After explaining the nature of ideas for Cudworth, I show in Chapter 12 that the mind must have anticipatory ideas of things in order to recognize them in experience, and yet must gradually form these

anticipatory ideas through experience. This tension is left unresolved in Cudworth's epistemological account, but, as I discuss in Chapter 13, it is mitigated in part by relegating the gradual development of ideas to an historical entity that is larger than the individual and which, through internalization (to use Lear's term again), informs the individual. I aim here to show the significance of Cudworth's version of intellectual history in terms of the development of ideas. In Chapter 14, I offer a reading of an early sermon by Cudworth concerning the nature of the Church and suggest that the actualization of ideas in individual minds is best understood as the culmination of a world-historical process—one that resembles the structure of historical recognition as described at the end of Part I. Finally, I conclude in Chapter 15 with a comparison between Plato and the Cambridge Platonists given the now articulated relationship between history and knowledge in each, and I return to the likeness noted by Cudworth concerning his time and Plato's. After showing how their understandings of their times were very similar, yet significantly different, I discuss how this difference is largely a ramification of Christianity. I end by suggesting that a fundamental difference between Plato and the Cambridge Platonists concerns the extent to which the rational or metaphysical critiques of their philosophical enemies is connected to their genetic critiques of their intellectual climates.

## **Part I: The historical conditions for the possibility of philosophy in Plato's dialogues**

### Chapter 2 – The development of the soul

#### Introduction

According to the myth in the *Phaedrus*, the soul's original home and final destination is among the gods in perpetual contemplation of intelligible reality.<sup>42</sup> To reach this goal, one is to 'become like god' to the fullest extent possible in this life, in preparation for the release of the soul from the body in death.<sup>43</sup> One achieves divinity by becoming virtuous and wise; this, in turn, requires realizing one's essential nature as a purely cognitive agent, unburdened by the demands of sensuousness and worldliness. Since one begins this earthly life identifying oneself with the lower powers of one's soul, believing that one's good lies in pleasure, reputation, or power, the realization of our essence is possible only through a philosophical purification of the soul, through which one comes increasingly to desire the absolute and unchanging good. One must learn that those transient goods which satisfy our vanity and our desire for pleasure are only apparent goods; our true end and happiness consist, rather, in being in direct intellectual contact with 'the really real' [ ' : the eternal and purely intelligible basis of all.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Phaedrus*, 246b-249d.

<sup>43</sup> See Lloyd P. Gerson (2005), "What is Platonism?," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 43: 253-276. According to Gerson, "[o]ne might say that the first principle of Platonic ethics is that one must 'become like god'." (p. 261) At *Republic* 500d, for example, it is said that "the lover of wisdom associating with the divine order will himself become more orderly and divine [ d d d d d ] in the measure permitted to man." On death as the separation of soul from body, see *Gorgias*, 524b and *Phaedo*, 64c; 66b-67b; 76d-e; 81a; 115c.

<sup>44</sup> *Sophist*, 248a.

For Plato, ethics is therefore ultimately a practice of self-transformation, whereby one identifies oneself increasingly with one's intellect—with that power which makes it possible to identify oneself in any way at all. But since the goal is to become pure intellect, which has only universal objects, becoming one's 'true self' involves an overcoming of precisely what we ordinarily think of as 'the self', which is the preoccupation with the idiosyncratic interests and tastes of the individual. The reification of the latter into a unified concept (the 'ego') is only a passing moment, as it were, in the intellect's process of self-recognition as the essence of life and as a force which is fully active in knowing the unchanging ideas. That is, in self-knowing thought, one knows oneself not as a thing, but as actively participating in the divine principle.

My point of departure here is Lloyd Gerson's argument in his book *Knowing Persons*. In Gerson's account, it appears that the ethical development is a movement from one pole to another: from the person internally divided between desire and intellect (or reason) to the unified, divine self. He calls the internally divided soul an 'endowment' of ours, while the unification of its parts is an 'achievement' for us.<sup>45</sup> Though I do think this describes the essential transformation proper to the philosophical life, I will show here that there is a more complex version of the development of the soul in Plato. Generally speaking, it consists of three modes of being: simple unity, internal division, and reconciliation of opposing parts. My aim in this chapter is to begin characterizing these modes of being; in following chapters, I will show that history, according to Plato, roughly follows the same development through these modes of being.

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<sup>45</sup> Lloyd P. Gerson, *Knowing Persons: A Study in Plato*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 113-114. Henceforth, "*Knowing Persons*".

In this chapter, I will focus on the modes of being solely as psychological conditions, rather than socio-political ones as well. Since Plato's psychology is largely contained within a moral context, (e.g., the tripartite theory of the soul in the *Republic*), I will be relating the modes of being to the various discussions and illustrations of the virtues. Specifically, to the first mode of being, which I will generally call 'immediacy', corresponds an unreflective sort of *sophrosune* and *andreia*. The second mode of being, i.e., that of inner division or self-antagonism, is characterized by either 'self-mastery' (*enkrateia*) or 'weakness of will' (*akrateia*). In both cases, the intellect has been distinguished from the rest of the soul, but is at odds with it; it then either rules the lower parts of the soul by force or succumbs to their pressure. The final mode of being is internal reconciliation or harmonization, and to it corresponds virtue as an achievement; this, in turn, may occur with or without comprehensive knowledge—i.e., in a 'manly' or in a 'godly' form of virtue respectively.

These modes of being are presented, albeit fairly obliquely, in the *Charmides* and the *Laches*. Though virtue is discussed in the *Republic*, the *Protagoras*, the *Meno*, the *Laws*, the *Euthyphro*, the *Alcibiades I*, and, to some extent, the *Phaedrus*, none of these dialogues has a developmental component as do the *Charmides* and *Laches*. It is for this reason that I will be focussing on the latter, though points from other dialogues will occasionally be useful. I should stress, once again, that the following is intended only as a preliminary adumbration of the development of the soul. A complete reconstruction based on the *Charmides* and *Laches* alone would be too conjectural and lacking in textual support to suffice for a robust theory. It is only by employing the analogy between the soul and the state that the content of this outline may be filled in more substantially in chapters to follow.

Four comments are in order concerning my presuppositions and method. The first concerns my presupposition that the essence of the human soul is mind or intellect. On this point, I am again following Gerson, who claims that, for Plato, the “person is essentially and ideally a knower.”<sup>46</sup> Roughly, his argument—which I find convincing and well supported by the texts he adduces—is that the ‘person’ (to use the term anachronistically, but appropriately) for Plato is the soul, whereas the human being is the composite of body and soul.<sup>47</sup> Yet, as embodiment—i.e., being subject to both mental and bodily states—is only the image of the disembodied and eternal soul, we may strive to transform ourselves from this endowment and achieve disembodiment as much as possible in this life (as Socrates speaks of it in the *Phaedo*).<sup>48</sup> This occurs through the self-identification and self-unification of the soul as intellect or pure knower.<sup>49</sup> For, as is argued in the *Philebus*, we are fundamentally more subjects of mental states than bodily states: since the intellect is more akin to goodness, and goodness is most real, then it follows that what is most akin to goodness in us is the most real.<sup>50</sup> Therefore the mind or intellect is the essence of the soul—not as a given fact, but rather as the ideal of disembodiment, which is the metaphysical basis of our existence and the *telos* of the philosophical life.<sup>51</sup>

The second comment concerns the thesis of the unity of the virtues. The position that I am assuming is that virtue is ultimately a single mode of being which can be

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<sup>46</sup> Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> See *Phaedrus*, 264c. In “The Lockeanism of Aristotle,” Jennifer Whiting argues that this distinction between person and human being is fundamental to Locke’s theory of personal identity; she and Gerson alike contrast this with Cartesian dualism.

<sup>48</sup> *Phaedo*, 64a, 64e-65a.

<sup>49</sup> His argument is here is based on the *Republic*. See Chapter 3 of Gerson, *Knowing Persons*.

<sup>50</sup> Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, p. 264. See *Philebus*, 65c-68a.

<sup>51</sup> Sarah Broadie makes a similar point as Gerson’s by arguing that, for Plato, the essence of the soul is a power to determine itself according to what it *thinks* is good. See Sarah Broadie (2001), “Soul and Body in Plato and Descartes,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 101: 295-308, esp. p. 305.

described in various ways: if speaking only of the state of the intellect in this mode of being, then one calls it *sophia*; if one is speaking of how knowledge is active in the lower parts of the soul, directing them towards the good, then one may call it *andreia* in circumstances such as war, and *sophrosune* at, say, a drinking-party; and if one is speaking of the general arrangement and orderliness of the soul, which leads to right and noble action, one calls it *dikaiosune*. Virtue is thus a complex unity. As for the unity of piety with the other virtues, this is a difficult matter, which would require a lengthy discussion about Plato's theology.<sup>52</sup> Though relevant to this dissertation, I can only touch on this matter briefly, which I do in Chapter 7, section C. Suffice it to say, for now, that it is excluded in the *Protagoras* from the list of virtues, and is not deduced in the *Republic*. Moreover, in the *Laws*, where piety is of primary concern, it is separated from the virtues, which, "though four, are yet one."<sup>53</sup> Leaving piety aside for now, then, my interpretation of the thesis of the unity of virtue is that when the parts of the soul are not unified or harmonized according to knowledge of the good, one may appear to have the various virtues in isolation—a bold but ignorant soldier, for example, might display something like *andreia*, but not the true virtue. One might also have technical knowledge without making this the basis of the whole soul's activity; but "knowledge separated from justice and the rest of virtue ... is not wisdom."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> For a recent debate (2006) about whether piety is to be included in Plato's virtues, see the articles by Øyvind Rabbås and Russell E. Jones in *Ancient Philosophy* 26(2): 385-394.

<sup>53</sup> *Laws*, 964a. The whole dialogue concludes with the need for piety, which depends, in modern times, upon the belief in the priority of mind over matter, and in the rationality of the cosmos (966d-e). How these beliefs are connected with the rest of virtue is not explicated, though clearly false beliefs, especially concerning matters involving the eternal, would be incompatible with wisdom.

<sup>54</sup> *Menexenus*, 247a. For arguments in favour of attributing to Plato the thesis of the unity of the virtues, see Terrence Penner (1992), "What Laches and Nicias Miss—And Whether Socrates Thinks Courage Merely a Part of Virtue," *Ancient Philosophy* 12(1): 1-28; Gregory Vlastos, "The Unity of the Virtues in the *Protagoras*—Appendix: the Argument in *La. 197E ff.*," in *Platonic Studies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973). For an opposing position, see Daniel Devereux (1977), "Courage and Wisdom in Plato's *Laches*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 15: 129-141.

The third comment concerns my method of interweaving the *Charmides* and *Laches*. Though it is certainly possible to interpret each dialogue independently, my argument depends upon the belief that they generally cohere with one another. This methodological point follows from my assumption of the unity of virtues: since the two dialogues treat of specific virtues, which are ultimately unified in true virtue, their contents ultimately point to the same idea—this despite the fact that the unity of the virtues *per se* is not treated in either dialogue. Though I will be providing some interpretation of each of the dialogues taken independently, this will generally be subordinated to the overall purpose of this chapter.

Finally, I will occasionally be employing some Aristotelian terms and distinctions. By no means do I wish to conflate Plato and Aristotle. However, Aristotle's precision can be very helpful in clarifying the positions presented by Plato, who is self-consciously not so concerned with terminological consistency, preferring to use whatever means are best at getting at the idea itself.<sup>55</sup> I will therefore do so when the idea in Plato seems to be the same as in Aristotle.

#### A. Immediacy in the *Charmides*

The mode of immediacy is best described and portrayed in the *Charmides*. The main topic of this peculiar dialogue is the nature of *sophrosune*. This term is not particularly difficult to understand in its usage in other dialogues, where it consistently seems to mean something quite close to temperance or continence. But the attempted

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<sup>55</sup> For example, see *Laws* 627d and 693c; *Charmides*, 163d; *Statesman*, 261e.

definitions in the *Charmides* range from “doing everything orderly and quietly—walking in the streets, talking, and doing everything else of that kind,” to the “science of itself and of the other sciences, and moreover ...[the] science of the lack of science at the same time.”<sup>56</sup> Needless to say, it is difficult to perceive the underlying unity of such definitions, and it is therefore difficult to know what it is the dialogue is really about. What is clear, however, is that the definition of the virtue moves increasingly from action to cognitive matters. Indeed, the same type of progression is noticeable in the definitions of *andreia* in the *Laches*. This should make sense if the virtues are ultimately unified through wisdom.

Despite being insufficient for a complete definition, it is not so odd, then, that the *Charmides* focuses more on *sophrosune* as an intellectual virtue than as a practical virtue. Yet by distinguishing the affective from the intellectual aspect of the virtue, the dialogue suggests a psychological development in the attainment of the virtue. What I perceive in the dialectic of failed definitions is a movement away from ordinary engagement in the sensuous world to pure contemplation. Otherwise stated, it suggests an internal development of self-consciousness. It begins with a definition about how one comports oneself in action and conversation, which need not be self-conscious whatsoever. It then moves to shame, which is an emotional kind of self-perception that is dependent on external factors (such as the presence of other people). From this emotional sense of one’s limits, the discussion moves to explicit knowledge about what is properly one’s own. Initially, the awareness of oneself is relative to others; one minds one’s own business, for example, by knowing the bounds of responsibility.<sup>57</sup> It then progresses to self-knowledge in general. Since this involves reflexivity (i.e., something acting upon itself), and since

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<sup>56</sup> *Charmides*, 159b; 167b-c. The latter definition is one of those which are called ‘academic’ [, 159b; ] definitions of *sophrosune* (*Laws*, 710a).

<sup>57</sup> *Charmides*, 162b; 164b.

nothing has the capacity to do this except mind (which is only implied),<sup>58</sup> the definitions culminate in discussions about knowledge as the reflexive activity that is most one's own.<sup>59</sup> Overall, the implication of the *Charmides* seems to be that to moderate one's behaviour in a composed and leisurely way ultimately requires knowing that one's essence is one's mind, which is properly active in its engagement with eternal objects, and not with the particularities of one's soul, body, or circumstances. Given such a connection to something transcendent, the lower desires of the soul can be refashioned and harmonized with the good.

This general movement inward toward the universal essence is foreshadowed in the introduction to the arguments of the *Charmides*, where Socrates convinces Charmides that to treat his headaches effectively requires treating the whole body, and that a healthy body ultimately depends upon the health of the soul, which is taken here to be *sophrosune*.<sup>60</sup> Charmides happens to exceed other young men not only in beauty but in *sophrosune* as well.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, his modesty, which is immediately associated with this virtue, adds to his beauty.<sup>62</sup>

But when asked to observe this quality within himself, Charmides' resourcefulness is not very extensive.<sup>63</sup> He does, admittedly, engage in a "manly effort at self-examination" [ ]: he observes what is "in him" by something akin to direct perception [direct p], and from this basis forms an opinion [ ], a ] about the virtue.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 167c-8a

<sup>59</sup> This is closely related to the point made in *Laws X* and the *Phaedrus* that circular motion is the first kind of motion (*Laws*, 896a; *Phaedrus*, 245c-d). The difficulty of relating these points lies in knowing how exactly mind and soul are related. Though soul is what moves itself, intelligence is at least logically prior to all life and motion.

<sup>60</sup> *Charmides*, 156d-8c.

<sup>61</sup> *Charmides*, 157c-d; 160d; 175e.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 158c.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 167b. Cf. *Laches*, 194b.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 160e; 159a.

The first result he offers is that *sophrosune* is “doing all things orderly and leisurely or quietly”.<sup>65</sup> Socrates shows that this cannot be right, since it implies a contradiction with the accepted claim that quickness, which is taken as the opposite of “quietness”, is honourable in all activity.<sup>66</sup> Charmides responds by suggesting that *sophrosune* is the same as *is t*—that is, shame, modesty, or humility.<sup>67</sup> But, as Homer wrote, “shame is no good mate for a needy man”; hence it is not always good, whereas *sophrosune* must always be good.<sup>68</sup>

Both of these attempted definitions positively describe perceptible aspects of the virtue. However, the first ignores the essential place of intellect; the second begins to approach the intellectual quality, but only as a feeling that corresponds to a judgment concerning the honourable and the noble. Hence, through his own self-perceptions, Charmides can only discover a general comportment and a feeling. That is the extent to which Charmides is able to reflect on himself. His so-called virtue here is a natural endowment [eeeeee], which is explicitly attributed to his noble and blessed genealogy.<sup>69</sup> But it is later agreed that if one truly has *sophrosune*, then one cannot be ignorant of it.<sup>70</sup> Since Charmides is clearly ignorant about his endowment, it is only an image of the virtue that he possesses, which can become truer through self-knowledge. Charmides and his definitions thus represent the best of the immediate mode of being. What this means is that one is generally oriented outwardly, and that one’s knowing, loosely speaking, occurs primarily through perception as opposed to reflection on one’s states of mind.<sup>71</sup> Charmides embodies and speaks indirectly of what is elsewhere called the ‘ordinary’ [embodi ] kind of

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 159b.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 160b.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 160e.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 161a. Cf. *Laches*, 201b, where the same quotation from Homer is used.

<sup>69</sup> *Charmides.*, 157d-8b. Cf. *Alcibiades I*, 104a-b.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 164a.

<sup>71</sup> It would be appropriate here to notice that the *Theaetetus* begins with knowledge as perception and moves closer to pure reason.

*sophrosune*, “which by natural instinct springs up at birth [, “wh (immediately)] in children and animals, so that some are not incontinent, others continent, in respect of pleasures.”<sup>72</sup>

But there is a danger that threatens the goodness and beauty of this immediacy. It is the risk of letting nature take its course without being grounded in self-knowledge. If one does not have a sound understanding of goods higher than those which satisfy appetite and vanity, then even a soul gifted by nature, which happens to desire what is best, is susceptible to a re-orientation towards the baser objects of desire. As is attested to in the *Laches*, when boys become young men, they are often led by their burgeoning desires, and wind up making little of their lives.<sup>73</sup> Applied to the *Charmides*, the danger is that Charmides’ apparent *sophrosune* would, without self-knowledge, disintegrate into its opposite, namely licentiousness. Aristotle’s terms are particularly helpful here. *Akolasia* involves choosing to be licentious without giving any thought to its being contrary to one’s proper end.<sup>74</sup> It differs from incontinence (*akrasia*) in that it involves no awareness that one is submitting to bad desires; one simply follows one’s feelings. The appetites thus face no resistance from the intellect in their domination of the soul. One suffering from *akolasia* is therefore likened to a child who is not directed by a proper, rational pedagogue.<sup>75</sup>

Yet there is perhaps an even greater danger to the corruption of his good nature by the change in desire without rational guidance. This is the development of his intellect in abstraction from the rest of his soul, or education without the necessary ‘musical’ component.<sup>76</sup> Charmides appears to be headed in this very direction. After his two failed definitions, he reverts to an opinion of Critias, who is his teacher (and uncle), and argues

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<sup>72</sup> *Laws*, 710a.

<sup>73</sup> *Laches*, 179c.

<sup>74</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1150a9-1150b28.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 1119a21-1119b19; cf. *Laws*, 808b.

<sup>76</sup> *Republic*, 522a; 549b; 591c-d; *Laws*, 654a-b.

that opinions ought to be examined regardless of their origin.<sup>77</sup> Though Socrates agrees to this point, the danger is that as a student, he will believe that by possessing opinions and justifications, he will have discovered virtue. On one hand, this does mark a first step towards true virtue in that it indicates an increased self-identification with one's intellect. One believes that one's intellectual capacity suffices for virtue. However, an increased ability to argue or discourse about virtue that ignores concrete integration of the ideas into one's life leaves the lower parts of the soul to their own devices. Moreover, it may even strengthen their domination within the soul through calculating means to their satisfaction. But since the intellect is naturally akin to the unchanging ideas of virtue and goodness, any awareness of this fact will cause a tension within the soul between the desire for earthly and divine goods.

## B. Self-antagonism in the *Charmides* and *Laches*

### i) Self-antagonism in general and in the *Charmides*

Phenomenologically speaking, the mode of immediacy is distinguished from self-antagonism in that there is no hesitation between one's initial impulse to act and the action itself.<sup>78</sup> Whether it be instinctively or by habituation, one simply reacts to one's situation

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<sup>77</sup> *Charmides*, 155a; 161c; 162d.

<sup>78</sup> Plato's philosophy of action is not technically developed as it is in Aristotle and the Stoics. Hence, my claim here about immediacy can be put into Aristotelian terms, according to Martha Nussbaum's discussion in her essay on *phantasia* and action in *Aristotle's De Motu Animalium*, transl. with commentary by Martha Nussbaum, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978). She explains that in animals and in humans, *phantasia* and *orexis* can suffice for action: "If *phantasia* is not opposed by judgment, and if the creature desires the object as presented by *phantasia*, he will, then, act accordingly." (p. 262) When, given the desire for the object, there is no deliberation which intervenes between the presentation of that object and the action, animals and humans in some cases (such as children) are active in what I am calling the mode of immediacy. For the use of the term *hormē* (which is usually translated as 'impulse') in Plato and Aristotle, see Appendix 2 of Brad Inwood's *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism*, (New York: Clarendon Press, 1985); and see Chapter 2 of that book for the Stoic account of action based on the elements of presentation, assent, and impulse. Among other discussions of ancient philosophy of action, see G.E.M. Anscomb,

without any intervening thought. In self-antagonism, by contrast, there is at least a moment of interruption in which the question arises as to what ought to be done. But the intellect and the lower parts of the soul—or reason and inclination—are at odds here: one either acts according to the ‘ought’ reluctantly by forcing oneself to do so, or one follows one’s inclination in spite of the knowledge or sense that one ought not to. To jump ahead for a moment, when one is self-reconciled, one’s action follows practical reasoning without hesitation. Though one may stop to think about what one ought to do, one’s reasoning has immediate effective force, encountering no resistance from the desires for merely self-interested goods. In self-reconciliation, desire is no longer discordant from reason.<sup>79</sup> That is, one’s desires are harmonized with reason so that one desires what is rationally determined to be best. Aristotle, who treats of such matters in greater detail than Plato, refers to this efficacy of reason as ‘practical necessity’: the proper conclusion to the practical syllogism—namely, action—follows necessarily from the reasoned premises.<sup>80</sup> I will return to this condition of the soul in Section C.

For now, the mode of self-antagonism is generally characterized by a conflict within the soul about what to do. That action follows without practical necessity indicates that both sides in the conflict remain at odds, despite the resolution to act. As in any conflict where one side overpowers the other, instead of being genuinely reconciled to one another, the soul is left in a state of *agony*, lacking quietude and equanimity. Plato (somewhat ironically) calls the two possibilities within this mode ‘self-superior’ and ‘self-

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“Thought and Action in Aristotle,” in *Articles on Aristotle*, vol. 2, eds. J. Barnes, M. Schofield and R. Sorabji, (London: Duckworth, 1977), pp. 61-71; Anthony Kenny, *Aristotle’s Theory of the Will* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); and A. Preus (1981), “Intention and Impulse in Aristotle and the Stoics,” *Apeiron* 15: 48-58.

<sup>79</sup> *Republic*, 544d.

<sup>80</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1147a25-30. See “Practical Syllogism and Practical Science,” in Nussbaum’s commentary on *de Motu Animalium* for a more thorough discussion of the use of the idea of the syllogism in practical matters in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, *de Anima*, and *de Motu*.

inferior’.<sup>81</sup> Though the idea is not drawn out at length in the texts, its meaning is readily understandable. When the soul is ‘self-superior’, the ‘better desires’ end up determining the will rather than the ‘worse desires’. In general, what constitutes better and worse in the realm of desire is relative to the hierarchy of the parts of the soul from which the desire emerges. Clearly, then, the fully rational desires, such as the desire to live in a just polity and the desire for wisdom, are higher than all others. But the desire for honour and reputation for courage, which has its seat in the passionate part of the soul, is still better than the desire for self-preservation (springing from *epithumia*) which would, say, cause one to flee a dangerous situation. When the soul is self-superior, the desire for higher goods conquers the lower desires insofar as it actually determines the will. Nevertheless, the lower desires linger on in the soul, having been suppressed but not negated altogether. Inversely, a soul is ‘self-inferior’ when the lower desires determine action, despite any gnawing sense that one is doing wrong.<sup>82</sup>

Returning to the theme of the *Charmides*, then, we usually call self-superiority and inferiority with respect to the appetites ‘contenance’ and ‘incontenance’. In the *Republic*, for instance, Plato first defines *sophrosune* as “contenance of certain pleasures and appetites,” [aaaaaa ] and as being “master of oneself.” [oooooo].<sup>83</sup> But there is a subtle difference between two ways of mastering oneself: one involves force, while the other involves reason. We see a case of the first in the sufficiently virtuous oligarch, whose base desires are “forcibly restrained by general self-surveillance and self-control” [ssssssssss]

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<sup>81</sup> *Laws*, 626d; *Republic*, 430e.

<sup>82</sup> If there is no other higher desire contending against, say, lust, then one is in *akolasia*, not *akrasia*. See next page.

<sup>83</sup> *Republic*, 430e.

□ ].<sup>84</sup> In forcible restraint, one does not tame the lower desires by rational persuasion; rather, one “keeps them down...by compulsion and fear.”<sup>85</sup> This kind of man, then, would be at war with himself:

[He] would not be free from internal dissension [www]. He would not be really one, but in some sort a double man. Yet for the most part, his better desires would have the upper hand over the worse....Such a man would be more seemly [be more seemly] than many others; but the true virtue of a soul in unison and harmony with itself would escape him and dwell afar.<sup>86</sup>

Continence as forcible self-restraint is thus a form of internal strife, implying a split of the soul into factions.<sup>87</sup> The second definition of *sophrosune*, both in the city and the soul, addresses this problem directly: it is constituted by “the friendly and harmonious relations between [each part of the soul and of the polity], namely, when the ruler and the ruled believe in common that the rational part should rule and don’t engage in civil war against it.”<sup>88</sup>

It is striking, though, that in the *Charmides*, no definition given of *sophrosune* mentions anything about self-control or even the appetitive desires.<sup>89</sup> That is, *sophrosune* is not at all equated with *enkrateia*. It is difficult to say why Plato did not even raise this possibility in the *Charmides*, considering the equation of the two in the first definition in the *Republic*. For what it’s worth, it seems to me that *enkrateia* is a distortion of *sophrosune* which nevertheless suffices for political purposes; that is, one needs not have harmonized one’s desires with the common good in order to be an adequately just citizen. In the *Charmides*, however, the aim is to characterize *sophrosune* properly; Charmides’

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 544c.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 544d.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 544d.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. *Republic* 440b,e; *Phaedrus* 237d-e; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099a19.

<sup>88</sup> *Republic*, 442c-d.

<sup>89</sup> I am very grateful to Aryeh Kosman for my drawing attention to this point. He will likely have more to say on the subject in a forthcoming publication.

initial definitions resemble the true virtue not in terms of the resulting action, as does *enkrateia*, but in terms of the disposition of the soul in general—i.e., calm and composed.

The least that can be said is that the omission of the *enkritic* conception from the *Charmides* implies a difference between *sophrosune* and *enkrateia*, as is implied by the difference in the two definitions of the *Republic*. Since Plato is not fully explicit about this difference, it is helpful to clarify it by reference to Aristotle. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he describes *enkrateia* as the victory of reason over pleasures and pains; hence it implies a state of self-antagonism.<sup>90</sup> In such a mode of being, one knows oneself as partly good and partly bad. One retains evil desires, but is able to restrain them through will-power.<sup>91</sup> *Akrasia*, of course, is weakness of the will in the face of these desires. (Plato usually calls it ‘*akrateia*’, but there is no difference in meaning so far as I can tell.) But *sophrosune* is the condition in which the entire internal struggle has been superseded: the two sides are in a harmonious relation with one another and not one of dominance and submission.<sup>92</sup> Since there are no more evil desires, there is nothing even potentially to overpower the rational ruling principle.<sup>93</sup> Desire has been duly measured by the knowledge of one’s true good, which has become internalized as second nature.<sup>94</sup> With respect to the appetites, then, self-superiority is, in Aristotle’s terms, *enkrateia*, while self-inferiority is *akrasia*. Given the fact that Plato omits this issue entirely in the *Charmides*, thereby distinguishing *sophrosune* from self-antagonistic superiority, it seems reasonable to apply the Aristotle’s terminological cleanliness to Plato. Moreover, I see nothing in this account which contradicts anything in Plato.

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<sup>90</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1150a35.

<sup>91</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1152a1-6.

<sup>92</sup> See Aryeh Kosman’s “Self-control and self-consciousness in the *Charmides*” (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>93</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1152a1.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 1147a20-24.

The only trace of *enkrateia* in the *Charmides*, then—and, indeed, of self-antagonism in general—is to be detected in the way Socrates describes Critias’ awkward entrance into the discussion. Socrates reports that “Critias had long been clearly showing uneasiness [uneasi ], for he felt that he had a reputation to maintain with Charmides [ ] and the rest of the company. He had, however, hitherto managed to restrain himself, but now he could no longer forbear....”<sup>95</sup> Though engaged directly with Charmides, the perceptive Socrates could detect the inner battle going on in Critias. For the first part of the conversation, Critias had been self-superior: he had allowed his student, Charmides, to answer Socrates to the best of his abilities. Yet when Critias witnesses Charmides mishandling an opinion of his, his desire for honour (*philotimia*) overcomes him. Admittedly, this is only a minor dramatic moment; but what we see in it is the self-antagonistic oscillation between self-control and indulgence. Critias falls into self-inferiority the moment he jumps into the conversation prematurely.<sup>96</sup>

Before turning to the *Laches*, in which self-antagonism is central, there are two noteworthy points here concerning the character of Critias. The first, which is admittedly only suggestive, is that Critias’ other appearance in Plato’s dialogues is in the *Timaeus* and *Critias*, where he repeats the Egyptian reports of the ancient Athenians who lived nine thousand years prior, and who warded off the imperialist Atlantis. As will be discussed further in Chapter 3, the theme of Critias’ narration is the ruin brought about in a polity by the fall from virtue to incontinence. This seems quite ironic, given the comical depiction of

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<sup>95</sup> *Charmides*, 162c.

<sup>96</sup> Thrasymachus’ entrance into the discussion in the *Republic* is quite similar: “While we were speaking, Thrasymachus had tried many times to take over the discussion but was restrained by those sitting near him, who wanted to hear our argument to the end. When we paused after what I’d just said, however, he couldn’t keep quiet any longer. He coiled himself up like a wild beast about to spring, and he hurled himself at us as if to tear us to pieces.” (*Republic*, 336a-b, transl. Grube) Thrasymachus is clearly unable to restrain himself—he is giving way to a kind of animality within.

him in the *Charmides* slipping in much the same way. The second and more important point concerning Critias is that he is connected to the sophistic movement through Prodicus, the famous word-manipulator and distinction-maker.<sup>97</sup> Critias employs his intellectual skill not for the sake of the truth, or for the real education of Charmides or the other young men present, but for his own private gain. His impatience was due to his desire to show off his powerful intellect.

ii) Self-antagonism in the *Laches*

a) As a mode of being that typically occurs in adolescence

The two sides of self-antagonism are embodied in distinct characters in the *Laches*. Among several commonalities between this dialogue and the *Charmides* is that both self-inferior characters (i.e., Nicias and Critias) are engaged in sophistic education. This is a point that will be returned to at several points throughout this dissertation. A second point of convergence is the context of the two dialogues, namely the coming of age of boys into young men [yy ]. My reason for pointing this out is that the *Laches* in particular emphasizes phases in maturation which closely resemble the phases in the development of the soul that I am outlining here. Specifically, it seems to be implied that childhood is the time of immediacy, adolescence is marked by self-antagonism, while proper adulthood or manhood is characterized by internal reconciliation—despite the fact that few men actually

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<sup>97</sup> *Charmides*, 163d.

achieve this. To be clear, my purpose here is not to show that there is a complete theory of maturation in the *Laches*, but that the theme of maturation suggests a possible movement between distinct psychological modes of being.

In general, we know that Socrates is particularly interested in this point in life when adolescent boys are becoming young men, finding all at this moment to be beautiful.<sup>98</sup> For it is in this budding moment that one may begin to become one's true self through introspection, to understand one's own nature and begin to take care of one's soul. Indeed, we are told elsewhere that Socrates patiently waited until Alcibiades had reached this age before approaching him.<sup>99</sup> But, as it says in the *Laches*, at this age

[ ] most young men are left alone by their fathers to do whatever they please, causing them to wander from the path of virtue.<sup>100</sup> Sophistic education, which many of the Athenian fathers seem interested in for their sons, does not substitute for lack of care; instead it poses a further threat, since it capitalizes on intellectual curiosity but develops the young man's reason for instrumental purposes as dictated by private gain or vanity. Incidentally, this is the path of cleverness that Charmides seems to have headed down by trying to become adept in the opinions of the 'wise men' [ ], including Critias and Prodicus.<sup>101</sup> Socrates therefore wants to guide the youthful intellectual interest by turning it in the direction of the true good of their own souls.

The themes of age and maturation are vividly apparent in the *Laches*. The children of Lysimachus and Melesias have just approached manhood. These two older private men are concerned about how to educate their sons properly at this critical juncture, when they

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<sup>98</sup> *Charmides.*, 154b.

<sup>99</sup> *Alcibiades I*, 103a-b.

<sup>100</sup> *Laches*, 179a,d.

<sup>101</sup> *Charmides*, 161c; 154b.

themselves were neglected by their own fathers.<sup>102</sup> In addition to the fact that there are many references to the respective ages of the interlocutors throughout the dialogue, including deference to elders, a clear contrast is drawn between Socrates' relative youth in terms of his chronological age, and yet his relative maturity.<sup>103</sup> Despite being the youngest one, he is, by the end, the only one to be considered a man, he is.<sup>104</sup>

The question that guides the philosophical discussion in the *Laches* is therefore: how can one successfully lead a young man or adolescent into manhood properly speaking? Hence, it is not simply 'courage' that they are discussing, but 'manliness' or 'manhood' as well, which are also appropriate translations of the term *andreia* (The term is similar to *virtus* in Latin.) In the end, Socrates' response is that none of them is truly a man yet; they need to educate themselves first.<sup>105</sup> The courage that they speak of throughout the dialogue can only be gained through the conviction that the universal good is actually the same as one's own good. This is only possible through the self-identification with one's intellect, through which one comes in contact with a principle that transcends temporal, sensuous life. The hope is that philosophical training can lead to this knowledge and make it "part of the tissue of the mind."<sup>106</sup>

My claim, then, is that Laches and Nicias, the Athenian generals who try to define *andreia*, represent the two sides of self-antagonism, while Socrates represents the reconciliation of the formerly opposing parts of the soul.

## b) As self-superiority in Laches

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<sup>102</sup> *Laches*, 179a; 180b.

<sup>103</sup> Mentions of age occur at 180d, 181d, 186c, 187d, 189c, 201a, 201b.

<sup>104</sup> *Laches*, 187e. Protagoras similarly acknowledges Socrates to a great man for his age. (*Protagoras*, 361e).

<sup>105</sup> *Laches*, 201a.

<sup>106</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1147a23, transl. R. Rackham (Loeb Classical Library).

Lysimachus and Melesias have brought Laches and Nicias to a show of fighting in armour in order to get their advice as to whether such a practice would be useful for their sons. Socrates, who is also present, steers the conversation in typical fashion to the question of the purported goal of such a practice, which all agree to be *andreia*. Laches and Socrates then begin the inquiry into the nature of this virtue. Laches' first response to Socrates' 'what is *andreia*?' question comes straightforwardly: "anyone who is willing to stay at his post and face the enemy, and does not run away...is courageous."<sup>107</sup> When Socrates asks again for a more general definition, he answers: "endurance of the soul".<sup>108</sup> According to more than one commentator, these definitions reflect the typically Spartan ideal of civic virtue.<sup>109</sup> This best expresses the sense Laches has of *andreia* from his military experience. Indeed, he claims that he witnessed the virtue in Socrates in the battle of Delium.<sup>110</sup> But Socrates shows the problem with his definition, and indeed with Laches' mode of being in general: it is too subject to contingency. One needs to know the good of the end for the sake of which one is being steadfast. If not, one might end up being foolishly bold.<sup>111</sup>

Laches therefore adds the supplement, 'endurance plus knowledge' [ches t he].<sup>112</sup> But what this knowledge is, Laches cannot say. Socrates frustrates him by getting him to agree that a commander who knows that back-up is coming is less courageous than one

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<sup>107</sup> *Laches*, 190e.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 192b.

<sup>109</sup> Walter T. Schmid, *On Manly Courage: A Study of Plato's Laches*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), p. 102; cf. Øyvind Rabbås (2004), "Definitions and Paradigms: Laches' First Definition," *Phronesis*, 49(2): 143-168.

<sup>110</sup> *Laches*, 181b.

<sup>111</sup> The same point is made in the *Laws*, as is a parallel argument against Charmides' conception of *sophrosune*—namely, that without knowledge, the leisurely man may become too soft and lethargic to be good in war; hence they are liable to cause slavery in the polity (*Statesman*, 307e).

<sup>112</sup> *Laches*, 192c.

who does not know, implying, in perfect contradiction to Laches' third hypothesis, that ignorant endurance is actually more courageous.<sup>113</sup> This is a clear use of dramatic irony, as Laches was in precisely this situation in the battle at Mantinea.<sup>114</sup> Laches then gives up before they get a chance to clarify what sort of knowledge is necessary to guarantee a stout heart oriented toward a good purpose.

Ultimately, Laches' problem is not simply that his definitions fail; for he actually fails to appreciate the task of defining *f d e f i n* as a universal notion. He is unable to transform his intuitive sense of *andreia*, which is based on his experience in witnessing instances of this inherited ideal, into an abstract object of which he can speak.<sup>115</sup> His problem is similar to Charmides', but not identical. The similarity lies in the fact that both operate on a more intuitive and experiential basis than a reflective one. However, there is a significant difference between the two characters. Charmides is perfectly open to the play of the intellect, and readily willing to submit himself to Socrates' questioning. Laches, however, as an older and more experienced man than Charmides, has come to see the hypocrisy in people whose words do not match their deeds, and has therefore developed a kind of misogyny when he does not know the character of his interlocutor.<sup>116</sup> It is only because he has seen Socrates' courage himself that he is willing to discuss the matter with

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 193b.

<sup>114</sup> Schmid, *Manly Courage*, 122. Daniel Dombrowski concurs with Schmid here when he claims that "[a]s in the *Charmides*, the theme of [the *Laches*] can only be understood against a historical background." (*Philosophy of History*, p. 20)

<sup>115</sup> This is evident at four points in the dialogue. First, Laches fails to understand the task that Socrates tries to clarify after his first definition (191e), namely, the task of explicating the power of *t t o c l a* in situations that are not limited to war. Second, at the end of Laches' turn in the hot-seat, Socrates feels it is appropriate for him to stress the need to abstract a general idea of *f o r h i m b y* encouraging Laches to endure in their inquiry, lest Courage Herself ridicule them (194a). Third, Laches responds by complaining that, though he feels that he "conceives in thought [feel s] what courage is," he cannot "lay hold of her in speech [ ] wh] and state what she is." (194b) Finally, during Nicias' later attempt at defining and *s t a* abstractly, Laches falls back onto his initial understanding by assuming that *f a l l s b*, as defined by Nicias, must belong to a specific and concrete class of people in society; this time, instead of soldiers, he looks to doctors or seers (196a).

<sup>116</sup> *Laches*, 188c.

him.<sup>117</sup> Laches' unwillingness to be roped in by 'unmusical' men (188d), whose words do not match their deeds, is surely quite respectable and prudent of him. Moreover, his willingness to learn—given a courageous interlocutor—is commendable.<sup>118</sup> But Laches does not have confidence in the power of reason to engage with error or to persuade others of their hypocrisy, as Socrates evidently does.

The consequence of placing limitations on the use of reason is that fear remains a potent force. To take Socrates as the contrast again, a properly developed capacity to reason leads one to recognize that death itself is not an evil to be feared.<sup>119</sup> Reason can sufficiently convince one of the immortality of the soul, and of the relative worthlessness of one's bodily life. In battle then, someone like Socrates simply recognizes his duty and desires to fulfill it, without regard to his bodily preservation. That would be true *andreia*, in which the passions are in accordance with reason. One is not tempted to run away, as Laches supposes the courageous man is. Laches' idea of *andreia* is thus a distortion: the endurance and self-control he speaks of implies a lingering, though ultimately irrational fear.<sup>120</sup>

The mode of being he speaks of is therefore self-antagonistic for two reasons: in the conflict between the fear of death and the desire for victory and honour; and in the suppression of reason, which is the source of the lingering fear in the first place. It is true that in his conception of *andreia* the better desire (victory for one's polity) has the upper hand over the worse (bodily preservation); yet without reason, such self-superiority inevitably ends up in bold foolishness or the triumph of fear.

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<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 188e-9b.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 189a-b.

<sup>119</sup> *Phaedo*, 77d-78a; *Apology*, 40c -41d.

<sup>120</sup> Laches' definitions are most like Aristotle's citizen-soldier who does not necessarily fight out of the desire for a noble purpose (honour), but may do so out of fear of punishment. (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1116a15-1116b3.

c) As self-superiority as Nicias

Nicias presents a nearly opposite set of definitions of *andreia*, over-correcting Laches' failed attempts by focussing excessively on the intellectual component. Nicias, we are told, has been a student of Damon, who, in turn, is an associate of Prodicus.<sup>121</sup> Through this sophistic association, Nicias has clearly developed his skill in manipulating words by making overly-fine distinctions;<sup>122</sup> yet, as will be seen, his power of reason has not become the basis of his activity. Lacking in practical necessity, his soul is therefore susceptible to being self-inferior—i.e., to being governed by a lower power of fear.

Nicias' first definition of Nicias' is "the knowledge of what is to be dreaded or dared."<sup>123</sup> But, as Socrates shows, since what is to be dreaded and dared is equivalent to future goods and evils, and since goods and evils are the same regardless of when they occur, the definition is tantamount to "knowledge of all goods and evils."<sup>124</sup> This definition, however, is too broad, since it supposedly applies to the whole of virtue, and not to the distinct part of *andreia*.<sup>125</sup> The entanglement here is similar to the confusion that occurs in the *Protagoras*, and is due to the fact that there has been no clear delineation between genuine and merely apparent virtue. When it is only apparent, the virtues can be taken independently of one another, say, in circumstances of peace and war respectively.

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<sup>121</sup> *Laches*, 180d; 200b; 197d.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 197c.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 194e.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 199c.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. *Protagoras*, 360c, where courage is defined in the same way. It should be noted, however, that this conclusion is reached given a premise that the pleasant and the good are the same. Among other sophists present in this discussion who agree with this premise is Prodicus, of whom Nicias is ultimately a disciple. This definition indicates that knowledge—or the art of measurement in particular (*Protagoras*, 354d)—is to be employed in a calculus of pleasures and pains. Nicias, along with the other sophists, considers knowledge to be *instrumental*: the purpose or end is determined by the lower parts of the soul.

That is because this popular conception refers only to the outward appearance of virtue, just as ‘doing everything leisurely, like walking and talking’ did.

But there is a more subtle, yet highly significant criticism of Nicias’ position, and it appears through another overt case of dramatic irony. According to Thucydides, the actual Nicias did not succeed as commander in the campaign in Syracuse because he was overly cautious, failing to seize the appropriate moment to attack the enemy.<sup>126</sup> Instead, he got overly caught up in calculations about what to do. Paralyzed by the inability of reason to destroy the uncertainty inherent in war, he deferred to his seer. Plato’s Nicias is thus an intellectually busy character, but in such a way that reason has no direct influence on the affective and motivating parts of the soul. Like a charioteer whose horses have become detached, Nicias’ rumination leads only to inactivity. The evidence that this historical fact is relevant comes when Socrates claims that “generalship makes the best forecasts on the whole...and is the mistress rather than the servant of the seer’s art...; whence the law ordains that the general shall give orders to the seer, and not the seer to the general.”<sup>127</sup> In effect, this comment implies a second refutation of Nicias’ one-sided definition of *andreia*: the good general has not only calculative knowledge, but is able to act in the appropriate situation despite circumstantial uncertainty. Nicias’ definition thus lacks the element of ‘spiritedness’, which Laches’ depended on exclusively. Whereas Laches represents (in both word and deed) the intuitive and affective aspect of the virtue, and lacks the intellectual, Nicias represents the exact reverse. He regards knowledge from an overly prudential and technical point of view; as he thinks is the case for other arts and sciences that appear impressive, he can simply get the answer to the problems that Socrates has

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<sup>126</sup> Schmid, *On Manly Courage*, 9.

<sup>127</sup> *Laches*, 198e.

posed from Damon.<sup>128</sup> But mere answers do not necessarily determine action. As a result, there is a “lack of harmony” between Nicias’ words and his deeds.<sup>129</sup>

The sophistic development of abstract thought displayed and alluded to by Nicias is severed from the genuine attempt to attain virtue. The lower parts of the soul are left intact, and therefore contend for the governance of the soul. In fact, they seem to win, as this kind of reason is purely instrumental and receives its purposes from the desires or emotions. The sophistically developed intellect is thus the slave to another master.<sup>130</sup> Since the better part of his soul is enslaved to a worse, he is in a state of self-inferiority.

### C. Inner Reconciliation

#### i) The model for a reconciled soul is the divine mind

As most commentators agree, the *Laches* implies that proper *andreia* consists of a combination of the affective and the intellectual components that are presented in Laches’ and Nicias’ definitions.<sup>131</sup> Yet a complete conception is only indicated negatively. The *Charmides* is similar in that it too treats the emotional or bodily component and the intellectual component of its virtue separately. Also in common is the fact that it is the character associated with sophism in each dialogue (i.e., Nicias and Critias) who is able to

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 200b.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 188d; 193d. See C. Emlin-Jones (1999), “Dramatic structure and cultural context in Plato’s *Laches*,” *The Classical Quarterly* 49(1): 123–38, especially p. 133.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. *Protagoras*, 352c. This point is developed further in Chapter 5.

<sup>131</sup> For other interpretations of the *Laches* that include a synthesized positive characterization, see Charles I. Griswald (1986), “Philosophy, Education and Courage in Plato’s *Laches*,” *Interpretation—a Journal of Political Philosophy* 14: 177–93; Mark Blitz (1975), “An Introduction to the Reading of Plato’s *Laches*,” *Interpretation* 5: 185–225; Gerasimos Santas (1969), “Socrates at Work on Virtue and Knowledge in Plato’s *Laches*,” *Review of Metaphysics* 22: 433–60; and Hermann Bonitz (1871), “Zur Erklärung platonischer Dialoge,” *Hermes* 5: 413–42 (especially pp. 429–442).

isolate the intellectual aspect, but ignores its connection with the rest of the soul, resulting in a lacuna between thought and action. Yet the intellectual definitions in the *Charmides* are more sophisticated than those in the *Laches*; only the former involve the reflexivity of thought, and hence the self-knowledge that is essential to virtue. These definitions in the *Charmides* describe the divine knowledge on which the human ideal is based. As will be shown, when adapted for human limitations and placed in the context of the lower parts of the soul, this ideal implies a state of reconciliation among the parts of the soul.

The final definition that Charmides gives before being replaced by Critias is not derived from introspection; its provenance is Critias, as Socrates suspects. The claim is that *sophrosune* is ‘doing what is one’s own’ [i] .<sup>132</sup> Critias soon accepts ownership of this opinion, and amends the definition to “doing or making good things” [t] .<sup>133</sup> What then becomes clear is that it is not simply the action that constitutes *sophrosune*—whether it be doing something leisurely, or feeling shame about an action, or taking care of one’s own business; what is also required is the knowledge that one’s deeds are indeed good.<sup>134</sup> Hence the dialogue shifts from ways of acting outwardly, to the content of those actions, to the self-awareness of what one does and how. In other words, attention becomes focussed increasingly on the self-awareness itself, moving from outward activity to introspection and judgment. Critias thus gives the next definition that next defi is actually knowing oneself.<sup>135</sup> The question that remains to be worked out is what this means, or what kind of self-knowledge they are speaking of.

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<sup>132</sup> *Charmides*, 161b.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 163e. The reason for the emendation is that a temperate person may make good things for others (which is in one sense ‘doing their business’).

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 164a.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 164d-e.

The knowledge of oneself [The kn or .<sup>136</sup> gets explained in two ways. Each explanation describes, at least partially, the essential aspect of the soul’s activity, namely self-knowing thought. I suggest that the reason that there are two quite different explanations is that the first speaks of one’s true essence in itself, while the second speaks of its manifestation within the sensible world. That is, the first attempt to specify this ‘self’ or the reflexive pronoun, or t he, directs us to the nature of pure, unmixed mind, or the “disembodied knowers”, as Gerson refers to it;<sup>137</sup> the second describes the essential feature of the mind insofar as it is alive in an embodied person, who is subject not only to cognitions, but to emotions, appetites and sensations as well. This is the worldly image of the purely intelligible and divine being.

To be more explicit, then, the first expansion of ‘knowing oneself’ is that it is equivalent to “knowledge of other knowledges and knowledge of itself” [i

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].<sup>138</sup> This passage, which might actually suffice for a definition of *sophia*, is clearly difficult to interpret. I take it to mean that self-knowledge, or kkkkkkkk, has two simultaneous components. The first is the knowing that one has objective knowledge of various kinds (e.g., goods and evils of specific things). One difficulty that I cannot fully clear up here is that the definition seems to indicate knowledge of what constitutes knowledge in general (i.e., epistemological knowledge). However, this hypothesis appears to be redundant. For it does not seem reasonable to suppose that one could have knowledge, properly speaking, without knowing what constitutes knowledge in the first place; otherwise one would simply have true opinion and

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 164d, 165c. Typical of Plato’s conversational terminology, the two words for knowledge have equivocal uses in this dialogue.

<sup>137</sup> Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, p. 50.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 166c.

perhaps some justificatory reasons. Though this is like knowledge, it is not the same.<sup>139</sup> I will therefore limit my interpretation of this first component of the definition to refer to the knowledge of one's possession of knowledge. I take the second component, *gnosis*, to refer to the self-reflexivity of the activity of knowing. By this I mean the concurrent awareness of one's subjective state while actively knowing. Taking, as Gerson does, true knowledge to be a direct cognition of intellectual objects, what this definition of *sophrosune* means is that one is directly cognizing both the intellectual objects and the subjective state of cognition. In short, it is a reflexive cognition of the relation between knowing subject and known object.

Among those in the *Charmides*, this definition is the one that comes closest to describing the ideal state of virtue, which, since it is the true ideal, belongs to a pure, disembodied mind. As Gerson explains,

... an immaterial person is the only sort of thing capable of knowledge as Plato understands it. This is because an immaterial person is the only thing capable of self-reflexivity. It is the only sort of thing wherein that which knows is identical with the subject of the state that is known. Further, the ideal for a person is to be exclusively in such a state of knowing. In this way, achieving knowledge can be seen as the core result and meaning of authentic self-transformation. Finally, in so far as knowledge is the ideal cognitive state, the *ne plus ultra* of cognition, all other cognitive states have to be understood as defective or at least derivative versions of the ideal. The possibility thus presents itself that for embodied persons, unqualified—i.e. actual and self-reflexive—knowledge is not available.<sup>140</sup>

Insofar as it contains the components of actuality and self-reflexivity, the formula “knowledge of other knowledges and of itself” stands for the ideal form of knowledge, and is similar to Aristotle's description of the divine mind in *Metaphysics* (“knowing that is knowing of knowing”).<sup>141</sup> Indeed, as Gerson has just pointed out, it may not be possible for

<sup>139</sup> Hence the refutation of any ‘doxastic’ conception of knowledge in the *Republic* and *Theaetetus*. See Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>140</sup> Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, p. 39.

<sup>141</sup> At 9, 1074b33, Aristotle writes: “the divine thought thinks (since it is the most excellent of things), and its thinking is a thinking of thinking.” I should note that the question of the content of divine thinking is a highly controversial matter among scholars.

humans to attain this state of mind consistently, if at all, in this life.<sup>142</sup> In the *Charmides*, Socrates himself questions whether such reflexivity is possible whatsoever;<sup>143</sup> but the question remains unanswered by the end of the dialogue. Beyond the fact that knowing all things is impossible for humans (though it would make us a “blessed race” if were possible)<sup>144</sup>, it seems that even the concurrence of objective and subjective cognition is impossible for us. My reason for thinking so is that when we are cognizing an object, reflection on our own subjective states removes us temporarily from this object insofar as we replace it with our own subjectivity as an intentional object. We oscillate back and forth between these two objects, since we generally only pay attention to one thing at a time (despite perhaps being peripherally aware of many other things, which could become intentional objects if we turned our attention to them). It seems, then, to be a feature of our temporality that this concurrence or simultaneity (both words can only be approximations) of objective knowing and self-knowing is not possible for us.

ii) The human image of the divine mind

I take the divine mode of self-knowing to be the ideal in Plato, as in Aristotle and later Platonists. As Gerson puts it, we ought to “strive to emulate our maker ‘as far as possible’.”<sup>145</sup> This is the philosophical life that Socrates pursues: he seeks knowledge as a means of “preparing for death”;<sup>146</sup> this is to say, he increasingly identifies himself with that

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<sup>142</sup> *Metaphysics* 7, 1072b25. Aristotle here says that we may sometimes enjoy the life of divine contemplation. As Socrates explains in the *Phaedo* (66d-e), one reason for it being only an occasional event is that the needs of the body always intrude to some extent.

<sup>143</sup> *Charmides*, 168a.

<sup>144</sup> *Sophist*, 233a.

<sup>145</sup> Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, p. 250. (The reference here is to the *Timaeus*.)

<sup>146</sup> *Phaedo*, 67e.

part of himself that is immortal, namely the soul as a knower, purified of its involvement with the body.<sup>147</sup> But since doubts are raised about the possibility of complete knowledge in this life, the explanation of “knowing oneself” [ἴσθῆσθαι] is modified for human knowers. It is therefore “knowledge of what one knows and does not know” [ἐπιστάμενος].<sup>148</sup> The same point is made in the *Sophist*, where the Stranger argues that the best and most temperate [ἐπιεικής] state of mind is to have an attitude of modesty which consists of thinking that one knows only what one actually does know, and not more.<sup>149</sup> This definition best describes the purely cognitive aspect of the virtuous state for embodied persons whose knowledge is cumulative, since it allows for ignorance with respect to objective knowledge.<sup>150</sup>

There are two senses in which one can know what one knows, which turn on whether ‘what one knows’ is taken as a matter of information, where knowledge is a possession, or as an activity of knowing in relation to intentional objects. The *Charmides* explicitly follows the first, possessive sense, and several problems ensue.<sup>151</sup> But this kind of factual self-knowledge regarding what one knows and does not know is only a secondary feature of having *sophrosune*. Though the *sophron* may always be able to examine himself introspectively and form a true opinion or proposition about virtue, that is not the basis of his self-knowledge. It is, rather, a kind of constant self-awareness that makes it easy to reflect on what one has been thinking. This subtle point is hinted at when the phrase “ἐπιστάμενος” is used, where the imperfect aspect of the infinitive implies on-going activity.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> *Laws*, 959b.

<sup>148</sup> *Charmides*, 167a.

<sup>149</sup> *Sophist*, 230d.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. *Sophist*, 233a; *Laws*, 906b.

<sup>151</sup> Such knowing *that* one knows is propositional; hence if Gerson’s argument is correct that no true knowledge is representational for Plato, then this possessive or factual sense of ‘what one knows’ would lead to the problems dealt with in the *Theaetetus* as well.

<sup>152</sup> *Charmides* 172b-c.

Likewise, in the definition just mentioned above, it is the infinitive that is used [ἴσθαι], though it has been translated as a common noun ('knowledge'). Such knowledge of one's active knowing is not the same as thinking definite thoughts about both an object and one's own consideration of that thing. It is, rather, more of a background sense or intellectual perception of oneself while considering it, which may be more or less prominent. This self-reflexive sense of oneself is the condition for the possibility of introspection, for without a sense of oneself as an intellectual agent already there, as it were, it would be impossible to examine the content of one's mind.<sup>153</sup> The picture that emerges here of the philosopher, then, is to be always aware of what one is doing, saying, and thinking. As Aryeh Kosman has described it, one knows what one is up to.<sup>154</sup> Yet what is being described here is not just general self-awareness, but the self-awareness of a knowing agent; and a knowing agent is, properly speaking, in relation to the universal objects of thought. One is conscious of oneself not as an intelligible object (i.e., οὐσιαστικῶς, in the possessive sense), but rather, of one's essential being as the activity of self-reflexive knowing (i.e., ἐνεργητικῶς, in the active sense of ἐνεργεῖν). In order to be self-aware as a knower, and to do so with constancy, moreover, requires the knowledge or sense that one is engaged with objects beyond one's ego. One cannot therefore be caught up in private matters, one's worries about future possibilities, memories of past events, etc. As an intellectual virtue, then,

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<sup>153</sup> The *Philebus* (31b-36e) is relevant here: just as the experience and recollection of pleasure and pain presuppose that we are aware of them as they happen (and not just that the body undergoes a change), introspection concerning our thoughts likewise presupposes that we are always aware of the thoughts that we are having, however dimly one recognizes this. If we were not at least dimly self-aware, we would not be able to recall anything. This seems to be the reason why we cannot remember infancy. I am following Kosman here, who has (informally) connected the reflexivity involved in knowing in the *Charmides* with Sartre's 'non-thematic' self-consciousness.

<sup>154</sup> Aryeh Kosman, "Self-control and Self-knowledge in the *Charmides*," (unpublished). Cf. *Lesser Hippias*, 365e: "And being intelligent (*phronimoi*), they know what they are doing (*epistantai ho ti poiouein*)." This might be a good way to interpret Seneca's notion of *concordia* ('primary attachment', 'primary') insofar as it exists in adult humans (as opposed to animals, babies, children, and adolescents). See *Letter 121*.

*sophrosune* seems to be not only ‘soundness of mind’, as it is sometimes translated, but *presence* of mind.

iii) This state of mind implies lack of self-antagonism.

Socrates clearly demonstrates that he knows what he possesses epistemically by admitting his ignorance. But what is more important, if we do not get caught up in the same entanglements as in the *Charmides*, is that he demonstrates the virtue of *sophrosune* as has just been defined above insofar as he is constantly aware of what is and what is not clearly and rationally understood as it occurs in his investigations. At the end of the dialogue, Socrates takes stock of the concessions that were made throughout their conversation (i.e., that a knowledge of itself was possible, that this same knowledge would know the content of other forms of knowledge, and that it is possible to know what one does not know).<sup>155</sup> But he has either been speaking or listening intently all along. This indicates a concurrent knowing what he knows and what he does not. The capacity that is evident here might be called ‘being observant’, though this often implies being removed or disengaged from the situation at hand, as an external or ‘outside’ observer. It is therefore more like being constantly awake to the fullest degree.<sup>156</sup> He remains present throughout every conversation, and yet shows that he has also been keeping track of what is going on without getting distracted. Though we are only given images of Socrates in dialogue with

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<sup>155</sup> *Charmides*, 175b-c.

<sup>156</sup> This quality of Socrates’ is obliquely referred to through his being awake constantly in a literal sense, as is mentioned at the end of the *Symposium*, both while on campaign in Potidaea, and overnight at the drinking-party (*Symposium*, 220d, 223c). For other comments on virtue as wakefulness, see *Laws* 808b, *Republic* 520c-d, *Statesman*, 277d; 278e.. I should note that we seem to have non-thematic self-awareness in dreams, for otherwise, we could not remember them. But there is a second layer, as it were, of self-consciousness which often interrupts a dream state. The explicit thought ‘I am dreaming’ has the capacity to destroy the dream. The definitions concerning self-knowledge in the *Charmides* are, I believe, referring to both layers of self-consciousness, which is (usually) only possible while awake.

others, I believe it is safe to assume that he is equally as attentive to these limits when he is thinking alone.

*Sophrosune* is the particular aspect of Socrates' virtue in times of peace, when his calm and self-conscious attentiveness are most salient. Yet as he says in the *Charmides*, he always ventures to be the same [αἴα].<sup>157</sup> Surely, then, this will include times of war. Indeed, the *Charmides* begins with Socrates' transition from war to peace. Moreover, he is described by Alcibiades as having the same firm but calm constancy of self-possessed awareness throughout the campaign under Laches in Potidaea that he usually has walking in the streets.<sup>158</sup> In the face of immediate danger, this appears as courage more than temperance, since the temptation to appease self-interest here is due to fear. The boldness of not fleeing from presence out of concern for the ego can, it is true, be seen in times of peace as well. Most notably, this occurs in speech that is honest and fearless [and fear]:<sup>159</sup> one says what ought to be said without concern for the consequences on oneself. This form of courage is alluded to in the *Laches*, where Lysimachus asks that everyone present in this joint investigation speak openly, without flattery (which is always for the sake of person gain).<sup>160</sup>

As exemplified by Socrates, then, the state of true virtue in an embodied person, whether it be regarded as *sophrosune* or *andreia*, is similar to the divine, disembodied ideal in that it involves a concurrent and consistent self-awareness; yet it differs in that it does not require that one has complete objective knowledge—which is to say, knowledge of all

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<sup>157</sup> *Charmides*, 170a.

<sup>158</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 221a-b.

<sup>159</sup> Cf. *Gorgias*, 487a. See Michel Foucault's *Fearless Speech* for a study on the use of this term in antiquity. One usage which Foucault does not discuss (and the reason for omitting it is mysterious enough) is in its intimate connection with moments when the Holy Spirit comes upon the Apostles in *Acts of the Apostles*. It should be noted, though, that in Plato the term also has a derogatory sense; for example, in the *Phaedrus*, it implies shamelessness (240e).

<sup>160</sup> *Laches*, 178a-b; 179c.

forms and their relations. It is a knowing that one currently knows something or not; hence the *sophron* “will only know that he has a certain knowledge, but of what it is, “will only will not cause him to know.”<sup>161</sup> Since this also applies equally to what one does not know,<sup>162</sup> it may more appropriately be called ‘*epistēmē*’ (though the use of *epistēmē* here may not be precise, as its object (ἡ) is changing). It is the constancy of skeptical, or investigational self-awareness; one carries, as it were, the criterion and sense of truth throughout the investigation.

The soul must be in a state of inner harmony in order to achieve this self-reflexive constancy. To take a contrasting example, if one fears being embarrassed by one’s ignorance, then one will have to split one’s attention between the matter being discussed and others’ perceptions. There are, in this case, two contending desires in the soul: the desire for truth and the desire for reputation. To pursue the truth honestly, one must leave one’s ego at the door. But one cannot simply suppress lower desires, as though they had no effect on the mind’s direction and intensity in its proper pursuit; rather, one’s desire and one’s reason must be reconciled with one another so that all one desires is truth. Though I can only offer this conjecturally, it seems to be Plato’s belief that given such a condition of the soul, one will recognize truth when one sees it.

True contemplation only begins when one has reached the state of inner harmony, for the demands of the ego are a constant obstacle and distraction to cognitive unification with the intelligible structure of what is. The self-knowledge that is ultimately intended in the *Charmides* is thus the opposite of ‘knowledge’ of the reified conception of one’s idiosyncrasies. Approximating the divine mind, it is the self-awareness of the intellect

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<sup>161</sup> *Charmides*, 170c-d.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 166e.

engaged in its proper activity of knowing. Since the true objects of knowing are universal, any distraction caused by self-concern is a misdirection of the intellect; in fact, it is in the very deed of paying attention to one's fears, frustrations, lusts, etc. that one is actually identifying oneself with the lower parts of the soul. Self-identification with one's intellect depends upon overcoming the need to attend to these lower powers. This, in turn, requires the reconciliation of inner conflict caused by competing desires. How one goes about reconciling one's soul is, unfortunately, unclear in Plato. It seems that this was why one needed to be initiated into a school or into a relationship of *eros* to be guided towards wisdom. As seems to be a common complaint in the Early Modern period about the ancients, the end of ethics is given, but not the process.<sup>163</sup>

To remain, then, with the description of the goal, the mode of self-reconciliation can be further illustrated in contrast to the mode of self-antagonism by comparing Socrates with other characters. In the *Laches*, for example, both Laches and Nicias recoil from the philosophical conversation into a battle of egos;<sup>164</sup> it is no longer a matter of discovering the truth jointly, as Socrates emphasizes ought to be the case,<sup>165</sup> but rather a matter of who fared worse under questioning. Most people, of course, are in the mode of self-antagonism; they therefore assume that Socrates is likewise engaged in a battle of wits. This is why he angers so many people when he reveals their ignorance. While others feel this revelation as a sting,<sup>166</sup> Socrates remains interested solely in discovering the truth. Critias makes this common mistake about Socrates when he accuses Socrates of merely trying to refute him

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<sup>163</sup> See, for example, Francis Bacon, *Works*, eds. James Spedding and Robert Leslie Ellis, (New York: Garrett Press, 1968), vol. iii, pp. 418, 434, 436, 439; and Thomas Hobbes, *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. William Molesworth, (London: J. Bohn, 1845), vol. vi, p. 230.

<sup>164</sup> *Laches*, 200a.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 196b-c. Cf. *Charmides*, 166d-e.

<sup>166</sup> *Apology*, 30e.

without having real consideration for the direction of the investigation.<sup>167</sup> Laches, Nicias, and Critias are thus all distracted between their desire for truth and their desire for reputation.

The character of Alcibiades is another telling case. As we are told in the *Symposium*, while with Socrates, Alcibiades is, as it were, transported out of himself and *into* the enchanted realm of ideas, and he feels the affinity of his true self—i.e., his mind—with the purely intelligible. Yet when he is no longer in this magical presence, Alcibiades recognizes his own vanity and his ignorance; reactively, he defends his ego and becomes resentful of Socrates for having made him aware of his deficiencies.<sup>168</sup> Alcibiades' internal division is thus manifest in his oscillation between love and hate towards Socrates. For the most part, Alcibiades is *akratic*—that is, he seems to give himself over to baser desires.<sup>169</sup> In contrast to Alcibiades, who contrives to seduce him, Socrates might appear to be *enkratic*, having an apparently supernatural ability to constrain himself, never even flinching at Alcibiades' temptations. While it is true that Socrates does not give himself over to his appetites, this description would be a misunderstanding: Socrates does not possess extreme control over his passions; he has, rather, “quieted the two elements in his soul and quickened the third”<sup>170</sup>—which is to say, his passions and appetites have been reconciled through his greater power of reason. This is what allows him to *laugh* at Alcibiades with contempt, and why Alcibiades marvels at his *sophrosune* and *andreia*.<sup>171</sup> Socrates actually desires the universal good, and not the private goods of bodily pleasure, a good reputation, or safety from fearsome circumstances. I might also note here that

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<sup>167</sup> *Charmides*, 166c. Cf. *Gorgias*, 515b, where Callicles accuses Socrates of being merely contentious.

<sup>168</sup> *Symposium*, 216a-b.

<sup>169</sup> As will become clearer in later chapters, it is no co-incidence that Plato portrays Alcibiades, who caused Athens so much grief, as *akratic*.

<sup>170</sup> *Republic*, 572a.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 219c-d.

Socrates is not regularly engaged in self-doubt; he trusts the direction of reason until he is stopped by his *daimon*.<sup>172</sup> This faith in reason indicates his genuine self-identification with his intellect, for habitual or excessive doubt arises from a need that is other than purely intellectual, such as fear of radical change, of duty, of being offensive to others, etc.

I should address a possible objection, for it appears that there is a major inconsistency in my argument. On one hand, I have claimed that *sophrosune* or virtue in an embodied person does not require objective knowledge, but only the constancy of self-reflexive awareness that is not distracted by the needs of the ego. On the other hand, the overcoming of the ego or reified self-conception requires knowing what one's true good is, for without an awareness of a higher good, there is nothing else but the ego. Hence, actual objective knowledge does seem to be required. The question, then, is whether or in what sense this awareness of the higher good is knowledge. If we take knowledge to be direct intellectual contact with the real, then knowledge of the Good is a difficult position to maintain. On one hand, it seems that the philosopher is eventually able, through dialectics, to ascend in thought to the un-hypothetical first principle of all.<sup>173</sup> Yet if this first principle is the Good, and the Good is beyond being and thought,<sup>174</sup> then knowledge of it would no longer be possible. The question then turns to whether the first principle is *long* or the *One*. Rather than trying to solve this major problem, it is apparent that even at the stage of mathematics, one might have a sense of beauty (which is sometimes equated with goodness)<sup>175</sup> that is completely removed from anything idiosyncratic. That is to say, one may have an intellectual sense of a higher good than anything bodily even prior to being

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<sup>172</sup> *Phaedrus*, 242b; *Apology*, 31d; *Alcibiades I*, 103a.

<sup>173</sup> *Republic*, 511b.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 508e-509b.

<sup>175</sup> E.g., *Laws*, 966a.

educated in dialectics. Indeed, it is the sense of beauty that draws the soul up from sensuousness to intelligibility.<sup>176</sup> Furthermore, the practice of philosophical investigation, even when it is not fruitful in bearing definitive knowledge, may lead one to a sense of something higher than oneself (as Alcibiades briefly felt), indicating the universal good in a negative way only. Finally, there is piety. While Socrates may not have knowledge *per se* of divine things (about, for example, the immortality of the soul and the existence of God), he does admit to knowing something about  $\eta\eta$ , which concerns the mediation between the divine and human.<sup>177</sup> More importantly, he has certain convictions about such religious matters despite his ‘ignorance’—that is, his inability to articulate these convictions in a fully rational way.<sup>178</sup>

However we are to conceive of it—as a sense of intelligible beauty, as a negative indication through understanding, or as pious conviction—it is clear that Socrates does have this sense of the higher good which enables him to be virtuous. In the end, all of the characters in both the *Charmides* and the *Laches* agree that Socrates is the best teacher they have come across, and that they would do well to follow him.<sup>179</sup> In both cases, it is merely his comportment and cognitive capacity which convince them that he has reached a higher level than everyone else, including the sophists—not his actual knowledge. How exactly he in particular has come to his conviction, and thus to virtue, however, remains mysterious. Though this may not be satisfying, his comments at the end of the *Meno* seem appropriate here: “virtue is found to be neither natural nor taught, but is imparted to us by a divine dispensation without understanding in those who receive it.”<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> *Symposium*, 210b-211c.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 202e.

<sup>178</sup> *Phaedo*, 114d. Here, as elsewhere (e.g. *Republic X*), Socrates uses myths to describe the fate of the soul and to provide reasons to believe in its immortality.

<sup>179</sup> *Laches*, 200c-d; *Charmides*, 176b-d.

<sup>180</sup> *Meno*, 99e.

## Conclusion

I will conclude by trying to sketch a continuous development through the three general modes of being. First was immediacy as direct consciousness without hesitation or doubt. As a condition typical of childhood (though not exclusive to it), there is unity of the intellect with the other parts of the soul. One simply feels what one feels and reacts.<sup>181</sup> Given the rarity of a good nature and good nurturing, such a mode of being may resemble true virtue in outward appearance as tranquility and composure. Yet becoming more thoughtful and self-aware can cause disorientation and uncertainty, as Socrates' non-intellectual interlocutors experienced. What reflection on oneself potentially does, though, is distinguish what is truly 'one's own' from what is merely a possession. That is, the very act of reflection on oneself transforms the body and the lower parts of the soul into intellectually represented objects. One might go so far in reflection to identify himself with this power of objectification, namely his intellect. But then one has two 'selves' to contend with: the true self of the intellect, and the false, apparent self of the appetites and emotions. One is therefore in the mode of self-division, which typifies (but again is not exclusive to) adolescence.<sup>182</sup> If one becomes sufficiently convinced that one's good is not sensual pleasure or reputation, then one will attempt to control one's desires through an oppressive œconomy of the soul. But, as Socrates says in the *Republic* about one who tries to be

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<sup>181</sup> It is plausible that the phase of actual childhood, as opposed to infancy, is marked by the first manifestation of self-consciousness as awareness of pleasure and pain, such that memories can be formed. That is, the onset of childhood is marked by when affections or passions begin to "permeate both body and soul" (*Philebus*, 33d).

<sup>182</sup> Usually, it seems, self-antagonism begins in the course of life when one identifies the fact that one exists as an intellectual object in others' minds, and is disturbed by this apparent fragmentation and theft of identity. The task then becomes to control the formation of one's self-object in others' minds by contriving one's behaviour. The awkwardness of self-division or self-alienation here is usually quite clear.

‘master of oneself’, this is an absurd or laughable [‘master’] condition, since one is both master and slave of himself.<sup>183</sup> Genuine virtue, which belongs to the truly mature man, is thus the overcoming of the inner oscillation between the rule of the master and the rule of the slave, between *enkrateia* and *akrasia*. The goal is to become a unified soul, which means that its lower parts must be in harmony with the intellect: one desires what one knows to be truly good, and one risks one’s private good for its sake.<sup>184</sup> It seems that there is a ‘virtuous cycle’ here (or a ‘positive feedback loop’), wherein the more one knows the good, the more one can harmonize one’s soul—and vice versa. How one enters into this cycle—e.g., through being inspired by an exemplar or initiated by a lover—is an important problem, which will be addressed again in Chapter 8. Suffice it to say for now that the attainment of virtue—that is, for embodied persons—is the self-identification of the intellect as a knower of universal objects. What this means concretely is not merely having such a thought regularly, but being self-reflexively aware throughout the process of coming to know, without becoming distracted by egoistic concerns stemming from the lower parts of the soul.

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<sup>183</sup> *Republic*, 430e.

<sup>184</sup> The question again arises here concerning the nature of this knowledge of a higher good. While it may seem that the higher good is the salvation of the *polis*, since that is the purpose of fighting in a war, I still think that the higher good is, for Socrates, the attainment of virtue in identifying oneself with one’s mind. As is attested to by Alcibiades, appearing and actually being relatively invulnerable is the result of this constant frame of mind (*Symposium*, 221b-c).

### Chapter 3 – Development and decline of the soul and of the polity

#### A. On the relation between soul and polity in *Republic*<sup>185</sup>

The primary question treated in the *Republic* concerns the value of justice for the individual soul in this life and the next. It is a difficult question, we are told, and so requires an epistemological aid. Since there is both justice of a single man and justice of a whole polity, and—as is presupposed—the essential nature of justice is the same in both, the character of Socrates employs the construction of the ideal polity as a magnification of the form of the soul in order to render this “remote region of the mind” more perspicuous.<sup>186</sup> The reasoning that follows until Book IV is analogical and rests on the assumption, taken up explicitly at 435d, that the structure of the soul and the polity are similar enough to warrant comparison. Indeed, the likeness between the two with respect to their form and their character (*eidos* and *ēthos*)<sup>187</sup> is so great that, near the conclusion of the work, Socrates speaks of an inner polity, claiming that the wise man will avoid disturbing the harmony of his soul through excessive or deficient wealth by fixing his sight on the polity within

[[[[[[[[[[ ]];<sup>188</sup> this is the “constitutional

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<sup>185</sup> I will be using the term ‘polity’ throughout this dissertation. I am avoiding the word ‘state’ because of the ambiguity between the political entity and the condition of something in general; also, the political entity that is the state is often distinguished from society as its governmental apparatus, which distinction is not usually helpful when dealing with Plato. I will not use *polis* or city because this unnecessarily limits the scope of the term, even though this is what Plato was referring to for the most part. (He refers to confederacies of cities as ‘*systema*’. (*Laws*, III))

<sup>186</sup> *Republic*, 368d-369a. The problem of the relation between justice as a condition of the soul and the ordinary conception of justice as a legal and political condition has been treated by many scholars. See, for example, David Sachs (1963), “A Fallacy in Plato’s *Republic*”, *Philosophical Review* 72: 148-151; Terence Irwin, *Plato’s Moral Theory*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 205-206, 331; Gregory Vlastos, “Justice and Happiness in Plato’s *Republic*”, in *Platonic Studies*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); and Jonathan Lear (1993), “Plato’s Politics of Narcissism,” *Apeiron* 26(3-4): 137-159.

<sup>187</sup> *Republic*, 435e.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 591e.

government” [ggggg ] that is fostered in the child through education before granting him freedom.<sup>189</sup>

If the explanation as to why the polity and the soul are analogous is based on the essential interconnectedness of the two, then many questions open up by moving from one to the other, including the question of whether or how the development sketched in Chapter 2 applies on the political level. Plato’s use of this analogy, however, has been criticized, most famously by Bernard Williams, on the grounds that the analogy itself is incoherent and that it is insidiously employed to conceal the repressive character of his ideal polity.<sup>190</sup> If the analogy does not really make sense, then it would be questionable to proceed in the manner that I am proposing. Yet, following Jonathan Lear, I will argue that the analogy makes sense because it is a result of a reciprocal causal relationship. Given a clarification of the relationship between the polity and the soul, we may investigate whether there is a logical structure to political history that reflects the development of the soul, and how individual souls are constituted by their place in this history.

In his essay, “The Analogy of City and Soul in Plato’s Republic,” (which, according to Myles Burnyeat, “has dominated the discussion of its subject ever since”<sup>191</sup>) Williams argues that the analogy breaks down into self-contradiction or absurdity.<sup>192</sup> Among several critiques of the analogy, the charge of self-contradiction results from Plato’s claim that a just polity consists in a harmonious relationship among its three classes—the rational, the spirited, and the appetitive—wherein each stays within the limits of its own job and

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<sup>189</sup> *Republic*, 590e-591a.

<sup>190</sup> Lear, “Inside,” p. 185.

<sup>191</sup> Myles Burnyeat, “Introduction,” in Bernard Williams, *The Sense of the Past: Essays in the History of Philosophy*, ed. Myles Burnyeat, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. xv.

<sup>192</sup> Williams, Bernard. “The Analogy of City and Soul in Plato’s *Republic*,” in *The Sense of the Past*, pp. 108-117. First published in E. N. Lee, A. P. D. Mourelatos and R. M. Rorty, eds. *Exegesis and Argument: Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to Gregory Vlastos, Phronesis: Supplementary Volume I*, 1973. Henceforth ‘*Analogy*’.

recognizes the validity and necessity of the others. Yet, based on *Republic* 435e, where Socrates states that a city's character is derived from the character of its citizens, Williams establishes the general principle that "(a) A city is F if and only if its citizens are F."<sup>193</sup> This implies that the just city has just citizens; however, since the just city must have an appetitive (or 'epithymetic') class,

it must ... have epithymetic men: in fact, it is clear from Plato's account that it must have a majority of such men, since the lowest class is the largest. So a [just] city must have a majority of epithymetic men. But an epithymetic man—surely—is not a man-sur man; if he is not, then the city must have a majority of men who are not of men [just], which contradicts (e) [the principle that a city is just if and only if its citizens are just].<sup>194</sup>

In other words, the appetitive person is both just and unjust—just because the just polity must be made of up just citizens (and the appetitive class is the majority), and unjust because he is governed by his appetites, not reason (and justice requires the governance of reason over the appetites).

This contradiction is exacerbated if one considers the fact that in the just polity, the appetitive person must follow or listen to his reason, since, among other more mundane things, he must know what his task is and stick to it, and accept the philosopher king as his rightful ruler. For in the appetitive person, the appetites are the ruling part of the soul; and yet, by following reason to some extent, it must, according to Williams, have "an extra little [reason] of its own," which it hearkens to.<sup>195</sup> The tripartite structure of the soul thus breaks down if the parts become nested within one another.

Against this second of Williams' criticisms, Jonathan Lear has explained that, though the ruling part of the appetitive man is indeed his appetites, he will have been bred and educated to have only the necessary appetites if he has been brought up in the truly just

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<sup>193</sup> Williams, *Analogy*, p. 109.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

polity; and in order to satisfy those appetites for himself, the appetitive man will employ his reason instrumentally.<sup>196</sup> Yet in the just polity, the best way for the appetitive man to satisfy his appetites is to obey the laws. In doing so, he will be contributing the justice of the polity. Though Lear does not say so explicitly, the appetitive person in the just state is governed by reason in a way that is largely heteronomous, as opposed to the autonomous self-governance of the philosopher-king. In claiming that the appetitive person is “surely” not just, Williams only has the full, autonomous sense of justice in mind here. There is no need, however, of an extra *logistikon* within the appetites if one does not require justice to be a result of autonomy.

As will be discussed further in Chapter 7, the character of the appetitive man’s soul (in the just polity) is indeed just insofar as it is being governed by the rationality of the laws and system of education. That the appetitive person is ruled by his appetites does not necessarily imply that the appetites are in conflict with reason—a point which Williams fails to acknowledge. Lear’s point is that internally, the man determines his ends according to his appetites; yet his overall behaviour will be just insofar as his means of satisfying himself are determined rationally by the laws and his education so that they result in what is best for him as an individual and for the polity as a whole. It is true that the condition of his soul is not properly just—which is to say, just in the way a philosopher’s soul is internally governed by his own reason. Nevertheless, as Christopher Bobonich has cogently argued, Plato allows for an inferior, but still genuine, sort of virtue that is attainable by the non-philosopher.<sup>197</sup> Williams’ claim that the appetitive man in the just polity is “surely” not a just man is based on the false presupposition that justice in the soul

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<sup>196</sup> See Lear, “Inside”, p. 198 on this particular point.

<sup>197</sup> Christopher Bobonich, *Plato’s Utopia Recast*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). It should be noted that Bobonich’s argument is not based on the *Republic*, but rather on later dialogues, especially the *Laws*. This issue will be treated in Chapter 6, section B. Henceforth, “*Utopia*”.

is possible only through autonomous self-determination; yet the harmonious relationship between the parts of the soul and the class-appropriate action which results may still obtain when determined heteronomously, so long as this determination is based on the wisdom of the philosopher-king or lawgiver and mediated through law. Hence, to respond to Williams' first criticism, the appetitive man in the just polity is indeed just in a certain (heteronomous) sense; therefore, the just polity is indeed made up of just men—though the psychic justice of the different classes differs with respect to degree of autonomy.

Lear's response to Williams depends on the dual claim that the constitution of the souls of the citizens in any polity is determined, at least initially (if one becomes a philosopher), by the common practices, laws, and beliefs that are predominant in that polity; and that the latter are, in turn, created or perpetuated by the citizens once they are active in the polity as adults. Lear's main thesis, then, is that "*psyche*-analysis and *polis*-analysis are, for Plato, two aspects of a single discipline, psychology, which has at its core the relation between inside and outside. What holds the *Republic* together is Plato's understanding of what holds people and polis together."<sup>198</sup> Williams' argument takes the relation between polity and individual to be formally analogous; but it does not recognize that the two are *causally* related in that they determine one another. The isomorphic structure is not merely a likeness [structure],<sup>199</sup> but a result of this reciprocal causality, which is demonstrated in the account of the declining constitutions in Books VIII and IX: cultural conditions in the city affect the characters of the citizens, who in turn reshape the culture. Lear writes:

If we examine Plato's tale of political decline, we see that the degeneration occurs through a dialectic of internalization of pathological cultural influences in individuals which provokes a degeneration in character-structure (as compared to

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<sup>198</sup> Lear, "Inside", p. 185.

<sup>199</sup> *Republic*, 369a.

the previous generation) which is in turn imposed on the polis, which thus acquires and provokes deeper pathology.<sup>200</sup>

The very constitution of the souls of the citizens and of the polity as a whole are in a dynamic relationship. Lear uses the birth of the democratic soul as a clear example of the dialectic of degeneration:

[T]he oligarchic father, by pursuing his own ends, recreates on the interpsychic stage of his family and immediate social environment a model of his own intrapsychic relations. His son, having his appetites both encouraged and held down, becomes an interpsychic correlate of the appetites within the father. However, as a member of the outer world, the son is open to other polis influences. The oligarchical father encouraged prodigality outside the family, but Plato's point is that this prodigality cannot, finally, be kept outside. The prodigal youths, encouraged by the oligarch, are an externalization and interpsychic correlate to the unnecessary appetites within the oligarch's psyche. ...It is these appetites—whose pedigree goes back to the father—which are reinternalized in the intrapsychic battle within the son.<sup>201</sup>

Lear's explanation is based on two "fundamental psychological activities" that he detects in Plato's thinking, namely *internalization* and *externalization*.<sup>202</sup> Internalization is the "process of taking cultural influences into the psyche."<sup>203</sup> To explain, the fundamental character of a soul is defined, in Plato's schema, by its ruling principle—whether it be reason, passion, or appetite.<sup>204</sup> To these parts or powers of the soul correspond the values of justice, honour, and pleasure respectively. Which of these values is highest in the rank is, for the most part, established by nurture; socialization into a particular society is a perpetuation of that society's hierarchy of values. It is for this reason that matters of education and poetry are so important in the *Republic*. Thus, for example, in a timarchy, or a polity governed by those who hold the highest public honours due to military success, the citizen's life will be oriented towards winning honour, which results chiefly from the

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<sup>200</sup> Lear, "Inside", p. 202.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203, citing 559e.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 190, 192.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>204</sup> I will generally be using the word 'passion' for *thumos*, though occasionally 'emotion' or 'spirit' will be used without any significant difference in meaning intended.

display of exceptional courage in war. Hence, the primary goal in his education will be the strengthening of the spirited part of the soul so as to overcome fear. In the oligarchy, where only those having a certain amount of wealth partake of governance, the citizen ranks money above all other values—money being useful for satisfying the appetitive part of the soul. The particular formation of the individual’s soul and the development of its powers are thus guided—at least initially—by common normative standards, beliefs and opinions. As Anytus supposes in the *Meno*, one learns to be virtuous just as one learns language and crafts: simply by growing up in one’s particular context and imitating the models one is given.<sup>205</sup>

Indeed, Lear takes imitation to be Plato’s paradigmatic means of internalization, especially the imitation that occurs in the education of the young. Citing several passages from the *Republic* which speak of the shaping of one’s character, the “permeation of the inner part of the soul” by music, and the gradual collection of evil images in the soul from poetry, which “little by little...flow into [people’s] characters and pursuits,”<sup>206</sup> Lear shows that, for Plato, “the fact that we are so dependent on internalization for our psychological constitution, makes us susceptible to cultural luck. Our ultimate dependency is manifest in the fact that we internalize these influences before we can understand their significance.”<sup>207</sup> That “cultural products”, such as conceptions of virtue and beliefs concerning the gods, are taken into the soul and thereby shape its constitution prior to one’s being able to reflect on this influence is a crucial point for my argument in Part I. As will be discussed in Chapter 8, the starting point of philosophical investigation is both relevant to the possibility of

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<sup>205</sup> *Meno*, 92e. Cf. *Protagoras*, 327e-8a. This claim is not absolutely true, though, for philosophical education is different than ordinary education. Thus there is also a difference between philosophical and civic or ordinary virtue.

<sup>206</sup> *Republic*, 395c-d; 401d-e; 401b-c, 424d.

<sup>207</sup> Lear, “Inside”, p. 190.

attaining truth and is contingent upon historical circumstances (or what Lear calls “cultural luck”).

Continuing with Lear’s argument, cultural products and the political constitutions spring from nothing other than the characters of their citizens.<sup>208</sup> Socrates claims that:

it would be absurd to suppose that the element, [for example,] of high spirit was not derived in states from the private citizens who are reputed to have this quality, as the populations of the Thracian and Scythian lands and generally of northern regions; or the quality of love of knowledge, which would chiefly be attributed to the region where we dwell, or the love of money which we might say is not least likely to be found in Phoenicians and the population of Egypt.<sup>209</sup>

In Lear’s terms, the polis is formed by the process of externalization, whereby “a person fashions something in the external world according to a likeness in his psyche.”<sup>210</sup>

According to Lear, the external productions include musical harmonies and rhythms, common speech patterns, artisanal works, dramatic works, laws and customs; in all of these cases, the quality of the production reflects the character of the producer.<sup>211</sup> Though it is not clear to me whether or why, say, artisanal works will necessarily reflect the condition of the souls which produced them, Lear’s claim here seems valid at least when applied to public opinions or beliefs about the relative values of various goods; and these alone will be of concern to me. Combining the processes of internalization and externalization, Lear sums up the nature of the dynamic:

Internalization is primarily going on in unformed youths, externalization is going on primarily in adults, who have already formed themselves through prior cultural internalizations. Psyche and polis are mutually constituted by a series of internalizations and externalizations, with transformations occurring on both sides of the border.... What is being traded across a boundary is not unformed energy, but psychological products. They are crafted both outside and inside an individual’s psyche and they are traded back and forth across the boundary of the psyche. Once inside they become citizens of a more or less federated republic and are subject to

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<sup>208</sup> *Republic*, 544d-e.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 435d-e.

<sup>210</sup> Lear, “Inside”, p. 192.

<sup>211</sup> *Republic*, 400d-401a.

the vicissitudes of intrapsychic conflict, before being externalized again across the border.<sup>212</sup>

This explains why Socrates can conclude that “the individual is wise in the same way and in the same part of himself as the city.... And the individual [is] courageous in the same way and in the same part of himself as the city[;] and everything else that has to do with virtue [is] the same in both[.]”<sup>213</sup>

In sum, Lear writes that Plato “...is not relying on a mere analogy of polis and psyche, but on an isomorphism which must hold true due to the way we function psychologically. Psyche and polis, inner world and outer world, are jointly constituted by reciprocal internalizations and externalizations; and the analogy is a by-product of this psychological dynamic.”<sup>214</sup>

Giovanni Ferrari has objected to Lear on grounds of both internalization and externalization (though the latter is much more emphasized). As I concur with the causal relation interpretation that Lear presents, I’ll try to defend it against Ferrari’s objections. In general, Ferrari offers a deflationist account of the analogy, which is to say that there is nothing more to it than the fact that the soul and the polity have similarities. He claims that the analogy “has nothing to say about whether the virtues of the virtuous individual are to be found in the members of any class within the virtuous city.”<sup>215</sup> Moreover, it “does not peer into the souls of the individuals who make up the just city, but only into the soul of the

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<sup>212</sup> Lear, “Inside”, p. 193.

<sup>213</sup> *Republic*, 441c-d, Grube’s translation.

<sup>214</sup> Lear, “Inside”, p. 193. Lear rightfully points out that “Plato never uses the word ‘analogy’ (*analogia*) to describe the relation between polis and psyche, though he is sometimes translated as though he did. See e.g., Paul Shorey’s translation of II.369e in the Loeb edition of the *Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), p.208, n.116.

<sup>215</sup> Ferrari, G. R. F. *City and Soul in Plato’s Republic*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 44. Henceforth, this book will be referred to as “*City*”.

individual to whom the just city is analogous.”<sup>216</sup> The implication here is that the constitutions of individual souls are *not* determined by internalization of cultural products.

To this point, he writes:

Timocratic, oligarchic, democratic, and tyrannical individuals do not get to be that way by virtue of having internalized the culture of timocracies, oligarchies, democracies, and tyrannies. We are certainly given an account of how their characters are formed, how they are corrupted by forces at work in their family *and in their environment*, but no connection is made thereby to the cities to which they correspond. Rather, the account runs ... in parallel to a quite separate account of how the corresponding city was formed—an account that is causally independent of the individual’s development, although analogous to it.<sup>217</sup>

Ferrari’s basic claim is that at each point in the decline, the condition of the analogous soul will be similar to that of the polity; but this is not because of any causal relationship. Yet he clearly admits that the character of the individual is formed by forces in their environment. I cannot see what this “environment” can be other than those very customs, opinions, norms, beliefs, etc. that are in common circulation—those “cultural products” which shape and permeate the soul. Furthermore, this environment must have an overall character (e.g., timarchic) if the polity has an overall character; and Ferrari clearly admits that the polity has a character, for that is a basic premise underlying the analogy. It follows, then, that the individual’s character is shaped, at least to some extent, by internalization.

But Ferrari’s main attack is against Lear’s notion of externalization. Specifically, he argues that Plato does not, as a rule, appeal to externalization to explain how polities are formed. Only in the case of the tyrant’s wilful moulding of the polity for his own satisfaction does the phenomenon of externalization occur; and this is, according to Ferrari, clearly marked as the exception.<sup>218</sup> Hence Ferrari argues against externalization in the cases

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<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52, italics added.

<sup>218</sup> Ferrari, *City*, p. 53.

of the timarchy, the oligarchy, the democracy, and in the ideal aristocracy. I will attempt to refute each of these arguments in turn.

Reiterating his main point, Ferrari begins his first specific argument by stating that “timocracy is like a timocratic man; it does not contain timocratic men, nor was it made by timocratic men. That is, the city-soul analogy makes no determination on these matters.”<sup>219</sup> If we look closely at the descriptions of the timocratic man and of the member of the ruling class in the timarchy, we will see, according to Ferrari, that they are not the same.

To begin, Ferrari claims that the rulers of the timocracy and the analogous timocratic man come about for different reasons, and that the divergent causes of degeneration in each case are reflected in their different attitudes towards money.<sup>220</sup> The degeneration of the philosophical ruling class into the timocratic rulers is due to a compromise between the intellectual values of the former and the commercial values of the productive class.<sup>221</sup> The compromise which brings about the timocratic man, however, is between his father’s lack of interest in the political life and his mother’s hope that he will be more powerful than his father.<sup>222</sup> While these are indeed different compromises, my response is that the two are necessarily related. Consider the fact that the cause of timocratic ruler’s degeneration is not continuous over many generations—that is, the fall from the aristocracy and the compromise happen once. If we then ask what happens to the second generation of timocratic rulers, we can see that it is precisely the description given of the timocratic son: his father (the first generation of timocratic rulers) still has intellectual leanings, as he was part of the original compromise; but his mother now senses the competitiveness and power differentials that have emerged as a result of the

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<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66-70.

<sup>221</sup> *Republic*, 547b-e.

<sup>222</sup> *Republic*, 549c-550b.

privatization of land. So the timocratic ruler's son—who I'm claiming is the same as the timocratic man—has two pressures which are internalized through his parents—a point which Ferrari admits. But these pressures are a direct result of what has happened in the political realm. To distinguish the two, Ferrari claims that the timocratic man, as opposed to the ruling class of the timocracy, “has no history of doing without private property. The result is that at no period of his life does he need to be furtive with money and stow it in his private nest; still less does greed lead him to break the law.”<sup>223</sup> But only the first generation of rulers in the timocracy have such a history of communal life; clearly the timocracy does not come about from a degradation from the ideal *every generation*. It would only be in that absurd case that Ferrari's point would hold. After the first generation, neither the member of the ruling class of the timocracy nor the timocratic man has such a history—for they are the same person. That the ruler of the timocracy is furtive with his money is the result of the fact that Plato is describing the first generation: he does still have this history and is therefore ashamed of his commercial inclinations. However, being raised in the privacy of this father's household, his son does not share his shame, as he sees money being amassed and used lavishly all the time.<sup>224</sup> As the predominant public values of honour and victory have now been established, the son is initially contemptuous of his father's private financial interests; but as he grows older, he begins to understand the attraction.<sup>225</sup> So the difference in their respective attitudes toward their money is simply a result of generational change. The lack of sensitivity to this intergenerational dynamic is precisely what Lear is working against when he emphasizes the need to understand the situation dynamically or dialectically, as he puts it.

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<sup>223</sup> Ferrari, *City*, p. 67.

<sup>224</sup> *Republic*, 548a-b.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 547d.

Next, Ferrari attempts to distinguish the ruler of the timocracy from the timocratic man by claiming that “militarism is not [the timocratic man’s] defining quality,” regarding him instead as a “huntin’ shootin’ fishin’ type.”<sup>226</sup> But the fact that hunting is not explicitly mentioned in the description of the life of the timocratic rulers does not necessarily imply that it is absent. Hunting is merely the leisurely expression of war; the fact that the timocratic man might live a complacent and uncomplicated life (as Ferrari claims)<sup>227</sup> is only a result of living in times of peace. As *Laws I* makes quite clear, the life structured around war will be characterized as such at all levels of organization: from inter-political to intra-political to relations between men, to relations between parts of the soul.<sup>228</sup> Presumably, the principle of war extends to relations with other animals too; therefore hunting would likely be part of the timocratic ruler’s training and leisure.

Finally, Ferrari claims that though it may seem that externalization is occurring in the case of the timarchy (since the ruling class is presumably made up of spirited men), Plato supposedly “diffuses [this bombshell] in broad daylight” by showing that “not every spirited person is ‘timocratic man’.”<sup>229</sup> Though hard to make out, the argument, I believe, is that there may be spirited men whose souls are not analogous to the timocratic polity as a whole. If so, then the rulers of the timocracy may be spirited, but not necessarily have the analogous constitution which the timocratic man has. Ferrari points out that Glaucon is suggested by Adeimantus as a good candidate for a timocratic man insofar as he is a lover of victory; yet Glaucon lacks the stubbornness and is too cultured to be either a timocratic man or like the rulers of the timocracy. Frankly, I do not see how this point diffuses the

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<sup>226</sup> Ferrari, *City*, p. 68.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>228</sup> *Laws*, 626c-e. This principle is not rigorously argued for by Plato, nor is it explained how the manifestations of the principle with the various levels of organization are related. As a hypothesis, though, I find it compelling and deserving of more attention than I can give it here.

<sup>229</sup> Ferrari, *City*, p. 69.

issue at all. Glaucon is an Athenian, after all; he displays one of the many colours present in the democracy. He represents what the spirited part of the democracy looks like—not what a timocratic man or a ruler of the timocracy looks like. That would be a Spartan. So Ferrari’s point that not all spirited men are necessarily timocratic may well be true; but this just goes to show that members of the spirited element in the democracy (e.g., Glaucon) have a different character than the spirited element in the timocracy.

Turning to Ferrari’s argument against externalization in the oligarchy,<sup>230</sup> he again claims that the rulers in the oligarchy are distinct from what is called an oligarchic man; for the former includes the idle and spendthrift, yet the latter is a hard-working miser.<sup>231</sup> Clearly one cannot be both. But again, Ferrari’s analysis is lacking an appreciation of the dynamic that occurs in time. The idle rich, who are included in the ruling class in the oligarchy, are the offspring of the hard-working misers: the miserliness produces wealth which the younger generation inherits. Ferrari himself notes of the oligarchic rulers that “their luxurious households and the children that they have accustomed to a permissive lifestyle are a cause of their downfall (556b), a situation that stands in complete contrast to the pinched and illiberal upbringing from which the son of the oligarchic man will escape (558d, 559d).”<sup>232</sup> Yet in the oligarchy, one must have money to rule; hence, initially, the specifically oligarchic man (as opposed to the first timocratic-*cum*-oligarchic man, who has inherited his wealth) will externalize the values of hard work and parsimony. The fact that this value degenerates due to the successful accumulation of wealth—that is, the fact that it is self-defeating and produces the idle rich (who still rule due to

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<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 70-3.

<sup>231</sup> *Republic*, 552b; 554a.

<sup>232</sup> Ferrari, *City*, p. 71.

their wealth)—is precisely Plato’s point in the decline of constitutions. That “not every money-lover has the character of the oligarchic man”<sup>233</sup> is again quite true; the wealthy “drones” that are produced are the proto-democratic characters—i.e., the ones who no longer need to show any discipline with respect to their unnecessary desires. Again, then, the difference that Ferrari is describing reflects a difference in time span or generation: the oligarchic man does indeed externalize his values for a period of time; but these are unsustainable (for the amassing of wealth leads to laziness in the younger generation of rulers) and give rise to (oligarchic) rulers who no longer adhere to those values, but rather to the emerging democratic ones. So there may indeed be rulers in the oligarchy that are not oligarchic in character; but such a phenomenon indicates the fluidity of the whole decline—not the supposed fact that the decline of the polity and the decline of the individual soul are on “different tracks”.<sup>234</sup>

To distinguish the citizens (i.e., rulers) in the democracy from the democratic man, Ferrari claims that the democratic man is “consistently inconsistent, passionately committed to being flighty; [yet] this is not at all the kind of freedom that the citizens of the democracy are passionate about.”<sup>235</sup> The latter freedom is, rather, about being unfettered by civic obligations.<sup>236</sup> “When citizens insist too much on their civic freedom,” writes Ferrari, “it is their city that becomes anarchic; but when it is each desire within one man that must be free, the anarchy will reign in his soul, not his city.”<sup>237</sup> Yet, to respond, the anarchic city is precisely the condition that is necessary for the anarchic soul to satisfy his desires. That

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<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, p.71.

<sup>234</sup> Ferrari, *City.*, p. 60.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

is, the democratic man is interested in having as few restrictions on his life so as to be able to do what he pleases, whatever that may be.<sup>238</sup> Hence, the paucity of civic obligations is the most sensible externalization of the rule of the unnecessary appetites in the democratic soul.

Finally, Ferrari argues that even in the case of the philosopher-king's legislation, there is still no externalization going on. He writes:

When the rulers of Callipolis regulate their city, they do so according to a pattern that is also found in their own souls. But here is the crucial point: it is not to their own souls that the rulers of Callipolis look when they regulate their city. They look to the forms directly, and regulate the city after that pattern, just as they look to that pattern to regulate their own souls (484c, 500d, 501b). No externalization is involved. Philosophers do not serve up to the city the rational order of the forms that they have cooked in their souls.<sup>239</sup>

It is good that Ferrari makes this point; indeed, the basis of the ideal polity is not the subjectivity of the philosopher-king as it is with the tyrant. And indeed, the use of the term “externalization” makes it sound like the city is the result only of externalizations of subjective idiosyncrasies. But Ferrari seems to have an inaccurate view of the forms,<sup>240</sup> for he takes the content of the soul and the forms themselves to be mutually exclusive. However, the forms are both transcendent and within; since the soul has “seen” them and retains a memory of them, its ascent to the forms is also an inward discovery, as the theory of recollection emphasizes. Hence the regulation of the city according to the forms is indeed an externalization of what is within the soul—just not merely subjective opinions and desires as it is with the tyrant.

I hope that this suffices as a defence of Lear's approach. If so, then I may proceed to move from the development of the soul outlined in Chapter 2 to the history of polities in

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<sup>238</sup> See Chapter 5, section B for a further discussion of this point.

<sup>239</sup> Ferrari, *City*, pp. 101-102.

<sup>240</sup> This is actually the interpretation that Cudworth criticizes. See Part II, Chapter 3 below.

the following chapters. It seems safe to conclude that, for the ordinary citizen—i.e., one who has not been drawn out of the cave of a corrupt polity through philosophical education—the ruling principle of one’s soul indicates the ruling principle of his polity and vice versa. Indeed, this point is emphasized and clarified at the very beginning of the *Laws*, where it is argued that in a polity (such as Crete and Sparta) which is in perpetual war with other polities, the various classes will regard one another likewise as enemies, and each citizen will regard all others antagonistically. More pertinently, each man will even be his own enemy, seeking the greatest victory of all: the one over the shameful parts of himself.<sup>241</sup> Thus the *ethos* of war pervades and determines each level of organization in such a polity, from its external affairs all the way down to the parts of the citizens’ souls.<sup>242</sup> This is actually a version of Williams’ principle that a city is F if and only if its citizens are F, for the *ethos* is the same explanatory principle in the case of both the polity and the individual soul. Yet there is an amendment to the version of the principle in the *Laws*: the variable F does not refer here to timocratic, democratic, etc., but rather to the orientation towards either war or peace.

Nevertheless, the revision can still be understood with respect to the constitutions in the *Republic* if the schema proposed in Chapter 2 is adopted. My suggestion—and this will be illustrated at length in the coming chapters—is that the principles of war and peace are tantamount to the modes of immediacy (peace), self-antagonism (war) and inner reconciliation (peace). Moreover, the rule of spirit (timarchy) and of appetite (oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny) are kinds of self-antagonism, while the rule of reason is found in the ancient forms of life characterized by immediacy and in the ideal polity, which is

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<sup>241</sup> *Laws*, 626a-7a.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 626c.

internally reconciled. (The difference between the latter two concerns autonomy.) The following chart should clarify my classification; the ‘ancient’ constitution, which is the subject of Chapter 4, is not included in the *Republic* but, as I will argue, is an image of the aristocracy presented therein.

<u>Constitution</u>	<u>Governing principle</u>	<u>Mode of being</u>	<u><i>Ethos (Laws I)</i></u>
‘Ancient’	reason (heteronomously)	immediacy	peace
Aristocracy	reason (autonomous)	internally-reconciled	peace
Timarchy	spirit	self-antagonism	war
Oligarchy	appetite	self-antagonism	war
Democracy	appetite	self-antagonism	war
Tyranny	appetite	self-antagonism	war

## B. On the relation between the logic of decline and the development of the soul

Given the isomorphism and reciprocal causation between the polity and the soul, and given the logic of constitutional decline in Book VIII of the *Republic*, the question arises as to whether and how the decline is related to the intellectual development of the soul that I outlined in Chapter 2. There, to recall, I adumbrated a possible trajectory of development, marked by different modes of self-relation and corresponding manifestations of virtue: immediate, self-antagonistic, and reconciled. It is possible for this process of maturation—of self-realization through self-identification with one’s intellect—to be undertaken by an individual through the course of his lifetime, if due care and diligence is given to the task. In contrast, the decline of the soul, as it is described in the *Republic*, cannot, it seems, be undergone by a single individual. For the alteration in psychic constitution depends on the generational difference between fathers and sons and the processes of internalization and externalization. Though each phase in this decline of constitutions does characterize both the polity and the individual soul equally well, and though an individual may suffer a step in the decline, the entity which undergoes the development as a whole is the polity; we can only say that ‘the soul’, in an abstract sense, undergoes this logical-historical change. Actual, individual souls can only be a moment in the development of the constitution of the polity and the common type of soul that animates it. (This is the case, I believe, for individuals who fully belong to their world, educated in the ordinary way without independent reflection (i.e., the ordinary citizen).) It is for this reason that the Athenian in the *Laws* states that in order to change the political constitution successfully, sufficient time must pass so that individuals cannot recall the state of affairs

prior to the change.<sup>243</sup> To change the character of the whole, new citizens must be nurtured in the altered climate.

The best change that may happen, of course, is the ascension to power of a philosopher-king or the true statesman, who alone can bring salvation and security to the polity—by establishing or sustaining just laws and institutions, by governing according to knowledge of the eternal forms, and by setting an example of virtue in his own person. The emergence of such a ruler requires, in turn, the conditions for proper philosophical education in true dialectic and contemplation of the eternal, intelligible reality on which life is based, and to which it may be more closely approximated. Whether in the form of a philosophical mystery into which one is initiated, or more public education in mathematics and abstract reasoning, purely intellectual pursuits must be available in some form in the surrounding culture. (Obviously, the educational program described in the *Republic* presupposes that the ideal has already come about; otherwise, that form of education of future rulers would not be instituted.)

Yet the intellectual practices (*mathēmata*) that strengthen the power of reasoning emerge only at a certain point in the development of polities, and perhaps only in a select few. It would have been impossible, for instance, for anyone to learn geometry from others prior to its invention. Indeed, the origin of the arts and sciences is a topic revisited by Plato several times, though always in the form of myth. (Examples are the myth of Epimetheus and Prometheus in the *Protagoras*, the myth of Theuth and Thamus in the *Phaedrus*, and the myth of the reigns of Cronos and Zeus in the *Statesman*.) In a society where intellectual pursuits have not appeared, or in ones in which they are overtly shunned, there seems to be

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<sup>243</sup> 789a-b. This is also, it seems, why Moses, on the advice of Jethro, circled back through the desert for forty years before leading the people into the land. At *Laws*, 752c, this transitional time is called a ‘period of disciplined adolescence’; the polity matures only when a new generation is born into the new law.

no hope of any philosopher occurring, let alone the emergence of a philosopher-king. At best, it seems, good statesmen might arise, whose virtue is a kind of divine inspiration, but not philosophically grounded. Moreover, people with philosophical dispositions may arise, but would not be guided properly towards the truth. I will be arguing that the possibility of such intellectual practices is, for Plato, intimately related to the story of decline: as the constitution veers toward the governance of appetite, the conditions for philosophical knowledge are actually fostered—though proper philosophy itself may not fully bloom.

The account of constitutional decline clearly reflects a movement away from the principle of “nothing in excess” [ppppp]—the first of those ancient principles that were “on every tongue” in Greece, according to Plato.<sup>244</sup> Yet it presents a more ambiguous development with respect to that other principle, perhaps even more crucial to Platonic philosophy: know thyself [ppppp]. What I hope to show is that in the background of the account of decline is another account of progress in regard to the intellect and self-knowledge—albeit a particularly precarious one. The combination of the two developments is expressed by the dictum that the owl of Minerva flies at dusk. My first point here will be to show that there is substantial evidence in Plato’s dialogues to support the attribution of this notion to him.

To show this, I will first reconstruct the anthropological-historical account of actual polities which supplements the logical-historical account of the *Republic*. The latter shows, in the abstract, how the ruling principle changes as temperance decreases. What it does not show is what exactly it means for each to be the ruling principle. When the passions and appetites rule, reason is still present, but not as it ought to be, for it has been subordinated

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<sup>244</sup> *Protagoras*, 343b. Cf. *Hipparchus*, 228e.

to another master.<sup>245</sup> What we don't see in the *Republic* account is what shape or form the intellect has under these dominions, and what the nature of its productions is. The historical account does, however, allow us to characterize the intellect and its development through this decline. To jump ahead for a moment to later chapters, what I will show is that modern Athens (i.e., Athens of Plato's time, as opposed to the Athens of the "ancient tales") is an *akratic* constitution, as opposed to Sparta, the *enkratic*. In Athens we see the actuality of the governance of appetite and its effects or manifestation in the intellect as instrumental reason, typified by sophism. That is, the history of Athens presents the logic of decline in a polity that has an intellectual proclivity. At the point where democracy may fall into tyranny or perhaps be rescued by the appearance of a philosopher-king, the salvation of both the individual soul and the polity turns on an ambivalence with regard to the practices of knowledge: depending on how they are conducted, they may exacerbate or ameliorate the problem.<sup>246</sup> The true attainment of knowledge is, for Plato, not simply an ability to handle persuasive arguments, but rather a recollection of what the soul supposedly knew before its embodiment, as is described in the *Phaedrus* and *Meno*. More concretely, though, I will argue that true knowledge also consists of an historical retrieval and explication of the underlying wisdom that established and sustains the polity. Hence, whereas the soul may undergo a development of reflective self-consciousness whereby its true self is recovered through the recollection of forms, the polity may also undergo a process of self-conscious recollection of its essence. I will conclude by explaining this historical process with reference to the unchanging idea of virtue as its principle of change, seeing that, for Plato, the intelligible must be at the basis of all sensuous reality, including

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<sup>245</sup> *Protagoras*, 352b-c.

<sup>246</sup> Intellectual practices are thus being classified here as "dependent goods", as in Bobonich's analysis of goods (*Utopia*, p. 126).

history.

### C. The decline of the polity

i) From the historicized logic of the *Republic* to the logic of history in the *Timaeus-Critias*.

The accounts of the formation of the ideal polity and its decline into tyranny in the *Republic* are not to be taken as historical fact. The accounts function, rather, in much the same way that arguments concerning the state of nature do: the consequent states of affairs follow primarily in a logical way; that they occurred in the world is only a possibility and conjecture. Indeed, in the *Laws*, it is written that all sorts of political changes have taken place in the long (or perhaps infinite) course of history,<sup>247</sup> and that thousands of actual polities do not even fit neatly into the categories used in the *Republic* in the first place (e.g., of ‘timarchy’, ‘oligarchy’, etc.).<sup>248</sup>

Nevertheless, it appears that there have been, according to Plato, significant cases in history that do generally follow the logic of decline in the *Republic*, despite the difficulty in squaring the histories with the abstract categories. (This is likely an inherent problem of trying to understand a sensuous, temporal image of the real intelligible entity: the account of the former cannot be fully rational because it includes an element of ‘non-being’.) The logic itself is quite evident, and may be stated simply: the decline from the ideal state to tyranny—through timarchy, oligarchy, and democracy—occurs due to a change in the

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<sup>247</sup> *Laws*, 676b-c; 781e.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 712d-e; 782a. Cf. *Republic* 544d. Of course, the actual polities would not fit exactly into the categories of the *Statesman* either.

governing principle from the higher to the lower powers of the soul and polity. The ideal constitution is the governance of reason; the second best (timarchy) is the governance of *thumos*; third (oligarchy) is the governance of necessary appetites; followed by the governance of all appetites equalized (democracy); and finally, the governance of excessive, unnecessary appetites (tyranny). Yet considering that the timarchy is taken to be a ‘compromise’ between the governance of reason and of appetite,<sup>249</sup> and that the lower three constitutions are all forms of the latter, the decline appears to consist of the decrease in control over the appetites by reason. In other words, the decline is from temperance to intemperance. The overall movement is thus clearly evident in the polar contrast drawn between the philosopher and the tyrant. The several virtues are unified in the constitution of the philosopher-king and the polity he governs. As a unity, it can be described from the perspective of each particular virtue, and perhaps best as *sophrosune*, which is *courage* in regard to the appetites,<sup>250</sup> and *knowledge* of one’s limits,<sup>251</sup> and the apportionment of what is properly due to each of the appetites (i.e., *justice*).<sup>252</sup> Whereas the philosopher possesses *sophrosune* in the fullest sense possible for a human, the tyrant suffers from extreme *akolasia*, or self-enslavement to his own desires; this renders him “envious, faithless, unjust, friendless, impious, a vessel and nurse of all iniquity, and so in consequence . . . the most unhappy. . . .”<sup>253</sup>

The more indulgent the polity gets, the more prominent becomes the desire for wealth, since that is the enabling condition for the satisfaction of desires. Furthermore, the greater the present wealth, the more tempting it is to fuel the desires. And, as is claimed in

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<sup>249</sup> *Republic*, 547b; 550b. This point will be clarified in Chapter 4.

<sup>250</sup> *Laws*, 626e.

<sup>251</sup> See the discussion of the *Charmides*’ definitions in Chapter 1, § C.

<sup>252</sup> Slightly different is the claim that *sophrosune* accompanies all virtue (*Laws*, 709e-10a).

<sup>253</sup> *Republic*, 577d; 580a. The opposites of this list are all considered to be the highest aim of the best state in the *Laws*. See introduction to Chapter 6 below.

the *Laws*, wealth, along with poverty, incites “the growth of insolence and injustice, of rivalries and jealousies.”<sup>254</sup> The accumulation of wealth is an instigator of decay in a polity because it creates a heavier burden under which the citizens must practice moderation; but the inclination of the masses is precisely the opposite: they “desire without limit” and will always take more than is necessary if given the opportunity.<sup>255</sup> Thus, for example, the money saved through the frugality of the oligarchic father is what enables his democratic son to pursue all of his desires.<sup>256</sup> As the Athenian states in the *Laws*, “it is impossible to be at once both good and excessively rich.”<sup>257</sup>

The problem with wealth, however, is that it comes to those states which are virtuous.<sup>258</sup> For the greater the virtue (so the argument goes), the greater the success in war, and therefore the greater the accumulation of wealth. This paradox, where the consequence of virtue makes the continued practice of virtue more difficult, is the theme of the historical section of the *Timaeus* and of the *Critias*, which, I will argue, ultimately depict the decline of Athens.

## ii) The decline of Atlantis and the decline of Athens

The *Timaeus* and *Critias* are presented as continuous in content with a large part of the *Republic*. Timaeus, Critias and Hermocrates have just heard about the ideal polity from Socrates the day before and ask him for a brief recapitulation. Socrates obliges by repeating the basic points from Books II to V of the *Republic*.<sup>259</sup> These characters respond

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<sup>254</sup> *Laws*, 679b-c.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 918d.

<sup>256</sup> *Republic*, 561a.

<sup>257</sup> *Laws*, 742e. Cf. *Matthew*, 19:23.

<sup>258</sup> *Critias*, 121a. Cf. *Apology*, 30b.

<sup>259</sup> *Timaeus* 17c-9b.

with gratitude and offer their own “feasts of words”, ones that are most appropriate to what Socrates has just argued.<sup>260</sup> For Critias claims that Socrates’ account was remarkably similar to the description he had heard in his childhood about ancient Athens nine thousand years prior, one that Solon supposedly learned from a priest in Egypt and related to Critias’ grandfather.<sup>261</sup> Hence the story of ancient Athens serves beautifully to supplement the abstract account of the ideal polity by showing it *in action*, which Socrates admits he cannot do.<sup>262</sup> Before telling the story, though, the characters agree that Timaeus ought to make his contribution by accounting for the origin of the cosmos by the demiurge, up to the formation of humans. Once this natural history has been completed, Critias picks up the thread in the next dialogue and begins his civic history of ancient Athens, which succeeded in fending off the imperial advances of Atlantis through the Mediterranean. The dialogue is cut short, however, and we do not at all see the speech that Hermocrates was supposed to give following Critias.<sup>263</sup>

Before looking at the historical content, it should be noted that the account of Athens and Atlantis is not taken very seriously by scholars as real history.<sup>264</sup> Most contemporary readers would interpret the *Critias*—and perhaps even the whole of the *Timaeus*—as mythical accounts, in contrast to the logical construction of the *Republic*. Being more philosophical insofar as it deals with abstract types in a rational manner, the content of the *Republic* would at least qualify for possibly bearing truth. However, there is

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<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 25e.

<sup>261</sup> *Timaeus*, 20d-e; 21e-2a.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 19b. It should be noted here that, according to the *Protagoras*, Socrates’ “memory”—i.e., knowledge of the past—only goes as far back as Thales and Solon, both of whom were admirers of the Spartans (343a). My suggestion, which will become clearer by Chapter 7, is that the Athenians still need their memory extended back further than the timarchic past.

<sup>263</sup> *Critias*, 108a.

<sup>264</sup> See, for example, Luc Brisson (1970), “De la philosophie politique à l’épopée. Le *Critias* de Platon.” *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 75: 402-438; and Christopher Gill (1977), “The Genre of the Atlantis Story.” *Classical Philology* 72: 287-304.

reason to believe that, for Plato, the historical account is to be taken seriously, even if it is not totally accurate.<sup>265</sup> The abstract account given by Socrates is referred to, surprisingly enough, as a ‘*muthos*’, and is opposed to factual truth.<sup>266</sup> In the *Timaeus*, Critias says:

The city with its citizens which you described to us yesterday, as it were in a fable (ἀστυμύθος), we will now transport hither into the realm of fact [truth] (ἀστυμύθος); for we shall assume that the city is that ancient city of ours, and declare that the citizens you conceived are in truth those actual progenitors of ours (τῶν ἀστυμύθων). . . .<sup>267</sup>

his *muthos*-like account of Socrates is contrasted with Critias’ true account [-----]. (Timaeus, meanwhile, is called a ‘poet’ by Socrates.)<sup>268</sup> It may be objected that this is Critias speaking, and that Critias must have the typically wrong idea of truth as fact in the realm of the changing world. However, after Critias himself casts some doubt as to whether his account is “to our mind” [www], Socrates also draws the same contrast:

What story [What implied from previous line] should we adopt, Critias, in preference to this [i.e., of Solon’s]? For this story [in pr again] will be admirably suited to the festival of the Goddess which is now being held, because of its connexion with her; and the fact that it is no invented fable but genuine history is all-important

[[ [ . . . . . ]].<sup>269</sup>

The consistent contrast between *muthos* and *logos alēthes* here suggests that the *Republic*-like account of a constructed ideal is ‘mythic’ as opposed to an account which claims to be

<sup>265</sup> Gerard Naddaf has argued that, though Plato’s story is fictional, it is still intended to be taken seriously as a prelude to the *Laws*. See Gerard Naddaf (1994), “The Atlantis Myth: An Introduction to Plato’s Later Philosophy of History,” *Phoenix* 48(3): 189-209.

<sup>266</sup> *Timaeus*, 26c.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 26c-d.

<sup>268</sup> *Critias*, 108b. Catalin Partenie (2009) has provided a useful categorization of all of Plato’s use of the term ‘*muthos*’. See his “Introduction” in *Plato’s Myths* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 1-21. For a fuller analysis of the use of the term ‘*muthos*’ in the context of the *Timaeus-Critias*, and particularly in regard to Timaeus’ account being called an *eikōs muthos*, see Myles Burnyeat (2009), “*Eikōs muthos*,” in *Plato’s Myths*, ed. Catalin Partenie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 167-186. The terms ‘*muthos*’ and ‘*logos*’ are interchanged at times here because Timaeus’ account is *eikōs muthos*, which, according to Burnyeat, indicates a reasoned cosmogony that is also a theogony, and can therefore only be a probable account. The account is therefore likened to exegesis of an oracle, since the subject matter is divine, and requires special skill.

<sup>269</sup> *Timaeus*, 26d-e.

historical fact. My point here is not to dismiss abstract reasoning (and hence, dialectic) as merely imaginary; this would be an absurd position to attribute to Plato. I simply want to show that there is some reason to take the history seriously. Admittedly, it is reasonable enough to doubt the veracity of any account of Atlantis. Yet even if we suspend belief about its accuracy, the dialogue is still worth considering, since, as I will show, the history of Atlantis parallels that of Athens. In other words, we can gather some of Plato's interpretation of Athenian history through the parallel with Atlantis.

While giving an overview of Solon's account, Critias exclaims that he " marvelled as [he] called to mind the facts [he] is now relating, reflecting what a strange piece of fortune it was [ffffff] that [Socrates'] description coincided so exactly for the most part with Solon's account."<sup>270</sup> Along with the passage quoted just above (about it being an "all-important genuine history"), this is a striking point, since it makes the claim that the ideal polity has actually existed on earth, but that none of the Greeks—who are a comparatively young people<sup>271</sup>—know of it; only the ancient Egyptian records kept by its priests could reveal this. The Greeks are considered young here by virtue of the fact that they do not know their history. The Egyptians, by contrast, are 'old souls' in that they are aware of the past that has been experienced in their state, that past which informs their present ways of living, attitudes, beliefs, etc. It is the accumulation of collective experience that determines the 'age' of the people here. Not only is this evidence that there are national characters which have their own historical development beyond the history of individuals; what it also shows is that the Athenians do not comprehend their mode of life as a result of vast historical changes.<sup>272</sup> As will be discussed in later chapters, the retrieval

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<sup>270</sup> *Timaeus*, 25e.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 22b.

<sup>272</sup> This lack of historical self-understanding on part of Athenians is perhaps represented in the *Menexenus* eulogy, where it is claimed, contra Solon's account, that Athens has always been as it is now, more or less

of their history—i.e., their maturation in the sense used by the Egyptian priest—is of vital importance if philosophy is to save them from ruin.

Though Socrates does not say anything about this matter, he is still thrilled upon hearing of Solon’s account, since it satisfies his wish to hear a depiction of the actual life of this beautiful ideal state, to conjure up the manifestation of its virtue in its dealings with other states, which he admits he—along with the poets and the sophists—is unable to do.<sup>273</sup> Ancient Athens’ ability to stave off the powerful Atlantis provides this evidence of a virtuous constitution. (The same notion that military success is evidence of a virtuous state also underlies the eulogy of Athens in the *Menexenus*.)

Yet it is not only ancient Athens that approximated the ideal polity so closely; as Solon’s account reveals, Atlantis also did at its inception:

For many generations, so long as the inherited nature of the God [F or m] remained strong in them [the people of Atlantis], they were submissive to the laws and kindly disposed to their divine kindred [i.e., ancestors]. For the intents of their hearts were true and in all ways noble, and they showed gentleness joined with wisdom in dealing with the changes and chances of life and in their dealings with one another. Consequently, they thought scorn of everything save virtue and lightly esteemed their rich possessions, bearing with ease the burden, as it were, of the vast volume of their gold and other goods; and thus their wealth did not make them drunk with pride so that they lost control of themselves and went to ruin; rather, in their soberness of mind they clearly saw that all these good things are increased by general amity combined with virtue, whereas the eager pursuit of and worship of these goods not only causes the goods themselves to diminish but makes virtue also to perish with them.<sup>274</sup>

The reason for this prosperity and virtue in both Atlantis and Athens is that both had gods as their founders.<sup>275</sup> That is, virtue and wisdom are ‘planted’ by the gods into the earth, as it were.<sup>276</sup> We therefore have two instances of the earthly appearance of the ideal—or at least

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(238c-d).

<sup>273</sup> *Timaeus*, 19b-e.

<sup>274</sup> *Critias*, 120e-1a.

<sup>275</sup> *Timaeus*, 24c (Athena founds Athens); *Critias*, 113c (Poseidon founds Atlantis).

<sup>276</sup> *Critias*, 109d. The same seed is then disseminated from soul to soul through philosophical *eros* (*Phaedrus*, 276e-7a).

remarkably similar approximation of the ideal—in ancient Athens and in ancient Atlantis. Solon’s story is that Atlantis began as a perfectly virtuous, self-sufficient, happy, and even fairly wealthy state. Yet as time went by, it lost its “divine apportionment” [fffff]<sup>277</sup>—which is to say its *sophrosune*—and was no longer able to resist its own capacity to indulge in lust and luxury. It thus set out from its own secluded island and conquered much of the Mediterranean.<sup>278</sup> Zeus then congregated the gods and decided upon a just punishment for this greedy imperialism. Though the dialogue ends just before Zeus’ pronouncement, it is clear enough that the punishment was the defeat of Atlantis by Athens. Atlantis thus began as a (nearly) perfect state and was eventually ruined by its inability to be temperate in the face of increasing wealth.

It should be noted that, despite repeated anticipation of Hermocrates’ discourse, which was to follow after Critias’, it is omitted. Though it is impossible, of course, to say what the content of this discourse would have been, it is not difficult to surmise. For Hermocrates, whose name is mentioned only in this context within Plato’s dialogues, was a Sicilian general who was instrumental in bringing about Athens’ defeat by the Spartans at Syracuse, thus bringing an end to the Peloponnesian War and setting up the Thirty Tyrants in Athens (including Critias).<sup>279</sup> As is related by Plutarch, by the time of Pericles, the oligarchy in Athens had become a full democracy, and the seeds were sown for the ensuing tyranny. Plutarch writes:

One of these [who ushered in full democracy], they say, was Ephialtes, who destroyed the power of the Council of the Areopagus and in this way, as Plato the philosopher puts it, poured out neat a full draught of freedom for the people

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<sup>277</sup> *Critias*, 121a.

<sup>278</sup> Cf. *Phaedo*, 66c, where Socrates argues that war is caused by the body and its desires. On this point in relation to the history of Athens in the *Menexenus*, see Dombrowski, *Philosophy of History*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>279</sup> One cannot say with certainty, though, that the character of Critias in the dialogues is the same as Plato’s uncle and one of the Thirty Tyrants. The point was, according to Dombrowski, “debated to death” by Karl Popper and Ronald Levinson in the 1950 (*Philosophy of History*, p. 19).

and made them unmanageable, so that they ‘nibbled at Euboea and trampled on the islands, like a horse which can no longer bear to obey the rein.’<sup>280</sup>

The explicit allusion about the draught of freedom is to *Republic* 562c; of course, the other allusion is to the ‘bad horse’ of the *Phaedrus*, namely the appetites.<sup>281</sup> Like Atlantis, the unbridled appetites led Athens to seek more wealth and power throughout the Mediterranean. Cornford therefore remarks that

[i]t is curious to reflect that, while Critias is to recount how the prehistoric Athens of nine thousand years ago had repelled the invasion from Atlantis and saved the Mediterranean peoples from slavery, Hermocrates would be remembered by the Athenians as the man who had repulsed their own greatest effort at imperialist expansion.<sup>282</sup>

The message is clear enough: just as Atlantis fell from grace due to the intemperance of imperialism, so too has Athens.<sup>283</sup> The significance of the *Critias* appears to be, then, that Athens has fallen from its original glory and suffered the decline toward tyranny according to the same general principle of diminishing moderation.<sup>284</sup>

iii) Athens as the focal point of Greek conflict

The loss of Athens, it ought to be remarked, is to Sparta, whose citizens consistently exemplify the greatest self-control throughout Plato’s dialogues. In both the case of the war between ancient Athens and Atlantis, and that between Sparta and modern Athens, the conflict is essentially between continence and incontinence, and continence wins.

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<sup>280</sup> *Plutarch*, “Life of Pericles,” in *The Rise and Fall of Athens*, transl. Ian Scott Kilvert (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 172.

<sup>281</sup> *Phaedrus*, 246a-b.

<sup>282</sup> Cornford, F. M. *Plato's Cosmology*, (London: Lund Humphries, 1937), p. 2.

<sup>283</sup> In *Plato's Cretan City: a Historical Interpretation of Plato's Laws*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), Glenn Morrow writes: “...[T]he *Laws* shows that Plato thought the Athenians of his own day had departed from the moderation that characterized their ancestors.” (p. 86) Morrow goes on to cite the *Gorgias*, *Republic*, *Crito*, and the *Menexenus* in making this point (pp. 86-92). Henceforth, “*Cretan City*”.

<sup>284</sup> Dombrowski takes this to be evident in the *Menexenus*. Plato, he argues, is commenting that Athens defeated itself in the Peloponnesian War, perhaps due to moral failure (*Philosophy of History*, p. 28). Indeed, that the speech in the *Menexenus* ends with an exhortation to virtue, including the Delphic saying “Nothing in excess” (247e), suggests that it is moderation that became increasingly lacking in Athens.

Furthermore, the same conflict is evident in the Persian War. In *Laws* III, we are told that in the time of its attempted conquest of Greece, Persia had sunk into extreme enslavement of the masses due to the rulers' indulgence in luxury and honouring of wealth. In fact, we see here a clear example of the paradox mentioned above: both in the case of Cyrus and Darius, their own virtue and moderation led them to victorious conquests and great wealth. Yet their sons, Cambyses and Xerxes respectively, were poorly educated because they were raised in luxury.<sup>285</sup> Under these spoiled rulers—the greedy and proud imperialists who enslaved everyone, according to the *Menexenus*,<sup>286</sup>—the enormously powerful and wealthy Persians fell to the much smaller, though well-disciplined and valiant Athenians, who were still under the “ancient constitution” at the time.<sup>287</sup> That is, Athens had not yet become a full-fledged democracy, since the populace (*demos*) had no control over anything, but willingly enslaved itself to Solon's laws.<sup>288</sup> Even when the civil war erupts in Athens itself, it seems that the two sides—i.e., the Spartan sympathizers and the democrats—can be represented by the principles of continence and incontinence.<sup>289</sup>

There are thus three important points concerning these conflicts involving Athens, ancient and modern. The first is that, according to Plato's dialogues, the principle of conflict in Greek history—in the (perhaps fictional) war with Atlantis, the Persian War, the Peloponnesian War, and, it seems, the Athenian civil war—is the struggle between *enkrateia* and *akrasia*, which are embodied in distinct polities or factions.

The second point is that Athens serves as a temporal link between the two sides of this conflict, since it is explicitly claimed that ancient Athens is continuous in customs and

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<sup>285</sup> *Laws*, 694d; 695d.

<sup>286</sup> *Menexenus*, 240a,d.

<sup>287</sup> *Laws*, 698b. Morrow (1960) claims that the Athenian defeat of Atlantis “is obviously but a prehistorical replica of the Athenian victory over the Athenians, a matter of vivid historical memory.” (p. 91)

<sup>288</sup> *Laws*, 700a.

<sup>289</sup> See *Protagoras*, 342c, where “the followers of the Spartan cult in our cities” is mentioned.

character with modern Athens.<sup>290</sup> In Plato's scattered history of Athens, we therefore have four phases represented: the initial phase of its divine inception, which, like the original Atlantis, was self-sufficient, peaceful and temperate. This phase is the *sophronic* state. Next comes the dominion of *philonikia*, the desire for glory and honour, which manifests itself in imperial expansion. This is the *enkratic* phase. The third, caused by prolonged expansion, is the degradation into the pursuit of wealth; this is the *akratic* phase. Finally, defeat comes at the hands of the more virtuous state, and tyranny ensues. This is the phase of *akolasia*—i.e., the complete, though infinitely unsatisfied indulgence of the appetites and of the ego without scruple. In the history of Athens, we therefore have a concrete example of the declining constitution which roughly follows the logic of the *Republic*.

The third point with regard to these conflicts concerns the difference between Athens and Atlantis. The descriptions of their establishment by the gods is quite similar; yet Athena founds Athens, and Poseidon Atlantis. The significance of the patron deities is, I believe, that Athena is the goddess of wisdom (who, according to Homer, battled Poseidon over Athens). Poseidon does not seem to be a particularly rational god, as he is the god of the sea and of earthquake; his domain is not the mind, as is Athena's. Right from its inceptions, Athens is thus distinguished as an intellectual polity. In the *Minos*, it is mentioned that tragic poetry was coeval with its inception,<sup>291</sup> and it clearly becomes the centre of Greek intellectual life by the time of Pericles. As was mentioned above, the "love of knowledge" characterizes Athens;<sup>292</sup> hence Athens is called the "sanctuary of wisdom" in the *Protagoras*.<sup>293</sup> Adding this third point (Athenian intellectuality) to the second (its continuity through four phases), we see that Athenian history is a presentation of the

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<sup>290</sup> *Timaeus*, 23b; *Menexenus*, 238c-d.

<sup>291</sup> *Minos*, 320e-1a.

<sup>292</sup> *Republic*, 435d-e.

<sup>293</sup> *Protagoras*, 337d.

decline of *sophrosune* in an intellectual state. It therefore lends itself to a characterization of the concurrent changes in the nature and use of the intellect, which I will now proceed to show.

A point of clarification in my method is necessary. What I am ultimately trying to illustrate is the progression of the intellect throughout the declining state, of which Athens is the outstanding example. Yet the Athens that Plato speaks of is only the ancient Athens in the age of Cronos and modern Athens of his own time. The exception is the military history of Athens in the *Menexenus*, which is not particularly useful for characterizing its intellectual history. The intellectual development in the interim must therefore be inferred by observing the intellect in other polities. In particular, Sparta and Crete can be substituted for Athens at the timarchic phase of its decline; while the ideal state in both the *Republic* and the *Laws* can be substituted for the desired end-point of the intellectual development in Athens. Again, the point here is to get a sense of the overall development of the intellect in relation to the decrease in temperance. The actual history of Athens is therefore only of secondary interest; yet that it undergoes these changes—however approximately that may be—is an important fact, since it locates the development that I am outlining in actual history and not merely in a logical-historical space, as in the *Republic*.

Finally, a point of terminological clarification is also in order. I will be using the terms *enkrateia* and *sophrosune* quite deliberately here. The difference is that in *sophrosune* (as was discussed in Chapter 2), there is peace and harmony in the soul (and therefore in the polity), while *enkrateia* implies the principle of war or antagonism, where the spirit of victory triumphs over one's appetites. The reason, for example, why I use *enkrateia* to describe the Spartan side of the Peloponnesian War is that, as a timarchy, it is a polity in which masters rule over slaves (the Helots), and in which the passions rule over

the appetites in the souls of the masters. The other side (Athens) is the opposite, namely *akrateia*, where the lower classes rule (in democracy) and the appetites govern the soul. The conflict is not between *sophrosune* and *akolasia*, since there is no internal division in either of the latter. Indeed, it is precisely because Athens is internally divided that one faction can be pro-Spartan. But in neither of the contending sides does reason govern; neither therefore embodies *sophrosune*. As will slowly become evident, aspects of each the *enkratic* and the *akratic* constitutions are recombined in the virtuous governance of reason.

## Introduction to Chapters 4-7: The development of the intellect in specific polities

My purpose will now be to describe the character of the intellect at the four phases of the polity's decline, and show that the same development occurs here as it did in the individual soul as outlined in Chapter 2. Generally speaking, the phases of intellectual development were the phases of immediacy (as found in case of simple *sophrosune*); of self-division and agony (as found in the case of *enkrateia*, struggling against *akrasia*); of inner reconciliation without objective knowledge (as found in the case of Socrates—i.e., the embodied ideal and his philosophical *sophrosune*); and of reconciliation with objective knowledge (i.e., the disembodied ideal of wisdom). Within Plato's dialogues, the isomorphism between the psychical and the political in this regard is as follows. The phase of immediacy is represented in the notion of the 'Reign of Cronos', a very ancient, paternalistic form of society characterized by peace, moderation, simplicity, and a lack of arts and sciences. The phase of self-division is represented, on the one hand—the *enkratic*—by Sparta and Crete, and on the other—the *akratic*—by modern Athens. The former are dominions of passion, characterized by strict regimentation and education, but fear and avoidance of independent intellectual practices. The latter is the dominion of the appetites, characterized by dissemblance and the excessive use of the intellect for private gain. The phase of reconciliation without objective knowledge (i.e., the 'embodied ideal') is represented by the future citizens of Magnesia, which is the colony that the Athenian, Cretan and Spartan are collectively legislating for in the *Laws*. These citizens are persuaded by right reason, indicating that they have overcome the importunity of the lower parts of the soul and attained intellectual temperance (*sophrosune* as presence of mind). Finally, the phase of reconciliation with objective knowledge (i.e., the 'disembodied ideal')

is represented by the various discussions of the ‘divine ruler’: the philosopher-king of the ideal state, the lawgiver (and the synod) in Magnesia, and the proper statesman as discussed in the *Statesman*—all of whom represent the same ideal of the governance of philosophical wisdom.

## Chapter 4 - Immediacy in the Reign of Cronos and the first polities

### Introduction

Plato's accounts of the earliest human history are found primarily in the anthropological account in Book III of the *Laws*, and in the myths of the *Statesman*, Book IV of the *Laws*, and the *Critias*. (Though of uncertain authorship, the *Menexenus* is also pertinent.) Like all of Plato's myths, these latter mythical passages clearly require a different hermeneutic approach than the rest of the dialogues, and there has been much debate concerning the appropriate take.<sup>294</sup> As there are explicit comments within the dialogues concerning the credibility of these accounts and the dubiousness of relying on them too much,<sup>295</sup> it is evident that Plato does not employ them in a completely literal or naïve way. Nevertheless, there are also explicit comments about "undue disbelief" in them, since they say something true.<sup>296</sup> I will therefore be trying here to find the purpose and partial truths of these myths, as they are relevant to the co-development of the polity and the soul. I do not intend to provide a detailed interpretation of the myths, nor to argue a position on the role of myth in general in Plato's writings. Rather, I will be drawing out

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<sup>294</sup> The debate began in the late eighteenth century and is very extensive. The positions considered standard are to be found in Perceval Frutiger, *Les Mythes de Platon*, (New York: Arno Press, 1976); Ludwig Edelstein (1949), "The Function of Myth in Plato's Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 10: 468-481; Paul Friedländer, *Plato: an Introduction* vol. 1, transl. Hans Meyerhoff (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 171-219; and John A. Stewart, *The Myths of Plato*, (London: MacMillan and Company, 1905). For more recent treatments, see Roslyn Weiss (2006), "The Strategic Use of Myth in the *Protagoras* and *Meno*," *Interpretation* 33(2): 133-152; Max Latona (2004), "The Tale Is Not My Own (*ouk emos o mythos*): Myth and Recollection in Plato," *Apeiron* 37(3): 181-210; Luc Brisson, *Plato the Myth Maker*, transl. Gerard Naddaf, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998); and Robert Zaslavsky, *Platonic Myth and Platonic Writing*, (Washington: University Press of America, 1981). For an account of the history of this scholarship from the late 1700s until the 1980s, see the first chapter of Kent F. Moors, *Platonic Myth: An Introductory Study*, (Washington: University Press of America, 1982).

<sup>295</sup> *Statesman*, 277b.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 271b.

their common features, under the assumption that repeated and consistent themes indicate something which Plato takes to be approximately true, given the fact that they concern historical matters prior to written documentation and cannot be matters of certainty. I take these points to be speculative in nature, but coherent with and important for the rest of Plato's philosophy.

The three myths mentioned above all describe a very ancient form of life where humans are compared to children or to herd animals, tended to and governed directly by a god. The principle of governance is thus located outside of human souls, in a higher, perfect intelligence which can attend to all particulars at once for the sake of the harmony and good of the whole. The human subjects are described consistently as simple, yet virtuous due to this divine guidance. The virtue is therefore not a philosophically developed virtue, in which an individual rules himself through his own power of reason. It is, rather, a natural, immediate image of the true, self-knowing and self-determining virtue. What is most noteworthy for my purposes is the nature of their simplicity and artlessness—both in the sense of the lack of guile and the lack of arts and sciences.

#### A. The *Statesman* myth

In the *Statesman*, the Stranger introduces a myth which he regards as his duty to insert in order to arrive at the goal of defining the true statesman as a herdsman of some kind.<sup>297</sup> He calls it a “famous myth” [ . ] which will provide amusement [ ] whi c], and asks the young Socrates to pay careful attention to it as if he were a child, presumably to absorb the content without skeptical objections. For the story was preserved by their

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<sup>297</sup> *Statesman.*, 268d-e.

earliest ancestors (who had contact with the previous age of the world), and ought not to be unduly disbelieved, as so many now do.<sup>298</sup> It contains a great lesson to be learned: that God is the true and original shepherd of men—a lesson to be kept in mind not only in general, but, specifically in this context, in order to recognize that the nature of the true statesman is an image of the divine ruler.<sup>299</sup>

Though the story is not perfectly coherent as whole (nor with the other myths entirely), it seems roughly to be as follows. In the first age of the world, God “[went] with the universe in its revolving course,” imparting His self-caused motion to it and imbuing it with its share of immortality.<sup>300</sup> The universe was thus supervised by an external divine cause, who, like the *demiourgos* of the *Timaeus*, harmonized all the parts for the sake of the good of the whole.<sup>301</sup> To administer to each part, then, God distributed all creatures to various gods and lower deities (*daimones*). Through their direct care, “no creature was wild, nor did they eat one another, and there was no war among them, nor any strife whatsoever.”<sup>302</sup> Like other animals, humans in this age were born directly from the earth (i.e., autochthonously); thus there were no families, no states, no traditions, and no recollection of earlier lives.<sup>303</sup> That is, there is no accumulation of experience that defines humans as we know ourselves, namely as historical beings: what or who we are largely depends on who we have been. The autochthonous human being described here is therefore similar to other animals, whose lives do not fundamentally change over long

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<sup>298</sup> *Statesman*, 271b.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, 275b.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, 269c. The description here is not all that dissimilar to the generation of the cosmos in the *Timaeus* (especially 30c-d; 37d), though the demiurge does not explicitly move with the immortal cosmos. The description also seems to be the worldly equivalent of souls circling with the gods prior to embodiment in the *Phaedrus* (246b-9d).

<sup>301</sup> *Timaeus*, 29e-30a.

<sup>302</sup> *Statesman*, 271e.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 272a.

periods of time.<sup>304</sup> The same life is guaranteed by the constancy of the surrounding circumstances. For, as in the description of the Garden of Eden, the earth provided food for humans in plenty without any agriculture; and since the climate was perfect, there was not even a need for the art of the weaver or tailor. Whether people in this age spent their days philosophizing or merely eating, drinking, conversing with animals, and telling stories, is uncertain, since “there is no one capable of reporting to us what the desires of the people in those days were in regard to knowledge and the employment of speech.”<sup>305</sup> But life was undoubtedly blessed.

At an appointed time, God and his ministers withdrew from the universe, leaving “fate and innate desire” [“.....”] to determine the state of affairs.<sup>306</sup> Like a spring motor being wound up, then suddenly released, the cosmos underwent the greatest of all reversals, being shocked at first by great earthquakes, then being spun in the opposite direction, “moving backwards through countless ages.”<sup>307</sup> The massive trauma destroyed most life instantly, but some of the human race survived. But as time was moving backward, these survivors grew increasingly younger, and began to disappear, while the cosmos grew increasingly forgetful of its proper order and tended toward chaos. Perceiving the pending disaster, God returned to the helm and saved the universe, granting it immortal life once again.<sup>308</sup> God, however, does not reign in the same fashion as He previously did. The universe had already been left to its own natural course, and strife and disorder had ensued. Without the direct care of the gods, humans therefore

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<sup>304</sup> If it is objected that domesticated animals, such as dogs, have undergone changes in their ways of life, these are entirely contingent upon human memory rather than the dogs'. The history of the dog does not constitute who the dog is as human history does for human identity, since the dog has no sense of the changes or adaptations its species has gone through.

<sup>305</sup> *Statesman*, 272d.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 272e.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 270a-b.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, 273e.

needed defence from the other animals and agriculture to procure food. Similarly to the myth in the *Protagoras*, the gods then granted humans the gifts of knowledge so that they might govern themselves: fire by Prometheus, crafts by Hephaestus and Athena, and agriculture by Demeter and Dionysus.<sup>309</sup> The current age is continuous with this origin of the arts.<sup>310</sup>

Though the ultimate ruler of the universe is simply called ‘the God’ [T] for the most part, the first age of direct rule is specifically called the reign of Cronos, as opposed to current reign of Zeus. The latter is contrasted with the former by the transference of knowledge from the gods to humans. The reign of Cronos is thus a divine kind of paternalism, while the reign of Zeus is constituted by independent human institutions, grounded on the wisdom of the gods approximated in human reason. Now, the purpose of the myth within the *Statesman* is mostly to show that the greatest of all kings—i.e., God—cares for all creatures in their particularity. The ideal statesman would therefore rule in a similar fashion, being able to treat every instance appropriately and uniquely. However, it is impossible for a human to tend to all things at once, and therefore, like the doctor or gymnastic trainer who needs to give prescriptions when he is absent, the best that the statesman can do is establish general laws or customs which aim at the best state of affairs, namely the virtue of all citizens.<sup>311</sup> Though not mentioned explicitly in the *Statesman*, it is clear that Zeus’ art is also bequeathed to humans. Zeus, who governs the Olympian community of gods, supposedly educated the ancient Cretan lawgiver Minos, for

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<sup>309</sup> *Statesman.*, 274c.

<sup>310</sup> Dombrowski considers this myth to be describing the beginning of specifically human history, as opposed to the mythic history of the gods (*Philosophy of History*, pp. 137, 142-3). In the Age of Zeus, the statesman can only be like a weaver, and not like a shepherd, as the ideal ruler (i.e., a god or the philosopher-king, for Dombrowski) was in the Age of Cronos (p. 135).

<sup>311</sup> *Statesman.*, 294a-5c; *Laws*, 705e.

example.<sup>312</sup> In the reign of Zeus, the best polity is thus an approximation of the reign of Cronos through the establishment of general customs or, if necessary, a codified set of positive laws.<sup>313</sup>

## B. Ancient life in the *Laws* and *Critias*

The notion of the age or reign of Cronos is also presented in Book IV of the *Laws*. After finding it difficult to determine precisely the kind of constitution belonging to Sparta or Crete, and stating that the polity ought to be named after God who is the true ruler of men, the Athenian tells the story [μῆν, ] of the age of Cronos.<sup>314</sup> The truth that this tale [[ The] has to tell, is that

wherever a state has a mortal, and not god, for ruler, there the people have no rest from ills and toils; and ... that we ought by every means to imitate the life of the age of Cronos, as tradition paints it, and order both our homes and our states in obedience to the immortal element within us, giving to reason's ordering the name of

'law' [ ' ' ' ].<sup>315</sup>

Here we are told that no human autocrat is capable of wielding power over all human affairs without "becoming filled with pride and unrighteousness (injustice)."<sup>316</sup> Hence, out of love for humanity, Cronos appointed as rulers the nobler race of *daimones*, who, lacking self-interest, brought peace, abundance, order, modesty and happiness to all.<sup>317</sup> Reason is that immortal element within us, which ought to rule as the *daimones*—the immortal

<sup>312</sup> *Laws*, 624b; *Minos*, 319b; 320b.

<sup>313</sup> *Laws*, 680a-1d.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 712d-3a.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, 713e.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 713c; cf. 691c-d.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, 713c-e.

rational agents without us—used to. The reign of reason is immediately opposed in the text to the rule of the appetites. Continuing the same passage, the Athenian states:

But if an individual man or oligarchy or a democracy, possessed of a soul which strives after pleasures and lusts and seeks to surfeit itself therewith, having no continence and being the victim of a plague that is endless and insatiate of evil, —if such an one shall rule over a State or an individual by trampling over the laws, then there is (as I said just now) no means of salvation.<sup>318</sup>

Since this is recognized to be a tale with a truth to tell, the point is that the best rule—the one which leads to the most prosperity, abundance, peace, and happiness—is that of reason.

The *Statesman* and *Laws IV* make it clear that the highest ruler is God, and that the best form of life was under God’s direct tutelage. The true human statesman is therefore an image of the divine ruler; while the citizens in the best polity can be characterized as an image of those in the reign of Cronos.<sup>319</sup> Since they provide a depiction of the archetype that the best state is to be modelled after, the myths of the *Statesman* and *Laws IV* can therefore be employed with all seriousness as means for characterizing life in the best state within historic times. (I do so in Chapter 7 below.) The difference between the mythic archetype and the real best state is that, instead of being guided directly by gods, the citizens in the age of Zeus have some basic arts and are guided by good laws and *nomos patros*, or patriarchal custom. Recall from the *Critias* that the rule of law, coupled with friendship and virtue, constitutes the continued ‘divine apportionment’ (*theou moira*).<sup>320</sup>

Indeed, the myth of the *Critias* presents a very similar depiction of the ancient and best form of life, but in the form of political states (instead of pre-political life).<sup>321</sup> Notably, this best form of life is located in ancient Athens, and, presumably, in Atlantis prior to its

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<sup>318</sup> *Laws*, 714a.

<sup>319</sup> This is also Kahn’s conclusion concerning the use of the myths in the *Statesman* and *Laws*. See Charles H. Kahn (2009), “The Myth of the *Statesman*,” in *Plato’s Myths*, ed. Catalin Partenie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 148-166.

<sup>320</sup> *Critias*, 121a.

<sup>321</sup> I am still calling it a ‘myth’ because specific deities are causal principles.

decline. Here we see a similar description of human life governed directly by various gods, to whom portions of the earth have been distributed. Each god settles his or her own country with autochthonous humans suited to the land. Athena and Hephaestus,

being born of the same father, and agreeing, moreover, in their love of wisdom and of craftsmanship [aaaaaaaaand], both took for their joint portion this land of ours as being naturally congenial and adapted for virtue and for wisdom, and therein they planted as native to the soil men of virtue and ordained to their mind the mode of government.<sup>322</sup>

Thus we see the same idea of the bestowal of arts and knowledge by the gods to an original race of autochthonous, virtuous people. Yet these are taken to be known historical figures, whose names have actually been preserved (e.g., Cecrops, Erechtheus, Erichthonius).<sup>323</sup> The gods reared the people, “even as herdsmen rear their flocks, to be their cattle and nurselings.”<sup>324</sup> Unlike other flocks, though, whose bodies are guided by force, the gods steered the souls of humans by ‘rudder of persuasion’.<sup>325</sup> These rationally-directed, divinely-reared humans were the ancient Athenians of approximately nine thousand years prior, who fought against Poseidon’s Atlantis, and of whom the Egyptians had written documentation.<sup>326</sup> It should be noted that, in the *Menexenus*, there likewise appears the same notion that the original Athenians were autochthonous to the land allotted to Athena (who strove against Poseidon) and were governed and educated by the gods in all arts, including the political and military.<sup>327</sup>

To summarize, in the *Statesman*, the *Laws IV*, the *Critias*, and even the *Menexenus*, the subjects of the best form of life are autochthonous (or spring from autochthonous ancestors) and are governed initially by the local deities, to whom the land was

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<sup>322</sup> *Critias*, 109c-d.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, 110b.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 109c.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.* The ‘cybernetic’ metaphor of a captain or helmsman is common to all three myths dealt with in this chapter.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, 113b-4a.

<sup>327</sup> *Menexenus*, 237b; 238b.

apportioned. While my exposition of these myths has been cursory, it suffices, I believe, to show my basic point, which is simply that in all of these accounts, the people are immediately virtuous: they are moderate despite their abundance, gentle and kindly disposed to one another.<sup>328</sup> There is still, though, one last source which further characterizes this form of life, and it is especially valuable because it is more properly ‘historical’ in that it does not involve the actions of the gods—or at least may be interpreted naturalistically. In the *Laws* III there is a description of early life that is an informal deduction from the premise that civilizations have been wiped out by cataclysms in the past. This premise is, it is true, derived from “ancient tales” [ppppppp], but these are supposedly “regarded by everyone as perfectly credible.”<sup>329</sup> The speculative description of post-diluvium times in *Laws* III is a more rational treatment of the same transition depicted in the movement from the reign of Cronos to the reign of Zeus: the establishment of political life through the discovery and organization of the various arts.

### C. Artlessness and guile

Book III of the *Laws* begins with an attempt to investigate the origin [begi ] of government and the process of change that occurs in polities.<sup>330</sup> In seeking the cause of change [ccccç ], the Athenian imagines what might have been the situation after one

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<sup>328</sup> *Critias*, 120e.

<sup>329</sup> *Laws*, 677a.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, 676a.

of the catastrophes which decimated past civilizations. Though it is likely that the flood of Deucalion is intended,<sup>331</sup> it does not particularly matter which one he has in mind, for it seems that the earth itself is immortal, and that many worlds successively appear.<sup>332</sup> After the great flood, only the nomadic people of the hills would have survived. Such people would have had “no memory whatsoever” concerning matters of statecraft and legislation,<sup>333</sup> and would have been “unskilled in the arts generally [ . ], and especially in such contrivances as men use against one another in cities for the purposes of greed and rivalry and all the other villainies which they devise one against another.”<sup>334</sup> They would have been ignorant of the arts of war, practiced by land and sea, and “those warlike arts which, disguised under the names of law-suits and factions, are peculiar to cities, contrived as they are with every device of word and deed to inflict mutual hurt and injury.”<sup>335</sup> All of the tools, arts, and inventions that belonged to the cities in the plains—whether of politics or of wisdom, and whether used well or not—would have been lost to the flood. Only after two thousand years were some of these arts—musical, medical, masonic, and prophetic—revealed again to legendary men, for example, Daedalus, Orpheus, Marsyas, Olympus, and Epimenides.<sup>336</sup> Prior to these re-discoveries, however, life would have eventually become very good after the initial trauma. Not only were the means for war unavailable, as metallurgy had not yet been developed, but there would not

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<sup>331</sup> Cf. *Statesman*, 270c.

<sup>332</sup> *Laws*, 676a-c. For a more nuanced and detailed analysis of this account, see Seth Benardete (2000), *Plato's Laws* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 88-103.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, 678a.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 677b.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, 679d.

<sup>336</sup> *Statesman*, 277d. Epimenides supposedly woke up after many years asleep in the cave of Zeus in Knossos (Crete) with the gift of prophecy. This is the same cave that Minos was supposedly educated in, and the one to which the interlocutors in the *Laws* are on their way. Daedalus, incidentally, was supposedly responsible for building the Minotaur's labyrinth in Crete. Notice that the birth of modern Athens is marked by Perseus' victory over the Minotaur, thus releasing the Athenians from their tribute to the Cretans.

even have been much inclination towards strife: the initial desolation of the land would have led to friendliness and sympathy; and, once the plains became fertile again, there would have been plenty of food and clothing for the few that remained.<sup>337</sup> Furthermore, as there was no gold or silver either, the people would not have been excessively wealthy or excessively poor. This is extremely important, since (to repeat): “a community which has no communion with either poverty or wealth is generally the one in which the noblest characters will be formed; for in it there is no place for the growth of insolence and injustice, of rivalries and jealousies.”<sup>338</sup> Such people, living without envy, without suspicion, and without the means and motivations to inflict injury on one another, would have been more simple (have been *m*), more brave (*o*), more brave (*o*), more temperate (*o*), more temperate (*o*), and more just (*o*), and more (*o*) than modern men.<sup>339</sup> In a word, they would have been more virtuous.

This list of virtues includes the familiar *andreia*, *sophrosune*, and *dikaiosune*; however, it differs noticeably from the most common foursome in that wisdom [*sophia* or *phronesis*] is replaced by ‘*euetheia*’—an interesting word having two quite revealing connotations: goodness of heart, guilelessness, and simple-mindedness, on one hand, or foolishness and simplicity (as of the simpleton) on the other hand.<sup>340</sup> The first is more pertinent here. (The second will be dealt with in Chapter 6, §C). Along with the freedom from envy mentioned above, which was due to the lack of “communion with wealth or poverty,” the most ancient men were virtuous due to “simple-mindedness, as it is called

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<sup>337</sup> *Laws*, 678d-9a.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 679b-c.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, 679d-e.

<sup>340</sup> Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. Luc Brisson (1998) makes note of the two senses of the term *euetheia* here and yet takes the negative view that the goodness of the ‘mountain men’ is only due to their stupidity, as in *Timaeus* 22b-23b (pp. 123-4). For a specific treatment of the term in Plato’s works, see Claude Gaudin (1981), “*Euetheia*: La theorie plaoniticienne de l’innocence,” *Revue philosophique de la France et de l’etranger* 159: 145-68.

[ [ □ ].<sup>341</sup> In another relevant context (namely, the *Greater Hippias*), the term seems to imply naïvety, since there is a link formed between the simple-mindedness of the ancient wise men and their being oblivious as to how valuable money could be.<sup>342</sup> In the current context, the term implies credulity: “for, being simple-minded, when they heard things called good or bad, they took what was said for gospel-truth and believed it. For none of them had the shrewdness of the modern man to suspect a falsehood; but they accepted as true the statements made about gods and men, and ordered their lives by them.”<sup>343</sup> But ‘credulity’ is the most derogatory way to describe this condition; ‘trusting’ [‘*credu*’] would be the most laudatory way. In the *Laws*, it is clear that the positive interpretation is intended. The specifically intellectual virtue of these ancient men—in contrast to modern men—therefore consists of being straight-forward and lacking mutual suspicion: rather than doubting, they accepted without skeptical reflection what was given immediately. Such people would have interacted with one another in a very direct way, without deception; for suspicion of falsehood is always a response to the experience of discovering deceit.

This positive interpretation of ancient simplicity depends, of course, on the initial law or custom being excellently suited to virtue, and on the “statements made about gods and men” being true. In the reign of Cronos, this is guaranteed by the direct guidance of the gods or *daimones*. The continuity of virtue and true opinion in the reign of Zeus, however, must be provided by an approximate means, namely *nomos patros*, or patriarchal custom. Returning to the anthropological account from *Laws III*, the first post-diluvium societies, which are called *dynasties*, were based on the unit of the family. Lacking written laws, order was established by the fathers of the families which survived the cataclysm.

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<sup>341</sup> *Laws*, 679c.

<sup>342</sup> *Greater Hippias*, 282d.

<sup>343</sup> *Laws*, 679c.

These virtuous men “stamped upon their children and children’s children their own cast of mind [mind [v]].”<sup>344</sup> The *nomos patros* thus ruled over single households [thus or ‘clans’ of extended family [of ex]].<sup>345</sup> According to the Athenian, these most just societies continued to exist into modern times in Greece and in barbaric lands.<sup>346</sup> The simplicity of mind in dynastic societies (and especially the most ancient, most virtuous ones) depended upon the persistence of the same patriarchal custom. Without a sense of cognitive independence from the given normative world, there could be neither a spirit of innovation nor the emergence of self-interested factions. However, due to the growth of the dynastic societies and the need to set up larger settlements, several clans, each with its own customs [ccccç], came to dwell in the same place. The clash of their particular customs required that chiefs be chosen and for them to congregate and deliberate about which of their customs would be best to adopt as common practices.<sup>347</sup> This is origin of the need for positive legislation, and the origin of public reason. Moreover, it is beginning of the tension between private interest and the public good which is so characteristic of political life, properly speaking. But given the initial disposition of the founders of the dynasties towards virtue and friendliness, and given strict continuity of their ways of life, the practice of reason which ensued in this meeting of diverse dynasties must have been straightforward and without guile; each position would have been earnestly believed and propounded, with dispassionate and prudent judgment being reached by the chiefs. Presumably, all would have recognized that the good of the whole settlement is necessary for the good of their own clans or families. Yet, so long as there is public debate, there must also be at least the potential for the development of rhetoric and factional division. That is, despite an

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<sup>344</sup> *Laws.*, 681b.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*, 680d-e.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, 680b.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*, 681c-d.

initially virtuous beginning to the practice of public reason, the seed of decline into guile and suspicion is coeval with the mixture of dynasties. The clash of custom itself breaks the bonds of necessity for each dynasty involved, since each must be at least open to the possibility of compromise or change.<sup>348</sup> Any sort of innovation corrupts the continuity which makes *euetheia* a good quality, since reflection on given customs is required to figure out which is best. Simple acceptance of the given cannot suffice in this mixture; in fact, it would result in conflicts among stubborn idiosyncrasies. Once the polity becomes necessary, so too does it become necessary for at least some people to recognize that their inherited opinions may not be true.

Another way of describing the intellectual character of the ancient men being treated in *Laws* III is to regard them as the ‘simple imitators’ as defined in the *Sophist*. At the very conclusion of that dialogue, there is a distinction made between two classes of imitators. The first kind, which goes unnamed and undiscussed, is the simple-minded kind (*euēthes*), who thinks he knows that which he only has an opinion about. The other class of imitator, “because of their experience in the rough and tumble of arguments, strongly suspect and fear that they are ignorant of the things which they pretend before the public to know.”<sup>349</sup> This latter class is called the dissembling or *ironic* (*ironikon*). He who dissembles before a multitude in long speeches is the orator, while he who delivers short speeches in private, imitating the philosopher, is the sophist.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> The claim made in the *Menexenus* that even the modern Athenians constitute a pure stock may therefore have the following significance, along with the claims that the ancient Athenians and Alantians were descendants of a single clan of patriarchs leading back to the original autochthons: the root of *their* evils is not due to compromise with foreign customs and ideas. Rather, their evils must be due to a corruption from within. As was discussed in Chapter 2, the corrupting principle is the desire for wealth, which is to say, the growth of the power of the appetites. (See Chapter 5, §A for a further discussion of this cause of corruption.)

<sup>349</sup> *Sophist*, 268a.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, 268b-c.

The ancient men qualify as ‘simple imitators’ insofar as they adopt the opinions they are given by tradition as though they knew them to be true, and conduct their lives accordingly; moreover, their lives are fundamentally of an imitative character, since they repeat the ways of their fathers. They lack the orator’s and sophist’s strong suspicion about their own ignorance precisely because they are inexperienced in the rough and tumble of arguments with people who manipulate opinions without believing them. This would only come after the development of public reason. (This is especially the case in courts of law, where, according to the *Theaetetus*, professionals, “deprived of growth and straightforwardness [σς] and freedom,” are bred to “become tense and shrewd, know[ing] how to wheedle their master with words....”<sup>351</sup>)

It should be noted, though, that there is also something positive in the ironic imitator, namely, a sense of being one’s own judge with regard to what one knows. Even though this is expressed in terms of fear and suspicion in this *Sophist* passage, it is not far off of the famed first step towards wisdom, namely the awareness of one’s ignorance. The fear and suspicion of the sophist indicates an awareness of the lack of actual knowledge, which the simple imitator does not share.

We even see the two kinds of character come into direct conflict in the *Lesser Hippias*, where the question of whether Achilles or Odysseus is the greater hero turns into a debate about whether it is better to be virtuous in a straight-forward manner or with the ability to be cunning and familiar with evil.<sup>352</sup> This is evidently a conflict at the heart of Greek culture, considering that it concerns its two greatest heroes.<sup>353</sup> (Sophocles, for

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<sup>351</sup> *Theaetetus*, 173a.

<sup>352</sup> Though Odysseus’ craftiness was commonly acknowledged (*Republic*, 334b), Socrates does question whether it is accurate to label Achilles the simple one and Odysseus the wily one (*Lesser Hippias*, 364d-e, 370d-e).

<sup>353</sup> Stanley Rosen has analyzed Plato’s portrayal of sophistry in comparison to Homer’s depiction of deception in the characters of Achilles and Odysseus. Rosen also discusses the term ‘*euetheia*’ briefly in

example, also drew on this tension in his *Philoctetes*, where the clash is between Odysseus and Achilles' son, Neoptolemus, who does not want to take Odysseus' command to trick the abandoned and injured Philoctetes.) The paradox presented in the *Lesser Hippias* is that knowledge is what makes deception possible. The unlearned person (*amathes*) does not have the option to deceive; he can only say what he believes. 'True deception' requires knowing the truth and not speaking it. But if only the virtuous person is truly knowledgeable, then only the virtuous person can be a deceiver.<sup>354</sup> Socrates' position is that, though this may sound paradoxical, it is actually the case, and that it is better to know the true—and therefore the false.<sup>355</sup> The reason is that true knowledge is more stable than ignorant right opinion, and less susceptible to being corrupted by trickery. The sophist, then, has the capacity to dislodge dogmatic beliefs, but he lacks knowledge; he is therefore located at the midpoint between the two sides in this conflict.

So long as one is living in good custom and one's convictions have not been dislodged (which is the supposed case in the *Statesman*, *Laws* III and IV, *Critias*, and *Menexenus*), simplicity is a good quality and indeed produces more noble people. But the simple man is liable to being duped, either by being persuaded to a false opinion through clever reasoning, or by coming to doubt what he takes to be true.<sup>356</sup> Hence the virtuous simplicity that has been described here partially resembles genuine wisdom, in which the knowledge of good is immediately effective. The entire soul is unified and governed by what is true. The worst kind of ignorance is avoided, namely the discord between what is

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regard to the *Laws* III passage treated above. See Stanley Rosen (1991), "Suspicion, Deception, and Concealment." *Arion*, third series, 1(2): 112-127, esp. pp. 121-125.

<sup>354</sup> *Lesser Hippias*, 367c; cf. 372d, 376b.

<sup>355</sup> Cf. *Laws*, 951b; *Republic*, 618c-9a.

<sup>356</sup> It therefore seems that the answer to the question posed in the *Statesman* (272d) about whether ancient men philosophized in their leisure is that they could not have, since philosophy demands a reflective distance from given opinions.

found pleasurable and what is rationally good.<sup>357</sup> Yet the virtuous simplicity differs from genuine wisdom in that it is based only on opinion derived from custom. It is not arrived at through independent reasoning, and is therefore susceptible to corruption, the threat of which is coeval with the origin of public reason in the polity.

## Conclusion

Though the collation of all these accounts may be somewhat confusing, and may not be entirely coherent, the basic point that can be gathered is that the ancient form of life of simplicity and virtue is the starting point of political history and ought to be mimicked. In that society of simple-minded virtue, there is a unity of the soul, governed harmoniously and immediately by wisdom. Initially, this is represented as a divine paternalism, wherein the rational governor is an external force (i.e., a god or a *daimon*) who directs the soul. Such ancient denizens are free in the sense of being alleviated of any need to work. After the transition from the reign of Cronos to the reign of Zeus—i.e., the invention of human arts and independence—the paternalism is quite literally through the rule of fathers, sustained by custom. This dynastic paternalism is an image of the postulated divine paternalism, perpetuated through the natural force of reproduction. Though the dynastic constitution gets replaced by the properly political, the constitution of the souls that made up the first *poleis*—such as ancient Athens—is still virtuous and immediate. Here, freedom consists not in complete leisure, but in the lack of envy. But with time and the increase of wealth, this initial innocence has long been corrupted, as the accounts of Atlantis and Athens indicate; therefore, the mimicry of that blessed state of immediacy and happiness—

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<sup>357</sup> *Laws*, 689a.

either of the reign of Cronos itself or of its approximation in the first dynasties—will have to have come after the experience of guile and duplicity, and therefore after the experience of doubt and suspicion.

As was discussed in the Chapter 2, the self-reconciled presence of mind of the philosopher, in which he is always self-aware while being outwardly attentive or ‘awake’, satisfies this condition that imitates the initial immediacy on a personal level. The difference, then, between the initial simplicity and the simplicity that is demanded in the future is that the philosopher is familiar with falsity and duplicity, and yet is not tempted by it. Furthermore, unlike in the case of the divine ‘helmsmen’ who steered the souls of humans paternalistically, the philosopher is able to bring about the reign of reason in his soul through his own autonomous power. The task, then, is to reshape social life according to this philosophical overcoming.

Chapter 5 - Enkratic self-antagonism in Sparta and Crete and the resistance to independent reasoning

A. On Sparta and Crete as timarchies

The description of Sparta and of Crete in Plato's works is scattered over the *Republic*, *Laws*, *Laches*, *Protagoras*, and, though they may be spurious, the *Greater Hippias* and the *Minos*.<sup>358</sup> Despite some ostensible inconsistencies, a fairly clear, albeit basic, characterization of these polities can be pieced together. What I intend to show is that Sparta and Crete are, in Plato's works, concrete manifestations of the *enkratic* or self-superior side of self-antagonism, where the lowest elements in the soul and polity are dominated by force for the sake of victory and honour, while the highest is neglected. Generally speaking, these polities are presented by Plato in a positive light. To take but one example, he acknowledges "the temperance and orderliness, the forbearance and placidity, the magnanimity and discipline, the courage and endurance, and the toil-loving, success-loving, honour-loving spirit of the Spartans...."<sup>359</sup> Nevertheless, there are important criticisms of their way of life that stem from it being a governance of passion rather than reason. Without proper knowledge to harmonize the entire constitution, the violent suppression of the lower parts must eventually give way to uprisings on the political level and incontinence on the psychic. Moreover, as is the problem with a courage-based conception of virtue in general, souls are apt to act irrationally and foolishly without

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<sup>358</sup> For a cogent argument in favour of attributing the *Minos* to Plato, see Glenn R. Morrow (1960), pp. 35-39.

<sup>359</sup> *Alcibiades I*, 122c. I am following Nicholas Denyer in taking the *Alcibiades I* to be authentic, contrary to Schleiermacher's argument. For Denyer's case, see his introduction to *Plato – Alcibiades*, ed. Nicholas Denyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 14-26.

knowledge. Negatively speaking, the dominance of reason by the passions is evident in the avoidance of intellectual pursuits and the fear of innovation that comes with independent thinking.

A few exegetical matters are in order, the first of which is to justify grouping Sparta and Crete together as virtually equivalent examples of timarchies. This grouping will allow for a richer depiction of any of these three terms taken alone, and will thus clarify their role in the historical development being traced here. To begin, Sparta and Crete are often spoken of in conjunction within the dialogues.<sup>360</sup> In the *Republic*, for example, these are the two polities taken as examples of the timarchic constitution,<sup>361</sup> and throughout the description of timarchy in general, there are allusions to minor details that pertain specifically to Sparta.<sup>362</sup> In the *Laws*, where the Athenian is conversing with a Spartan (Megillus) and Cretan (Clinias), we are also told that these two polities were settled under similar laws.<sup>363</sup> (Aristotle corroborates this, acknowledging (and apparently accepting) the general opinion that Sparta copied most of its constitution from Crete, and cites the “traditional records” which say that Lycurgus had personal connections to Crete.<sup>364</sup>) A similar point is made in the *Minos*: that the Spartans derived their laws (e.g., refraining from alcohol) from the Cretans.<sup>365</sup> The essential similarity of the two polities is acknowledged by Clinias, who agrees that the laws of his state, as well as those of Sparta, are aimed entirely at war.<sup>366</sup> Megillus readily supports this view as well.<sup>367</sup> Finally, there is

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<sup>360</sup> E.g., *Crito*, 52e; *Protagoras*, 342a,d; *Republic*, 544c. For a discussion of the common origin and similarity between Spartan and Cretan law in Plato and other ancient thinkers (Aristotle, Ephorus, Xenophon, Plutarch), see Morrow, *Cretan City*, pp. 32-3.

<sup>361</sup> *Republic*, 544c; 545a.

<sup>362</sup> See Henderson's notes in the Loeb Classics translation of *Republic*, Books VI-X, pp. 249, 250, 252.

<sup>363</sup> *Laws*, 682e-3a.

<sup>364</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, 1071b2. Morrow argues that a better explanation is their common Dorian stock; though Plato himself never gives this explanation, “he may well have divined it.” (*Cretan City*, p. 34)

<sup>365</sup> *Minos*, 320a-b.

<sup>366</sup> *Laws*, 626d-e; 628e.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, 626c.

mention of an instance of the reverse direction of influence: Spartan poems about valiance in war have made their way to Crete, where they have been adopted.<sup>368</sup>

As for the two being considered timarchies, there is some hesitation about this classification in the *Laws* which ought to be addressed. The structure of government in Sparta is that of two kings, a council of Elders, and the lot-appointed Ephors from the common stock of citizens.<sup>369</sup> It is thus a mix of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. As for Crete, Plato does not mention the equivalents explicitly, though Aristotle does so in his *Politics*.<sup>370</sup> The Spartan in the *Laws* himself admits that:

when I reflect on the Lacedaemonian polity, I am at a loss to tell you by what name one should describe it. It seems to me to resemble a tyranny, since the board of ephors it contains is a marvellously tyrannical feature; yet it sometimes strikes me as, of all states, the nearest to a democracy. Still, it would be totally absurd to deny that it is an aristocracy; while it includes, moreover, a life monarchy, and that the most ancient of monarchies....<sup>371</sup>

The Cretan then responds that he too is equally perplexed by his own Cnossian polity's type of constitution.<sup>372</sup> This mixed constitution is highly approved of in the *Laws*, since it finds a medium between extreme slavery of the multitude (as one finds in Persia) and extreme liberty of the multitude (as one finds in Athens), both of which have pernicious effects.<sup>373</sup> It seems, then, that the Spartan and Cretan constitution may be closer to the ideal constitution (according to the *Laws*) than to timarchy. Indeed, the Athenian goes so far as to say that "[i]t is not for nothing that the laws of the Cretans are held in superlatively high repute among all the Hellenes. For they are true laws inasmuch as they

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<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, 629b.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, 691e-2a.

<sup>370</sup> As it is older, it is not quite as 'polished' as the constitution in Sparta; also, Crete has lost the element of monarchy that persisted in Sparta (*Politics*, 1272a9).

<sup>371</sup> *Laws*, 712d-e.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 712e. Despite having several towns on the island (including Knossos), Crete as a whole is considered to have a single constitution by Aristotle. (Cf. Stalley's note to *Politics* 1271b in *Aristotle – Politics*, transl. Ernest Barker, revised with notes by R. F. Stalley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 345. I will therefore treat it as a single political entity.

<sup>373</sup> *Laws*, 699e.

effect the well-being (*eudaimonia*) of those who use them by supplying all things that are good.”<sup>374</sup>

However, one of the first characteristics which distinguishes the timarchy from the ideal polity in the *Republic* is that all are free in the latter, whereas there is a division in the timarchy between masters and slaves.<sup>375</sup> The presence of a class of slaves, then, is particularly notable in Sparta: the ruling Spartan minority brutally oppressed and humiliated the Helots.<sup>376</sup> Such oppression is merely the negative side of the rule of honour, since a social system based on honour of great men requires contempt of the lowly. The presence of the Helot class is alluded to in the *Laws* in its mention of the Crypteia, which were bands of young men who were granted permission to kill Helots in the countryside as a form of training.<sup>377</sup> Moreover, the system of slavery with regard to the Helots in Sparta is called “the most vexed question in Hellas”.<sup>378</sup> Though Plato did think that there should be slaves in the best polity, truly free citizens would not treat their slaves with such brutality.<sup>379</sup> The strife between these classes therefore suggests something less than the best constitution.

The issue of the kind of constitution can be solved even more simply, though. The most important feature of a constitution for Plato is not the structure of government so much as the governing principle. The typical view of Sparta, of course, is that it was a strict, militaristic polity, a view which seems to have been readily adopted in Plato’s time as well.<sup>380</sup> Aside from the *Republic*’s treatment, we are told in the *Laches* that the Spartans are most interested in war, hence any art that would lend an advantage in this regard would

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<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, 631b.

<sup>375</sup> *Republic*, 547b-c.

<sup>376</sup> According to Plutarch, the Ephors condoned the massacre of Helots, along with public humiliation of them so as to set negative examples. See *Plutarch’s Lives*, transl. Bernadotte Perrin, (London: William Heinemann Ltd. 1914), chapter 28. Cf. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, IV, 80, 4.

<sup>377</sup> *Laws*, 633b.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, 776c.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, 777d.

<sup>380</sup> See, for example, Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, I, §80-5.

be practiced there.<sup>381</sup> As for Crete, it is described in the *Laws* as being less like a polity and more like an army.<sup>382</sup> Moreover, after the Spartan and Cretan agree initially that victory in war is the ultimate aim of their polities, the Spartan lists several of their practices whose aim is clearly to breed good soldiers: the famous common meals (also practiced in Crete), the gymnasia, hunting, pain endurance competitions, the Crypteia, naked games in the scorching heat, and others.<sup>383</sup> These athletic and militaristic practices are aimed at harnessing and shaping aggression in order to foster the virtue of *andreia*.<sup>384</sup> To some extent, *sophrosune* is also the goal of education—though as we will see, the self-control shown in these polities is not the harmonious kind that belongs to *sophrosune* proper, but rather the self-antagonistic and forceful suppression of the appetites that is characteristic of *enkrateia*. Such an athletic ethos, in which the men aspire to all kinds of victory, is the characteristic of the rule of honour, for that is the prize to be had by winning.<sup>385</sup>

For the most part, it is clear that Spartan and Cretan laws are oriented toward military victory as the highest good, and love of victory and love of honour are the highest values in the timarchy.<sup>386</sup> Still, there is some confusion. The Athenian constructs an argument that if the source of their laws was truly Apollo and Zeus, conveyed through the

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<sup>381</sup> *Laches*, 182b.

<sup>382</sup> *Laws*, 666e.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, 633a-c; 688a. The bands of young men who policed the Helots in the countryside, i.e., the Crypteia, went bare-foot in the winter and slept without covers (*Laws*, 633b-c).

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, 632e; cf. 688a-b. On the Spartan educational system, Malcolm Schofield writes: “Its purpose was to develop resourcefulness as well as toughness and resilience, but no less importantly obedience to superiors and habituation to the militaristic values of Spartan society. Plato rejected the militaristic conception of virtue to which the Spartans, like the Cretans, seemed to be wedded. But what he found compelling was the notion that the whole nature of a society and the development of the individual alike could be transformed in tune with each other if the city itself made sure that it had not just an educational system, but an entire cultural environment designed with the single-minded aim of fostering virtue and the desire to become ‘a perfect citizen’.” Indeed, Plato is seeking that sort of cultural-educational unity throughout the *Laws*. See Malcolm Schofield (2006), *Plato: Political Philosophy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 37. Henceforth, “*Political Philosophy*”.

<sup>385</sup> In the *Phaedrus* (256b), *enkratic* control is considered one of three ‘truly Olympic contests’. Its result here, though, is not honour, but the freedom of the mind for philosophy and happiness.

<sup>386</sup> *Republic*, 545a.

lawgivers Lycurgus and Minos, then the true aim must be divine goods—i.e., the virtues—and not merely human goods (e.g., victory).<sup>387</sup> Though the victory-loving constitution does foster *andreia*, the courageous man who lacks the other virtues can be can be “reckless, unjust, violent, and pre-eminently foolish.”<sup>388</sup> The Athenian therefore claims that “both the Heaven-taught legislator of Crete and every legislator who is worth his salt will most assuredly legislate always with a single eye to the highest goodness and to that alone: and this consists in ... ‘complete righteousness’.”<sup>389</sup> They will, he continues, “enact laws with an eye not to some one fraction, and that the most paltry, of goodness, but to goodness as a whole....”<sup>390</sup> Seeing that Megillus and Clinias accept the premise of divine authorship of the laws,<sup>391</sup> it seems that they are mistaken about military victory being the real principle of their laws,<sup>392</sup> and that only an “expert in the law” can detect the true, higher aim that unifies their legal systems.<sup>393</sup> This point supports the view that their polities are closer to the ideal than to timarchy.

In the end, however, this argument seems to be more of a rhetorical device, since the Athenian has simply used their belief in the divine origin of their laws in order to get them to agree in the abstract that the whole of virtue is this highest aim of true law—which is the real purpose in this part of the dialogue.<sup>394</sup> Furthermore, the “polite criticisms”<sup>395</sup> of their laws that are raised by the Athenian are generally consistent with the critique of the timarchy in the *Republic*.

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<sup>387</sup> *Laws*, 631b.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, 630b. Cf. *Laches*, 192c; *Protagoras*, 349d; *Meno*, 88b.

<sup>389</sup> *Laws*, 630b-c.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, 630d-e.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*, 624a; 632d.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 630b-e.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, 632d.

<sup>394</sup> *Laws*, 705e.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, 635a.

## B. External and internal suppression

Granting, then, that Sparta and Crete are essentially the same, and essentially timarchic, I will continue their characterization by emphasizing the claim made in the *Republic* that the timarchy is the result of a compromise between two contending principles: the desire for virtue and the desire for wealth. This constitution supposedly arises when the aristocratic rulers of the ideal polity come to be “at odds with one another and with themselves [aaaaaaaaaaaaa ].”<sup>396</sup>

The cause of this corruption of the initial unity is the emergence of the appetitive desires as a separate and contending force. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates observes that

in each one of us there are two ruling and leading principles, which we follow whithersoever they lead; one is the innate desire for pleasure, the other an acquired opinion which strives for the best. These two sometimes agree within us and are sometimes in strife; and sometimes one, and sometimes the other has the greatest power.<sup>397</sup>

In the ideal state, all have acquired “the opinion which strives for the best.” How exactly the innate desire for pleasure becomes a real contender is not altogether clear.

In the case of ancient Athens or Atlantis in particular, it seems that a consequence of virtue is an increased capacity for gaining wealth: the virtuous polity will be a formidable enemy due to its courage and discipline; hence, the possibility of victory and the accumulation of wealth present themselves. The problem with this explanation of the decay, however, is that it presupposes a diminution of the power to resist the temptation of wealth. The discussion of Persia provides some illumination of the problem here (though it is never regarded as an excellent polity in general).<sup>398</sup> Both Cyrus and Darius proved

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<sup>396</sup> *Republic*, 545d.

<sup>397</sup> *Phaedrus*, 237d.

<sup>398</sup> *Laws*, 694a-6a.

themselves highly virtuous leaders, and secured a vast and, especially in Cyrus' case, a largely peaceful domain. Yet they neglected to educate their sons properly, leaving them to be spoiled by luxurious surroundings and the fawning of tutors and women. Cambyses and Xerxes thus led the Persians to their ruin, trying to extend their power too far. (Recall that the same problem held true for Atlantis.) But Persia under Cyrus was already in the mode of conquest of other nations; hence the desire for victory or wealth must have already been present, and therefore the problem must have begun prior to this.

The *Republic* offers a different, though very obscure explanation of the origin of the conflict between virtue and wealth. Socrates reasons that the purity of the various characters of citizens (Hesiod's 'metals') inevitably gets compromised due to a eugenic miscalculation concerning the right time for breeding.<sup>399</sup> Given the knowledge belonging to the ideal ruler, it is not clear why the miscalculation itself occurs. Whatever its cause may be, the result of the miscalculation is a lower quality of future rulers, who neglect the importance of music and gymnastics in education. The vicious cycle has begun, since worse education in turn debilitates the power of recognizing the true characters of potential guardians.<sup>400</sup> Consequently, some of the guardians will be of a mixed nature: they will be driven partly by the desire for wealth (as is the producing class), and partly still by the desire for virtue.<sup>401</sup> The guardians then come to a compromise in order to avoid factions centred around these disparate interests. The desire for wealth is appeased by the distribution of the property in the polity (which was not owned at all by any guardians in the ideal polity), and the enslavement of the citizens whose freedom was formerly protected.<sup>402</sup> Yet the timarchic ruling class does not itself pursue wealth; there is, rather, a

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<sup>399</sup> *Republic*, 546a-d.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, 546e-7a.

<sup>401</sup> *Republic*, 547a.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*, 547b-c.

distribution of labour, where the slaves do the productive work (agricultural, artisanal, etc.), while the masters pursue a particular kind of virtue, best categorized as *andreia*.

In the resulting constitution, then, there is a strict division between the pursuit of virtue and the pursuit of wealth; though the latter is a necessary condition for the former, since only the land-owning masters are able to avoid labour and train to acquire the virtue of *andreia*, the pursuit of wealth is clearly subordinated to the pursuit of virtue to the point of being regarded as contemptible. The slave class is thus treated with scorn and hatred. In order to set up an ideal of *andreia* for themselves, the timarchic citizens use the slaves as images of vice—as embodiments of that which one ought to avoid. As has been mentioned, the Spartans even go so far as to kill Helots in the countryside as a state-sponsored part of education (the *Crypteia*). The polity as a whole is thus in a state of self-antagonism, where there is hostility between the producing and the guardian class. This alone is an indication that its ideal of virtue is flawed, since it locates the good in a part rather than the whole of the polity.<sup>403</sup>

The Athenian in the *Laws* observes that the Helot system of the Spartans in particular is “the most vexed problem in all Hellas,” and has caused a “violent dispute”.<sup>404</sup> One side in the dispute “places no trust at all in the servant-class, but, treating them like brute beasts, with goads and whips they make the servants’ souls not merely thrice but fifty times enslaved; whereas the other party act in precisely the opposite way.”<sup>405</sup> The Athenian sides more with the latter:

Proper treatment of servants consists in using no violence toward them, and in hurting them even less, if possible, than our own equals. For it is his way of dealing with men whom it is easy for him to wrong that shows most clearly whether a man is genuine or hypocritical in his reverence for

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<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, 519e.

<sup>404</sup> *Laws*, 776c.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, 777a.

justice and hatred of injustice. He, therefore, that in dealing with slaves proves himself, in his character and action, undefiled by what is unholy or unjust will best be able to sow a crop of goodness,—and this we may say, and justly say, of every master, or kind, and of everyone who possesses any kind of absolute power over a person weaker than himself.<sup>406</sup>

Not only is there an internecine relation between the classes of the timarchy, as mentioned above, but this strife reflects the very character of the master. This makes sense, of course, given the reciprocal relation of causality between soul and polity. A man's desire to vent his anger on subordinates is both caused by the given common attitudes with regard to the social structure, and perpetuates them.

Yet the analogy may be taken further by considering the problem of the slave revolts in neighbouring Messenia that are alluded to.<sup>407</sup> These events indicate the potential danger that violent suppression of the slave class entails. According to Thucydides, the Spartans were well aware of the threat of revolution and were “frightened by [the Helots'] unyielding character and their numbers.”<sup>408</sup> The Spartans therefore took violent and treacherous precautions against this happening, luring out the most valiant of the Helots and slaughtering them under false pretences.

To draw the analogy, then, one would expect there to be a similar threat within the timarchic man if the lower elements in his soul are not reconciled to being in the whole. Both the ruling class and the ruling element in the soul thrive off the antagonism with the lower, but always at the risk of revolution. Indeed, this seems to be the crux of the main criticisms that Plato has of the timarchic soul: the higher principle inevitably gives way to lower forces, namely, unbridled anger, the desire to please women, and the desire for bodily pleasure. Before investigating these three criticisms, though, I would add that the soul-

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<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, 777d-e.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*, 777b-c.

<sup>408</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book IV, §80.

polity analogy might also extend to the souls of the slaves—though this perspective for its own sake does not seem to be of interest to Plato. Nonetheless, I would guess that the souls of the slaves would also be turbulent, kept in suspense through fear of the masters and resentment for their harsh treatment. In other words, their constitution would also be a governance of passion, though the ruling passions would be ‘worse’ than the desire for honour through being courageous, as in the souls of the masters.

Turning to the masters, then, the ideal that animates their lives and therefore structures the polity as a whole, is *andreia*. This word has, for us, two distinguishable senses: ‘courage’ and ‘manliness’. While it makes sense to translate it as ‘courage’ in most instances (in Plato as in Aristotle), it is very useful in the description of the Spartan and Cretan ideal of *andreia* to conceive of this primarily as ‘manliness’. This ideal consists not only in courage, which is truly put to the test in battle; for in times of peace (which are merely times of preparation for war), the ideal is achieved through self-control over one’s emotions (and not just appetites). The opposite of this virtue, which is still a pervasive ideal today, is pusillanimousness, or ‘softness’, [*malakia*] or ‘effeminacy’. I am guessing, for example, that it would have been most shameful for a free Spartan boy (let alone a grown man) to cry.

Yet the inculcation of this ideal of courage and manliness is not meant merely to suppress certain feelings of weakness or tenderness; for it seems that the Spartans (and Cretans) well understood what I might call the law of conservation of emotion. What this means is that the suppressed feelings do not dissipate; in fact, the frustration of not expressing such feeling is positively stimulated. As is common, I am guessing, among all military cultures, the intentional fuelling of anger takes place through humiliation, by making the young soldier feel shame about the slightest weakness and imperfection,

likening him to an image of baseness (as represented by, say, a Helot who is forced to become a drunken fool).<sup>409</sup> The need to vent one's feeling becomes so extreme that one becomes fearless. Yet while the anger is brought to a rolling boil, the Spartan boys are trained most thoroughly in military skill, so that when the built-up reserves of passion simply must be vented, they come out in a physically and technically refined brutality against an enemy. It is due to these highly-skilled and fearless warriors, whose anger has been cultivated, that the timarchic constitution has such a long-standing success.

But, as mentioned above, if such a fearless man lacks the other virtues, he is liable to be "reckless, unjust, violent, and pre-eminently foolish."<sup>410</sup> The cultivation of anger occurs through the suppression of undesirable feelings, such as the desire to flee, to give in to pain, to cry, etc. The aim is to contain the resulting boldness within the bounds of the law and the authorities (i.e., commanders). As long as this occurs, the higher principle of the good of the whole is in control of the lower principle of emotion. Yet just as the slave class threatens to become too powerful to control, the passions may become increasingly enflamed to the point where they take over the soul and direct it without regard to the proper authority or prudence. A soldier may, for example, be led by the desire for revenge to act independently, sloughing off any resistance in his soul by the power of judgment.

The governance of the timarchic soul thus oscillates from self-control to the explosive release of passion. It is as though the charioteer in the metaphor of the *Phaedrus* is so harsh with the 'good horse' of passion that the horse eventually asserts its own will: when dominated by fearless anger, untrammelled by self-constraint, one becomes mad and savage.<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>409</sup> Plutarch, *Life of Lycurgus*, chapter 28.

<sup>410</sup> *Laws*, 630b. Cf. *Laches* 192c; *Protagoras*, 349d; *Meno*, 88b.

<sup>411</sup> *Statesman*, 310d.

The second and third criticisms of the timarchic character are in the same vein, but concern the consequences of the scorn of the other lowly element in the soul, namely the appetites. The goal of the ascetic practices of pain endurance is not only victory in war, but that “first and best victory”, namely the self-mastery of one’s appetites.<sup>412</sup> This suppression of the lower force is *enkratic*—that is, forced without rational persuasion.<sup>413</sup> But this means treating oneself as both master and slave.<sup>414</sup> Indeed, forcible constraint is suitable only for slaves, not truly free men.<sup>415</sup> The result of such constraint, then, is the inevitability of sedition in the soul, where the lower power asserts its own will, as it were, conquering the master.

Thus, in an allusion to Sparta in the *Republic*, Socrates notes that the timarchic men “cherish a fierce secret lust for gold and silver, owning store-houses and private treasuries where they may hide them away, and also the enclosures of their homes, literal private love-nests in which they can lavish their wealth on their women and any others they please with great expenditure.”<sup>416</sup> Here we see the force of the desire for wealth gaining the upper hand in private life, where the real constraining forces—public opinion and the law—do not fully penetrate.<sup>417</sup> The hidden weakness is for women (or “any others”). In fact, women are the most proximal cause of the origin of timarchic souls in the first place. In the

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<sup>412</sup> *Laws*, 626e.

<sup>413</sup> *Republic*, 548b-c.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, 430e-1a.

<sup>415</sup> *Laws*, 719e-20e.

<sup>416</sup> *Republic*, 548a-b. These private store-houses were apparently common in Sparta, according to Shorey (Loeb Classics, vol. 1, p. 250).

<sup>417</sup> That the law cannot penetrate into the depths of private life is made clear in the *Laws* (718b-c; 785a). There is a point beyond which legislation will not be effective; indeed, trying to legislate too far into the domain of one’s own [*oikos*] is dangerous, for it fosters the habit of disobeying the law (*Laws*, 788a-b). This is one reason why the ‘rational preludes’ are given by the Athenian before all laws: hopefully, the citizen will be able to adopt the general principle in dealing with the particularities of his situation (*Laws*, 720d-e; 772e; 790a-b).

account of decline from the *Republic*, the son of a virtuous but non-ruling citizen of the ideal polity

hears his mother complaining that her husband is not one of the rulers and for that reason she is slighted among the other women; and when she sees that her husband is not much concerned about money and does not fight and brawl in the private law-suits and in the public assembly, but takes all such matters lightly, and when she observes that he is self-absorbed in his thoughts and neither regards nor disregards her overmuch, and in consequence of all this laments and tells the boy that his father is too slack and no kind of a man, with all the other complains with which women nag in such cases.<sup>418</sup>

The son, hearing similar comments from the family's slaves about his father's laxity with respect to punishing his wrongdoers, grows up with conflicting aims: on one hand, that of "proving himself more of a man than his father" by getting what he deserves in such imbroglions; and on the other, his father's "rational principle" of "minding his own affairs."<sup>419</sup> As a compromise, the son does not quite endeavour to make lots of money, but rather becomes a lover of victory and seeks public honour. Nevertheless, we see the influence of women (and slaves) as one of the roots of the timarchic ideal as a compromise between the desire for virtue and the desire for wealth—an influence which continues to draw the soul towards the latter in stealth.<sup>420</sup>

The final and closely related criticism of the timarchic soul, then, is that the *enkritic* endurance must eventually succumb to indulgence. As the Athenian argues in the *Laws*, Spartan and Cretan education successfully train their men to withstand pain, but, by shunning pleasures altogether,<sup>421</sup> such as those of the drinking-parties,<sup>422</sup> it does not prepare them to endure likewise in the face of pleasure. In tempting situations, one who has had no

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<sup>418</sup> *Republic*, 549c-d.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*, 550a-b. Cf. *Charmides*, 162b.

<sup>420</sup> One of Aristotle's criticisms of the Spartan constitution is even more explicit: the love of victory keeps men out at war so much that the women end up taking effective control of the polity. Since the Spartan women are neglected by the educational system, they lack scorn of earthly matters, and the indulgence of the appetites sets in (*Politics*, 1269b13-1270a14).

<sup>421</sup> *Laws*, 635b-c.

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*, 637a.

practice in moderating his indulgence will only be able to control himself to a certain degree, finally losing the battle to one who can, like Socrates in the *Symposium*, participate in the pleasurable activity of drinking without succumbing to drunkenness.<sup>423</sup> Hence, by abstaining from pleasure altogether, and not recognizing that it has its due place and amount,<sup>424</sup> the timarchic character lacks the principle of measuredness, i.e., the infusion of reason into the appetites, harmonizing them through the knowledge and practice of setting due proportions.

Thus we see how the suppressed principle of corruption—namely the appetitive desires—gains the upper hand, making the ‘inferior part superior to the superior’, and bringing about the fall of the timarchy into the rule of the appetites. In other words, the lovers of victory cannot always assure victory all the time. Instead, they should learn true moderation. From the perspective of *sophrosune*, virtue is not an embattled suppression and domination; that would be *enkrateia*, which is always a precarious form of control.

### C. The state of the intellect in the rule of passion

The governance of passion in the soul does not simply mean that people do whatever their emotions ‘tell’ them. Rather, the rule of passion requires what Plato calls an alliance with reason against the appetites.<sup>425</sup> What this means is that the intellect provides judgments which are then enforced by the passions. In showing the distinctness of the spirited part of the soul, Socrates evokes the story of Leontius, who was possessed by both the desire to look at corpses and disgust or anger over this very desire, which eventually

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<sup>423</sup> *Symposium*, 223c-d.

<sup>424</sup> *Laws*, 636d.

<sup>425</sup> *Republic*, 439c; 440b; 441a.

won over the anger.<sup>426</sup> The anger was allied to the judgment produced by the intellect, which deemed this action and inclination vile or base. Likewise, any subsequent feelings of shame and remorse would have reflected those same judgments concerning the good and the bad.

In the timarchies, then, judgment has been passed on lower emotions (e.g., fear) and appetitive pleasures, and this judgment holds fast; what is right and wrong, noble and base has been determined once and for all. Hence there ought to be no innovation in the laws, customs, and education. In fact, children ought not to be allowed even to hear of any criticism of their way of life (as the interlocutors in the *Laws*, being old men conversing in private, are allowing themselves to do).<sup>427</sup> Furthermore, knowing that foreign influence leads to change and innovation through the introduction of novel customs and ideas, the Spartans expel all alien residents when making political decisions.<sup>428</sup> Moreover, both the Spartans and Cretans do not allow their youth to travel abroad, “lest they unlearn what they have learned at home.”<sup>429</sup>

With regard to the intellect, their education consists of the inculcation of the basic but powerful practical maxims of the Seven Sages, including ‘know thyself’, and ‘nothing overmuch’. Though they may not fare well in argumentative conversations, they do know when to call up these maxims, like a “deadly shot that makes [the] interlocutor seem like a helpless child.”<sup>430</sup> It is because their wisdom is so simple and essentially true that Socrates

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<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, 439e-40a. On the sexual nature of Leontius’ desire, see Reeve’s note to this passage citing a comedic fragment about his love of boys so pale as to be like corpses (*Plato – Republic*, transl. G. M. A. Grube, revised by C. D. C. Reeve. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992), p. 115.)

<sup>427</sup> *Laws*, 634d-e; cf. *Greater Hippias*, 284b.

<sup>428</sup> *Laws*, 949e. Notice that the Athenian considers the Aliens Expulsion Act to be tyrannical and overly severe.

<sup>429</sup> *Protagoras*, 342d.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, 342e. Cf. *Laws* 721e, where Megillus, the elder Spartan, says that the Laconian way is to prefer brevity always; he does, however, come to agree that the persuasive method of the lawgiver, with the rational prelude and explanation, is preferable.

praises their ‘philosophical’ education.<sup>431</sup> He goes so far as to suggest that it is by means of the simple adherence to these ancient maxims, rather than the military training *per se*, that the Spartans were once masters of Greece.<sup>432</sup> It is thus the very lack of skepticism that assures their safety and success: the guiding principles and ideals remain in immediate effect, without questioning (or at least without open questioning). Someone such as Simonides, who, according to Socrates’ interpretation, publicly takes issue with these wise maxims—and that for the sake of making a name for himself—would not be desired or tolerated in Sparta and Crete.<sup>433</sup>

Thus, with the exception of the development of military stratagems,<sup>434</sup> the power of reason is kept quiet. The foundational principles and laws of the state are sufficient to maintain the form of life, and its health depends on the firm, unreflective attachment to them. The rigid perpetuation of the laws originally instituted by their divine lawgivers reflects a fixation of the intellect: this legislative power in the alliance sits dormant while the passions are active, executing the law and judging each situation through emotive force. The passions are thus the vitalizing force in this governance: their presence is felt in all situations, whether it be the sense of glory that comes with victory, the anger that ensues from the perception of a base desire, or the shame that comes with the relinquishment of power to the appetites when one indulges.

Though the intellect has distinguished noble and base in all spheres of life, it has done so in the past and in the universal form of law. To recall, it is argued in the *Statesman* that the ideal governance transcends law: like the gods who could attend to all particular affairs singly and simultaneously, reason in the ideal state is present and active in all

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<sup>431</sup> *Protagoras*, 342d.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, 342c.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*, 343c.

<sup>434</sup> *Republic*, 547d-e.

situations, judging according to the specifics of the situation what ought to be done, “making knowledge his law.”<sup>435</sup> But:

[I]aw can never issue an injunction on all which really embodies what is best for each; it cannot prescribe with perfect accuracy what is good and right for each member of the community at any one time. The difference of human personality, the variety of man’s activities and the inevitable unsettlement attending all human experience make it impossible for any art whatsoever to issue unqualified rules holding good on all questions at all times.<sup>436</sup>

That is to say, the ideal governance is the direct application of wisdom without the mediation of law. As we saw in Chapter 4, this is how the gods and the *daimones* ruled the ancient societies. In imitation of this, the philosopher-king therefore would possess not only *epistēmē* of the true forms of reality, but a practical *logismos* with *aisthēsis* (reasoning with perception).<sup>437</sup> Law can only be a substitute, and by its nature as generality, there will always be times when it is inappropriate. Thus the rigid rule of law is “like a stubborn and ignorant man who lets no one do anything contrary to his command or even to ask a question, not even if something new occurs to someone, which is better than the rule he has himself ordained.”<sup>438</sup> Likewise, those “most law-abiding of men”—i.e., the Spartans—are considered “stubborn and self-willed.”<sup>439</sup>

From the strict adherence to law, which remains as constant as possible, it follows that no attention is given to ideas or considerations that fall outside the bounds of customary experience. Like the character of Laches, who clearly represents “the Spartan ideal of civic spiritedness,”<sup>440</sup> others’ opinions are not even worth hearing unless they are backed up by the evidence of deeds, judged by the standard of valour. A certain misogyny

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<sup>435</sup> *Statesman*, 297a. (transl. J. B. Skemp)

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, 294b.

<sup>437</sup> *Republic*, 346b.

<sup>438</sup> *Statesman*, 294c.

<sup>439</sup> *Greater Hippias*, 285b; *Republic*, 548e.

<sup>440</sup> Schmid, *On Manly Courage*, p. 102.

is present here.<sup>441</sup> In fact, there is even fear of putting wise men in power and a preference for the more “high-spirited and simple-minded men, who are better suited to war than for peace.”<sup>442</sup> Though the term ‘simple’ here is *haplos*, and not *euētheia*, the quality being mentioned is related to the latter; for what is indicated by *haplos* is the singularity of remaining within the given hierarchy of values and being able to apply its judgments decisively.<sup>443</sup> For a general that has doubts about his priorities is dangerous.<sup>444</sup> Since the given order is not open to question, wise men capable of employing independent reason to make constitutional innovations are therefore to be avoided. The few wise men of the past, like Lycurgus, Minos, and Theopompus (who introduced the system of Ephors) suffice for stability. It is no wonder, then, that there are no rhetoricians in these timarchies,<sup>445</sup> for such men would be able to defend opposing values (i.e., to be ‘*diplos*’, or two-faced). Indeed, honour and the appointment of offices in the timarchy are “not based on ability to speak or anything of that sort....”<sup>446</sup> Their displays of intelligence are not discursive or theatrical, but simple and pithy.

It follows, then, that the Spartans would have had little interest in a sophist’s show of intelligence. When, for example, Hippias visited there, the people did not applaud him for his discourses in astronomy, or geometry, and were “far from enduring a lecture on the processes of thought;” rather, they “made use of [him] as children make use of old women,

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<sup>441</sup> *Laches*, 188a.

<sup>442</sup> *Republic*, 547e.

<sup>443</sup> In this passage, Socrates says that the timarchic men are no longer simple (*haplos*) in that they are of a mixed strain. This, I believe, refers to their being a mix of aristocratic and oligarchic tendencies. Yet in the preference for more simple-minded (*haplousterous*) men, the term ‘*haplos*’ cannot be referring to the same trait; for it has just clearly been stated that there are no ‘simple’ men in the sense of being unmixed, as in the aristocracy. The simplicity here must therefore refer to another quality, despite the same word. The simple-mindedness being referred to, then, is what we usually call ‘decisiveness’, which, at least in popular opinion, is crucial for a war-time leader.

<sup>444</sup> See the criticism of Nicias in Chapter I, § B.ii.c above.

<sup>445</sup> *Republic*, 548e.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*, 549a.

to tell stories agreeably.”<sup>447</sup> In particular, they liked stories concerning ancient times and the heroes.<sup>448</sup> Despite not being educated much in music and poetry, preferring gymnastics by far, they are still lovers of music and lovers of listening [by far, th and and r, ];<sup>449</sup> for stories about the heroes stimulate the vital principle of their constitution by calling to mind vivid images of the ideal they strive towards. Hence, Homer, who paints the beautiful portraits of Achilles and Odysseus, is regarded as the greatest poet in Sparta.<sup>450</sup>

The Spartan and Cretan lack of mathematical education (recalling from the *Republic* that this includes arithmetic, geometry and astronomy) is spoken of in the *Laws*. Taken in conjunction with the discussion of education in Book VII of the *Republic*, this point implies a subtle but powerful criticism of the lack of intellectual development. Since mastery of the motions of the body soothes fears and therefore fosters *andreia*, their education is limited to gymnastics and some music.<sup>451</sup> They do not cross that famous line into the purely intellectual pursuits. As the saying went, “many of them [the Spartans] do not even know how to count.”<sup>452</sup> The Athenian is therefore reluctant to discuss mathematical education with the Cretan and Spartan, as he is “scared by the neglect of such studies which is the habit in [those] countries.”<sup>453</sup> Yet mathematics has the special

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<sup>447</sup> *Greater Hippias*, 285c; 286a. The comparison of Spartans to children is, in my view, quite interesting, even if the thought was not from Plato himself (as the authorship of the *Greater Hippias* is disputed). The form of life in this state resembles boyhood, as contrasted with infancy and adolescence. As is typical of boys, everything is about winning a competition. That is, *philonikia* is characteristic of packs of boys, who are, for the most part, not yet developed individually, and who respect the winner and the stronger one. (See José Ortega y Gasset, “The Sportive Origin of the State,” in *Towards a Philosophy of History*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002.)) We might say that Sparta and Crete—or the timocracy—represent the phase of boyhood in Greek history. The mythic or ancient aristocracy described in Chapter 3 would be equivalent to the phase of infancy, of complete dependence on a higher (rational) ruler. Here, a strong sense of independence and self-will have sprouted. Yet lust has not yet become dominant, as in the adolescent. Notice the contrast with Athens, where pederasty is even an institution, and where individuality has begun to blossom, as in the marvellous cases of young men in Charmides and Alcibiades.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*, 285d.

<sup>449</sup> *Republic*, 548b; 548e.

<sup>450</sup> *Laws*, 680c. The Cretans, by contrast here, are unfamiliar with foreign poets.

<sup>451</sup> *Laws*, 791b-e; 796a.

<sup>452</sup> *Greater Hippias*, 285d.

<sup>453</sup> *Laws*, 818e.

significance of being the study which turns the soul from the realm of becoming to the realm of immutable being.<sup>454</sup> In employing number, one must abstract from the plurality of sensuous reality and apprehend the unity of things—which unity itself is purely intelligible.<sup>455</sup> Hence this “study of the one” [ . . . ] “naturally conduce[s] to the awakening of thought . . . tend[ing] to draw the mind to essence and reality [t t t t].”<sup>456</sup> Lacking the cognitive capacity to recognize essential unities, the Spartans and Cretans deny themselves access to true reality, and can never identify themselves properly as knowers. The upshot, though, is that, since the intellect has not begun to grow independent of the given world, and hence skeptical, the Cretan is not even familiar with the *amathia* (ignorance) that is atheism, with which only the Athenian is familiar enough to address.<sup>457</sup>

As a result of their lack of apprehension of unity, the Spartans and Cretans relate to one another in a highly differential manner based on class, as has been discussed. Without an appreciation of the common essence of all human beings as embodied rational agents—that is, lacking an awareness of humanity as such—their dealings with one another are entirely mediated by the concepts of ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’. Under the strict system of timarchic rank, each person will submit to and revere his superior, while treating his inferior with scorn and harshness.<sup>458</sup> As will be shown in the next chapter, such differentiation of respect contrasts starkly with democratic Athens.

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<sup>454</sup> *Republic*, 521d.

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid.*, 524b-5b.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, 525a; 523a. Cf. 520c-d.

<sup>457</sup> This point will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

<sup>458</sup> *Republic*, 549a.

## Conclusion

The conception of virtue as courage and manliness is the ideal towards which the timarchic ruling class is dedicated. Life here is athletic in the fullest sense, including both the sportive desire for victory and the sense of struggle on which it thrives. The body and the experience of suffering fear, pain, and anger are regarded as materials to be worked on in service of this idea of virtue as bodily and spiritual strength. There is thus a sense of valour and dignity in mastering the body, and not allowing oneself to be ruled by the ends it 'proposes'. Satisfaction of the appetites is thus relegated to a contemptible class of slaves. What is honoured by all in these polities (or at least by the ruling class) is the successful application of a determined will; the greater the suffering that is resisted, the greater the demonstration of power. In this reverence of will-power lies the first sense of the dignity of human freedom, for it acknowledges and celebrates the capacity to transcend nature. Thus freedom is counted as one of the essential traits of the ideal guardian class, whose characteristics serve as the ideal in the timarchy.<sup>459</sup> Unlike in the mythic, ancient aristocracy of blessed simplicity, there is a constant effort in the timarchy to overcome an element of evil in pursuit of a higher idea of man than as he is by nature. This sense of infinite striving is a new and important quality gained in the decline from aristocracy to timarchy.

But this ideal remains too closely tied to sensuousness and worldliness: for it to be actualized, the presence of pain and the fearsome are required, as is the image of depravity represented by the lower class. Moreover, the ideal is sought not because such self-possession is necessary for righteousness, but either for the sake of the attainment and

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<sup>459</sup> *Republic*, 395c.

demonstration of power, or for the sake of honour and reputation—goods which are notoriously fleeting and dependent on vanity. Bound through force to the slavish elements, the masters inevitably succumb to them—either politically in a slave revolt, or psychically through secret indulgence of appetitive desires and the inability to moderate pleasures.

## Chapter 6 - *Akratic* self-division in Athens and the development of instrumental reason

### Introduction

According to Plato's dialogues, as well as Aristotle's account, the Athenian constitution changed from a monarchy in ancient times to democracy in modern times.<sup>460</sup> As late as the beginning of the Persian War (about 500 B.C.), it was still considered by Plato to be 'ancient', where this essentially meant that the *demos* had no control over the laws, but willingly submitted to them out of reverence [Laws, ].<sup>461</sup> After the Athenian victory at Marathon against the Persians, however, this condition changed, and a full democracy emerged in which various liberties were granted to all citizens. (There was only the brief oligarchical interruption of the Thirty Tyrants in 404-3 (under Critias).) Indeed, in the *Laws*, modern Athens is characterized as taking the principle of liberty to its extreme, and is therefore the quintessential case of democracy.<sup>462</sup> This is consistent with the description of democracy in the *Republic*, where the democratic conception of the good is likewise defined as liberty.<sup>463</sup> Only in the *Menexenus* is there any hint at Athens being anything other than a democracy. There it is claimed that Athens is and always has been an "aristocracy backed by popular approbation".<sup>464</sup> It must be noted, however, that this denomination occurs in the context of a competition to give a public eulogy of fallen Athenian soldiers. Hence, it is tantamount to praise of Athenian leaders and flattery of its

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<sup>460</sup> See Aristotle, *The Athenian Constitution*, fragments 1-7 on the initial monarchy and chapters 2 and 3 on the change into oligarchy prior to Draco.

<sup>461</sup> *Laws*, 698b, 700a. Cf. 699c-d.

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*, 693d; 698a; 699e. Cf. *Republic*, 564a.

<sup>463</sup> *Republic*, 562b.

<sup>464</sup> *Menexenus*, 238d.

currently democratic citizens.<sup>465</sup> Calling Athens an essentially aristocratic-democratic constitution implies that its current state is the pinnacle and glorious fruition of Athens. Since this is so out of line with everything else said by Plato about modern Athens, it seems reasonable to regard the speech as obsequiousness (though this does not mean that it ought not to be read seriously).<sup>466</sup>

In general, then, modern Athens, in Plato's depiction, represents the rule of appetite in an intellectually developed climate. Here, the passions of shame and respect have given way to a youthful audacity which demands the right to pursue all desires, regarded as equal in worth. What is truly honoured is therefore the individual will and the freedom to do what one wants. Being the rule of the many, whose desires are generally appetitive and selfishly oriented, such freedom allows all, in theory, to pursue their private desires. Considering that Athens is the centre of Greek intellectual life, the domination of the intellect by the appetites is striking, albeit somewhat complex. Each of the three major strands of intellectual life—dramatic poetry, natural science, and sophism—has a role to play in bringing about the democratic constitution and exacerbating its problems. What we

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<sup>465</sup> See Kerch, T. M. (2008), "Plato's *Menexenus*: A Paradigm of Rhetorical Flattery," *Polis* 25(1): 94-114. Cf., Sara Monoson (1998), "Remembering Pericles: The Political and Theoretical Import of Plato's *Menexenus*," *Political Theory*, 26(4): 489-513, where it has been suggested that the speech is a parody of Pericles' famous funeral oration. (See Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, II, §§34-46.) It should be noted that interpretations of the *Menexenus* do vary widely, including an intriguing argument that it is actually a eulogy for Socrates given by Socrates. See Harold S. Stern (1974), "Plato's Funeral Oration," *New Scholasticism* 48 (1974), 503-508. Other takes include Pamela. Huby, (1957) "The *Menexenus* Reconsidered," *Phronesis*, 2: 104-111; and C. Kahn, (1963) "Plato's Funeral Oration: The Motive of the *Menexenus*," *Classical Philology*, 58, 4: 220-34.

<sup>466</sup> On the ambiguously ironic status of the *Menexenus*, Dombrowski writes: "The main problem with [the *Menexenus*] is determining where the spoof on Pericles and other orators ends, and where Socrates' own serious treatment of Athens begins. The position that the only accusation that can be made against Athens is that she is too compassionate (244e) is an example of the former. And the contention that the ruler who separates knowledge from virtue is not wise (247a) is an example of the latter. Although the majority of points are in between these two poles, I think that almost all of them lean toward the latter pole, i.e., toward a serious treatment of Athens. For example, the claim that Athens was superior in almost all respects to other Greeks, and especially the barbarians, is made both there (239b, 245c) and elsewhere (e.g., *Statesman* 262d)." (*Philosophy of History*, p. 29-30).

will see is that, whereas Sparta and Crete exhibited an ideal of self-mastery without the free use of reason, Athens develops independent reason, but only in the service of the satisfaction of worldly desires.

#### A. On Athens as Democracy from Oligarchy and into Tyranny

It is crucial that the democratic constitution results, at least logically, if not also historically, from the oligarchic, whose principle—and cause of demise—is the love of wealth [wealth [ally]].<sup>467</sup> In both kinds of constitution, the appetitive element is dominant; the difference between the two is that the oligarchy condones only the pursuit of the necessary appetites, while the democracy opens the flood-gates to all unnecessary desires as well.<sup>468</sup> Wealth alone, however, is not sufficient to pursue these unnecessary desires, since one might be prevented from indulging by feelings of shame, by public scorn, or, as in the case of the oligarch, by fear of not having enough money for later.<sup>469</sup> Hence the unfettered freedom to do (and say) whatever what wants is the more fundamental condition necessary for the pursuit of all appetites, though wealth is certainly still required in many cases.

In the oligarchy, appetite (*epithumia*) is king, and enslaves the other parts of the soul: it directs the passions (*thumos*) toward the honour of wealth and wealthy persons, and employs the intellect for calculative purposes—i.e., for private financial gain.<sup>470</sup> Those with wealth govern those who lack it, eventually reducing the latter more or less to beggars and thieves, who, like drones afflicting a hive, are useless and costly to the polity as a

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<sup>467</sup> *Republic*, 553e; 562b.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*, 559c; 561a.

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*, 554d.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, 553c.

whole.<sup>471</sup> The oligarchic soul is a hoarder,<sup>472</sup> and is unable to turn his attention to anything greater than his personal security or that of ‘his own’ (i.e., his *oikos*). He thus lacks education or culture (*paidia*), which is the state of being drawn out of being absorbed in one’s ego and into a universal mode of being, open to all and best for all. Since the latter requires moderating self-interest, true education is not even within reach in the oligarchy, for “[i]t is impossible for a city to honor wealth and at the same time for its citizens to acquire moderation, but one or the other is inevitably neglected.”<sup>473</sup>

    Tempted to secure comfort for himself at a minimum cost and effort, the oligarchic soul becomes a breeding ground of sorts, in which the “dronish” appetites—i.e., non-necessary—spring up.<sup>474</sup> But these are still “forcibly restrained by his general self-surveillance and self-control.”<sup>475</sup> Rather than being able to tame these appetites by persuading himself that they are not true goods, but merely apparent ones, he can only keep himself in check “by compulsion and fear, trembling for his possessions generally.”<sup>476</sup> Though his ‘better desires’ generally keep him aligned, the oligarchic man “would not be free from internal dissension [fff]; he would not really be one, but in some sort double man [[; he w].... The true virtue of a soul in unison and harmony with itself would escape him and dwell afar.”<sup>477</sup> Like the timarchic man, he is divided against himself; but whereas the timarchic soul is divided against itself as honour and love of victory (in the passions) versus comfort and pleasure (in the appetites), the oligarchic soul is divided against itself within the appetites themselves, namely between present and future appetites.

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<sup>471</sup> *Republic.*, 551c-d.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*, 553b.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*, 555c.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*, 559c.

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*, 554c.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, 554d.

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid.*, 554d. Cf. *Republic* 397e; 440b,e; *Phaedrus*, 237d-e; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099a19.

As is familiar to us, in a polity in which financial security is among the highest values, general spending and licentiousness are encouraged to the point that the younger generation finds itself in gross amounts of debt.<sup>478</sup> The lenders become richer, and therefore more honoured (for the time being).<sup>479</sup> But when those in debt eventually become paupers, there arises a desire for revolution, which is easily carried out. For the ruling class has become vulnerable: the sons of the ruling oligarchs have been spoiled by their parents' security of all the 'necessary'—i.e., material—conditions, and by their parents' inability to persuade them to control those unnecessary desires brewing in them.<sup>480</sup> The sons are consequently 'soft' [consequē], averse to toil, and much like the pauper class, indifferent to any of the spiritual striving toward self-possession that we saw in Sparta and Crete.<sup>481</sup> Recognizing this weakness and cowardice, the pauper class pounces by overthrowing the oligarchs and raising the democratic banner of equality and liberty.<sup>482</sup>

Yet a class struggle based on relative wealth persists in the democracy. A successful minority of industrious people become rich through better organizational skills and must struggle to keep their money from the drones who have taken charge of the government.<sup>483</sup> Furthermore, there is still the lower and largest class of 'the people' [ ], which is rarely involved in politics and consequently receives an even smaller share of the wealth.<sup>484</sup> Unwilling to part with their riches, the wealthier class is accused by the drones of being oligarchs; and in fact, they are, despite not having control of the actual government. (One is reminded here of 'Big Business'.) To bring the upper class down, the

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<sup>478</sup> *Republic*, 555d.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*, 555c.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*, 560b.

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*, 556c.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*, 556e-7a.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*, 564e.

<sup>484</sup> *Republic.*, 564c-5a.

drone class stirs up the people against the rich and produces a mass of litigation against the latter. The rich respond with legal tactics and impeachments, while the docile mob of people rally behind a leader—one who eventually becomes a tyrant when he is successful against the higher classes.<sup>485</sup>

From excessive liberty in the democracy eventually comes excessive slavery in tyranny. This reversal of mastery and slavery is not unexpected, for “excessive action in one direction usually sets up a reaction in the opposite direction,” whether this is in seasons, plants, bodies, or political constitutions.<sup>486</sup>

The liberty that is dangerously taken to an extreme here is of a very particular sort. What is demanded by the democratic right to liberty is the right to do and say whatever one wants [wwwwww ].<sup>487</sup> For the bulk of humans, what one wants is determined by the appetites. Democratic liberty is therefore what Plato calls “popular liberty” [t t t t t t t t ] in the *Laws*. “The desire common to all men,” he writes, is ... “that, if possible, everything,—or failing that, all that is humanly possible, should happen in accordance with the demands of one’s own heart [t t . . . . . ].”<sup>488</sup> This, of course, is most natural. However, “the mass of mankind... desire without limit, and when they can make moderate gains, they prefer to gain insatiably.”<sup>489</sup> Add to this the claim that “the many judge that pleasures are the greatest blessings in life, and they imagine that the lusts of beasts are better witnesses than are the

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<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.*, 565b-e.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.*, 563e-4a. (Grube’s translation) For a recent discussion of whether and how Plato’s views on democracy in the *Republic* can be applied to contemporary democracy, see Gerasimos Santas (2007), “Plato’s Criticisms of Democracy in the *Republic*,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 24(2) (2007): 70-89.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*, 557b. I think this is an accurate statement with respect to modern democracy as well.

<sup>488</sup> *Laws*, 687c.

<sup>489</sup> *Laws*, 918d. Cf. *Gorgias*, 494a-b, where Callicles adopts this view of the pleasant life.

aspirations and thoughts inspired by the philosophic muse,<sup>490</sup> we see that popular liberty is essentially the universal permission to pursue as much pleasure as possible without scruple. In other words, it is an ideal that springs from the appetitive part of the soul.

In order to accomplish this indiscriminate pursuit of pleasure, what is required in the new regime is the destruction of the aspects of the given moral code which condemn certain actions absolutely, and leaders who, out of “love for the people” allow them to indulge their desires.<sup>491</sup> Wrong is essentially defined by the limitation of liberty. Thus granted the familiar “freedom to do what you want to do” [ggggggg ],<sup>492</sup> the democratic souls are unencumbered by any external order [democ]. Without a sense of civic duty, or without any other ideal borne within them, they have no sense of necessity operative in their lives; yet they consider themselves blessed.<sup>493</sup> Liberty is therefore only the nominal principle of democracy, the lofty-sounding idea by means of which the citizens justify their indulgence.

The real principle of the democratic constitution is the assertion of the individual, who erroneously identifies himself with his peculiar appetites—i.e., with whatever he wants in the present moment. The oligarch, as has been mentioned, was still oriented by anxiety over his future security, while the timarch was oriented by the laws of the past and the traditional ideal of manliness. By contrast, the democratic individual, unfettered by any past or future, has claimed the absolute right to shape his own life. But he does so with the impertinence typical of an adolescent. As the Athenian claims: “Every boy . . . , as soon as he has grown to manhood, deems himself capable of learning all things, and supposes that by lauding his soul he honours it, and by eagerly permitting it do whatever it pleases

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<sup>490</sup> *Philebus*, 67b. Cf. *Republic*, 505b.

<sup>491</sup> *Republic*, 558b.

<sup>492</sup> *Laws*, 687b.

<sup>493</sup> *Republic*, 561d.

..... ].”<sup>494</sup> Though the principle of self-determination has sprouted in the democracy, its growth is aimless, wild, and anarchic.<sup>495</sup> Lacking direction, it produces diverse ways of living; since all desires are given equal value, the citizens dabble in all sorts of pursuits, regarding them as adornments to their personality and so acquiring nothing but the superficiality of the dilettante who can dazzle the ignorant with his variety of colours.<sup>496</sup> All ways of life [ All ways o] are to be found here, including the ideals of former times, such as the more traditional ideal of manliness that still prevails in Sparta and Crete.<sup>497</sup> The Athenian character of Laches, for example, shows that in military life that ideal still has vital force (as it does in contemporary democracies’ military culture). It is simply not the only valid normative standard anymore. The diverse result is alluring and beautiful at first glance, but it lacks substance and nobility.<sup>498</sup> For not all things are to be desired and pursued; a father, for instance, does not always wish for his son to get everything that the son prays for, since these might not actually be good.<sup>499</sup> Indeed, the democracy suffers from that “greatest cause of error,” namely the kind of ignorance

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<sup>494</sup> *Laws*, 727a-b.

<sup>495</sup> *Republic*, 558c.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*, 561b-d; 559d.

<sup>497</sup> Bernard Williams has objected that: “Moving between the social and the individual level once more, Plato seems disposed to confound two very different things: a state in which there are various characters among the people, and a state in which most of the people have a various character, that is to say, a very shifting and unsteady character.” (“Analogy”, p. 201) Lear (1992) has provided an adequate response in noting the following: “That a polis allows and even prides itself on the fact that it has various sorts of character is, for Plato, a manifestation of the fact that it does not have a firmly established sense of better or worse. There can be no agreed or enforced set of values, beyond tolerance: thus the political possibility of various types. It is as though citizens are allowed to decide for themselves what will constitute their own goods.” (p. 204) The polis as a whole will have a variety of types of character, and a common feature of these characters is the tendency to be unsteady. But not everyone has to be unsteady; only a large part of the populace. Thus, Lear amends Williams’ principle: instead of it being the case that, for Plato, a polis is F if and only if its citizens are F, it is rather the case that, for Plato, if a polis is F, then some of its citizens are F (p. 196). The appetitive class, for example, is not courageous in the timarchy. Moreover, there may be spirited characters in the democracy who are simply not part of “the most influential, or predominant citizens,” in Williams’ words.

<sup>498</sup> *Republic*, 557b-c.

<sup>499</sup> *Laws*, 687d-8a.

where one mistakes apparent goods for the true good (which all, in fact, desire deep down).<sup>500</sup>

What makes it possible to regard all desires as equal and worthy of pursuit is the affirmation of the value of the individual, conceived primarily in reference to his appetites. This affirmation amounts to nothing more than the self-consciousness and approval of one's particular tastes. Though self-consciousness as such does indeed constitute the essence of the soul—i.e., the activity or actuality of intellect, this appetitive conception of the soul rests on a fundamental error, namely the confusion between the set of one's preferences and the *awareness* of those preferences.<sup>501</sup> It is therefore in the realm of aesthetics that we find, according to the *Laws*, the “commencement [of] how the life of excessive liberty grew up.”<sup>502</sup> This second account of the origin of democracy—and specifically Athenian democracy—is ostensibly quite different than the one in the *Republic*; but, as this segue has hopefully begun to show, it is quite consistent with it.<sup>503</sup> The common link between the two accounts is the emergence of the affirmation of the individual, popularly understood as the idiosyncrasy of desire.

## B. The origin of democracy from musical ignorance

Of Athens we are told that, “besides all its various culture [Of At], [it] has poets of every kind, and especially those who write tragedy, [which] is a very ancient invention of

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<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*, 688c; 689a.

<sup>501</sup> The truth of the matter, as is argued in the *Philebus*, is that the constant in the flow of pleasures and pain is the awareness itself; there is thus a confusion in this conception of the ‘self’ between the awareness itself, which constitutes one's essence, and the object of awareness, which here is mistaken as the essential.

<sup>502</sup> *Laws*, 700a.

<sup>503</sup> On the role of music in the decline of the polity in the *Republic*, see 424c-e; and see Lear, “Inside”, §5 on the effect of poetry in the birth of tyranny.

[that] city.”<sup>504</sup> It has thus always been a distinctly *musical* polity, taking the term in its broad Greek sense. According to Plato, the musical arts possess great power in that they can lift one beyond interest in the mere appetites through the “improvement of the standard of pleasure by hearing about characters superior to [one’s] own.”<sup>505</sup> So long as it is good, music is fundamental to education because it harmonizes the lower parts of the soul to the ideal of virtue, making one yearn for it and take pleasure in advancing towards it. It thus overcomes that ignorance which resulted in the psychic discord between pleasure and reason. Whereas philosophical *erōs* has the same function for some of the youth,<sup>506</sup> music is part of the minimal common education. Specifically, it is the crucial instrument in “guiding children towards that principle which is pronounced right by the law and confirmed as truly right by the experience of the oldest and most just;”<sup>507</sup> and it does so through the habituation or conditioning of pain and pleasure. The political danger of music is innovation, which releases the bonds of tradition by modelling young souls according to different ideals, or to none at all.

As is well known, the main criticism that Plato has of poetry or music concerns harmful content: it presents false and inconsistent images of divinity and virtue, where unrighteousness in gods and men is matched with reward and pleasure.<sup>508</sup> But this only applies to bad poetry, which is to say inaccurate poetry. The infamous banishment of the poets in the *Republic* is a banishment of the independent artist; for music is still the basis of education of the guardians in the ideal polity. Unwanted are characters such as Simonides, who, according to Socrates in the *Protagoras*, composed at least one of his poems for the

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<sup>504</sup> *Minos*, 320e-1a.

<sup>505</sup> *Laws*, 659c. “Hearing about” is my substitution for “listening to” in Bury’s translation.

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.*, 837c.

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*, 659d.

<sup>508</sup> *Republic*, 568a. Cf. *Laws*, 719c.

sake of gaining a name for himself by cleverly refuting an ancient maxim of Pittacus (one of the Seven Sages).<sup>509</sup> Simonides—or so goes the accusation—was not primarily interested in extolling virtue for the proper education of his audience. Euripides too would be unwanted, since he glamorizes the life of the tyrant.<sup>510</sup> By associating pleasure with vice, such poetry, which has great power to determine public opinion,<sup>511</sup> fails to foster—and even cripples—any desire for virtue, which is the key to salvation of both the individual soul and the polity.<sup>512</sup>

This deprivation through poetry results from the poets' ignorance of the true essence of the life which they represent.<sup>513</sup> (Actors and rhapsodes too are criticized on similar grounds in the *Ion*.)<sup>514</sup> Those who determine public opinion ought, rather, to be 'educated by the gods'—either inspired lawgivers such as Minos and Lycurgus, or proper statesmen who have attained wisdom through philosophy. Hence, in the *Laws*, poets are allowed in the colony being legislated for, but only under a system of censorship which judges the accuracy of new poetry with respect to the union of justice and happiness.<sup>515</sup>

We might imagine Plato actually condoning independent poetry in unjust constitutions; it does, after all, have the power to expose the falsity or absurdity of current opinions and habits, whether the poetry is old or new. Indeed, despite the criticisms of the old poets in the *Republic*, Socrates employs Homer and Hesiod in just such a way among the modern Athenians—i.e., to encourage their education.<sup>516</sup>

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<sup>509</sup> *Protagoras*, 343c.

<sup>510</sup> *Republic*, 568a.

<sup>511</sup> *Minos*, 320e.

<sup>512</sup> *Laws*, 906b; 961c-d.

<sup>513</sup> *Republic*, 600e; 602a.

<sup>514</sup> *Ion*, 536e.

<sup>515</sup> *Laws*, 660a; 817c-d; 941c.

<sup>516</sup> See *Laches*, 201b, to take one of many examples.

There is also—primarily in the *Laws*—another critique of poetry which focuses on its formal aspects. While Athens still had an ancient constitution, it recognized several distinct genres of music, each appointed to its proper function: the hymn for prayer, the dirge for mourning, the dithyramb to Dionysus, the paeon to Apollo, etc.<sup>517</sup> These corresponded with various tonal modes, which naturally expressed joy, courage, loss, etc.<sup>518</sup> Moreover, certain instruments were appropriate in certain contexts, each being naturally imitative of distinct things in nature (e.g., the flute and the bird).<sup>519</sup> This order was not based on mere human convention; styles, modes and instruments of music had—and always have—their own inherent qualities and purposes. The positive law which assigns each its own place was therefore a means to keeping their use within the natural order of things, of grounding this part of human convention in the divine law of the cosmos. To mix or confound the styles of music was therefore a transgression of the law, both in the most literal sense of being against specific rules and punishable,<sup>520</sup> and in the more symbolic sense of loosening human convention from the objective laws of reality.

This is precisely what happened “later on, with the progress of time” in Athens:

...there arose as leaders of unmusical illegality poets who, though by nature poetical, were ignorant of what was just and lawful in music; and they, being frenzied [fr enzi ed [w] and unduly possessed by a spirit of pleasure, mixed dirges with hymns, and paeans with dithyrambs, and imitated flute-tunes with harp-tunes, and blended every kind of music with ever other; and thus, through their folly, they unwittingly bore false witness against music, as a thing without any standard of correctness of which the best criterion is the pleasure of the auditor, be he a good man or a bad.<sup>521</sup>

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<sup>517</sup> *Laws*, 700b.

<sup>518</sup> *Republic*, 399a. The mixolydian was for dirges, and the Ionian and Lydian were for *symposia* (dithyrambic, perhaps); the Dorian and Phrygian, meanwhile, “imitate the tone and rhythm of a courageous person who is active in battle...or some other misfortune, and who...is fighting off his fate steadily and with self-control.” (Grube’s translation) It is still quite easy to recognize the emotions specific to each of these modes.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*, 397a.

<sup>520</sup> *Laws*, 700c.

<sup>521</sup> *Laws*, 700d-e.

It is unclear how exactly pleasure took control of the poets—whether it was (and is) innate to the poetic disposition or whether this disposition had been corrupted. Either way, as a result of this condition, such poets “bred in the populace a spirit of lawlessness in regard to music, and the effrontery of supposing themselves capable of passing judgment on it.”<sup>522</sup> Since pleasure, and not the portrayal of virtue, became the goal of the poet, the audience felt entitled to judge it according to their personal taste, and began to make a clamour of applause in the theatre.<sup>523</sup> But it is asserted by the Athenian that “all music is representative and imitative;<sup>524</sup> and that “no imitation should be judged by the criterion of pleasure or of untrue opinion.... The reason why the equal is equal, or the symmetrical symmetrical, is not at all because a man so opines, or is charmed thereby, but most of all because of truth, and least of all for any other reason.”<sup>525</sup> To judge the music, one must know “its essence [[ [ [ ],—what its intention is [ ] ] ] and what the actual original [is] which it represents.”<sup>526</sup> Therefore, “whenever a man states that pleasure is the criterion of music, we shall decisively reject his statement...”<sup>527</sup> The music itself intends something, just as the flute ‘intends’ to mimic the bird. The proper judge is one who understands the natural mimetic congruency between thing and representation. By judging music accordingly, the proper judge is actually a teacher of the audience, “being ready to oppose those [poets] who offer them pleasure in a way that is unseemly and wrong.”<sup>528</sup> The audience, by contrast, is only minimally uneducated—and decreasingly so, if the vicious cycle is perpetuated: lacking the knowledge necessary to judge properly, it awards prizes according to the most

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<sup>522</sup> *Ibid.*, 700e.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*, 701a.

<sup>524</sup> *Ibid.*, 668a.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*, 667e.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*, 668c.

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.*, 667e-8a.

<sup>528</sup> *Laws*, 658d.

popular taste; this then corrupts the poets, who adapt to the audience's poor standard and cease to present characters who are superior to them. Education thus becomes increasingly difficult.<sup>529</sup>

It should be noted that only in Sparta and Crete are the poets persuaded by good legislators and statesmen to portray virtue, showing that the 'so-called goods'—i.e., the 'human goods', such as health, beauty, wealth, etc.—are only good in the possession of the just man, who possesses the 'divine goods' (which are primarily understood in terms of *andreia* in these polities).<sup>530</sup> In these places alone are novelties avoided in dancing and all other forms of music; their guardians of the law consistently determine the content and form of their music.<sup>531</sup> In Athens, however, this proper "aristocracy of music" was lost, and "a kind of base theatrocracy" ["a ki nd of b] sprang up.<sup>532</sup> Becoming accustomed to judge what is good and bad by the standards of their uneducated pains and pleasures, the populace [[ ] began to show conceit for wisdom in all other matters and contempt for the law in general.<sup>533</sup> "For thinking themselves knowing, men became fearless; and audacity begat effrontery. For to be fearless of the opinion of a better man, owing to self-confidence, is nothing else than base effrontery; and it is brought about by a liberty that is audacious to excess."<sup>534</sup> Becoming habituated to audacity towards the proper musical judges, the people started to refuse to be subject to anyone—soon disrespecting

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<sup>529</sup> *Ibid.*, 658d-e.

<sup>530</sup> *Ibid.*, 660a-1c. My use of the *Laws* here is in accord with Luc Brisson's argument that, much like the *Republic*, the *Laws* is a radical critique of Athenian democracy. See Luc Brisson (2005), "Ethics and Politics in Plato's *Laws*," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 28: 93-121. For an opposing view—i.e., one that argues that the *Laws* is actually more positive about democracy—see Steven Michels (2004), "Democracy in Plato's *Laws*," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 35(4): 517-528.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*, 660b.

<sup>532</sup> *Ibid.*, 701a.

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.*, 700d; 701a.

<sup>534</sup> *Laws*, 701a-b.

parents, then elders and their admonitions, then the laws in general, then even their own oaths, and thus the gods.<sup>535</sup>

The domination of the passions by the appetites is evident here, for the feelings of shame and fear, which had previously suppressed the appetites, are overcome by the absolute affirmation of personal taste. In Sparta and Crete, shame and honour held fast to their post as guardians and enforcers of the law; in modern Athens, by contrast, these passions are replaced by impudence and insolence. Such passions, as is described in the *Republic*, leave the “citadel of the soul” vulnerable: without feelings of shame, reverence, or fear to guard the law, false opinions and beliefs which conduce to the satisfaction of the appetites overtake traditional “lessons [appetite], noble practices [ ]], and words of truth [ ],”<sup>536</sup> thereby completing the *coup-d'état*.

The change in governing principle throughout the soul and polity is then reflected by a systematic linguistic substitution (which is very revealing): What was properly called “*tyche*” (reverence, shame, or awe) is now called “*tyche*” (folly), “*temperance*” (temperance) becomes “*temperance*” (want of manhood), “*moderation*” (moderation) becomes “*moderation*” (rusticity), and “*orderly expenditure*” (orderly expenditure) becomes “*orderly expenditure*” (illiberality); while “*insolence*” (insolence) is now called “*insolence*” (good breeding), “*good*” (good) is now “*anarchy*” (freedom), “*prodigality*” (prodigality or extravagance) is now “*prodigality*” (magnificence), and “*shamelessness*” (shamelessness) is “*shamelessness*” (courage or manliness).<sup>537</sup> Even obedience to the laws and to the rulers in general is frowned upon as “willing slavery” [laws and to ].<sup>538</sup>

Hence all relations between superiors and inferiors are levelled, or even reversed. Fathers

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid.*, 701b.

<sup>536</sup> *Republic*, 560b.

<sup>537</sup> *Republic*, 560d-1a.

<sup>538</sup> *Ibid.*, 562d.

now fear their sons,<sup>539</sup> as do teachers their students; elders are mocked by the youth, slaves are given equal rights as their masters, women are treated like men, foreigners are treated like citizens, and even the animals are granted rights and treated with respect.<sup>540</sup> The “gang of unprofitable and harmful appetites” has thus overturned the basic values of the society, leaving the citizens in an anarchic state of the soul, angered by the slightest suggestion of slavery.<sup>541</sup>

Any claim to authority concerning how one ought to live is rejected by the very fact that it is a claim to authority. There can be no valid claim to a singular purpose and overall necessity in the polity. The equality arrived at reflects neither a shared conception of each citizen as a particular member of a higher project, nor even a common recognition of the essential humanity of all persons. For the latter would require self-identification with the intellectual part of the soul. Rather, the equality in democratic Athens is a pragmatic position which guarantees each person the indulgence of their appetites, which, for Plato, certainly do not constitute the essence of humanity. Moral relativism is thus the result of the domination of the intellect by the appetites—i.e., the justification for all to do whatever they want to do. With respect to the intellect then, democracy is therefore the rule of opinion, where all are fundamentally equal simply in virtue of being opinions.<sup>542</sup>

### C. Sophism and instrumental reason

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<sup>539</sup> Cf. Aristophanes, *Clouds*.

<sup>540</sup> *Republic*, 563a-c.

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.*, 560d; 563d.

<sup>542</sup> See Eli Diamond (2006), “The Relation Between the Divided Line and the Constitutions in Plato’s *Republic*.” *Polis*, 23(1): 74-94. Diamond’s illuminating argument is that tyranny corresponds with imagination, democracy with opinion, oligarchy with mathematics, timocracy with dialectic, and aristocracy with intellectual perception of the idea of the good. My account is only incompatible with his insofar as I do not think proper dialectic is common in or characterizes the use of the intellect in timarchies, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Despite what people might say, no one in democratic Athens actually believes that there is such thing as knowledge as opposed to opinion. (The case is more extreme, it should be noted, in Ionia, where the Heraclitean doctrine is incarnated in people who “take very good care to allow nothing to be settled either in an argument or in their own minds, thinking...that this is being stationary....”<sup>543</sup> I might add that the central aspect of Ionian life is commerce by sea (e.g. in Miletus), a consequence of which is, for Plato, “wiliness and faithlessness”.<sup>544</sup>) Without any absolute criterion of truth, all opinions are essentially regarded as valid: Man, says Protagoras, is the measure of all things. For political purposes, the only remaining criterion among opinions is purely quantitative; that is, the majority rules. But that the majority thinks something is no sign of intelligence;<sup>545</sup> in fact, in a constitution ruled by the appetites, the common opinions are usually erroneous, as has been mentioned.

In the rule of opinion, success in getting one’s way largely depends on flattery of the majority. The Athenian notes that

in every case where a man uses the language of eulogy on seeing great wealth or eminent family distinctions or anything else of the kind...he has this fact specially in mind,—that the possessor of such things [the language of flattery] is likely, just because of this, to realise all, or at least the most and greatest of his desires.<sup>546</sup>

The implied analogy here is that, for the sake of getting what one wants through flattery, one must look to the great families in the timarchy, the wealthy men in the oligarchy, and “anything else of the kind” in the democracy—i.e., the opinion of the many.<sup>547</sup> This is the democratic “thing that is large, powerful, and strong,” which, if employed as an instrument,

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<sup>543</sup> *Theaetetus*, 180b.

<sup>544</sup> *Laws*, 705a.

<sup>545</sup> *Laches*, 184e.

<sup>546</sup> *Laws*, 687b.

<sup>547</sup> The character of Polus in the *Gorgias* typifies the democratic flatterer. See *Gorgias*, 481c-482c for Socrates’ indictment of Polus on this account.

grants one what one desires.<sup>548</sup> Though it is a common enough inclination to want to use things to one's advantage, especially large and powerful things, it is "both wrong and against nature."<sup>549</sup> In the democracy, then, those who are able to take advantage of the mob through flattery include politicians and poets.<sup>550</sup>

But the real art here belongs to the sophists. Since the most common opinion may change in various circumstances, one who is able to employ this great instrument of their own desire must have the ability to manipulate opinions in general—i.e., to validate any one and discredit another depending solely on whether it is useful. As is implied, then, the most useful opinions are the most common ones concerning what is desirable:

Each of these private teachers who work for pay, whom the politicians call sophists and regard as their rivals, inculcates nothing else than these opinions of the multitude [οἶον] which they opine when they are assembled and calls this knowledge wisdom. It is as if a man were acquiring the knowledge of the humours and desires of a great strong beast which he had in his keeping, how it is to be approached and touched, and when and by what things it is made most savage or gentle, yes, and the several sounds it is wont to utter on the occasion of each, and again what sounds uttered by another make it tame or fierce, and after mastering this knowledge by living with the creature and by lapse of time should call it wisdom, and should construct thereof a system and art and turn to the teaching of it, knowing nothing in reality about which of these opinions and desires is honourable or base, good or evil, just or unjust, but should apply all these terms to the judgments of the great beast, calling the things that pleased it good, and the things that vexed it bad, having no other account to render of them, but should call what is necessary just and honourable, never having observed how great is the real difference between the necessary and the good, and being incapable of explaining it to another.<sup>551</sup>

Like the rest of the democratic beast with which he dwells, the sophist too is governed by his appetites and does not believe there to be any difference between knowledge and

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<sup>548</sup> *Laws*, 686e. The point extends to "all ... cases where men hold such ideas." (686d) In this particular context, though, the 'great thing' being spoken of is the ill-fated Dorian confederacy between Sparta, Messene, and Argos, which would have been a great boon to the Greeks as a whole had it not been ruined by ignorance of the true human interests on part of the rulers of Messene and Argos in particular (683d; 686b; 692c; 699c). For they saw the alliance as a means of satisfying self-interest, rather than the good of the whole confederacy, let alone the whole of Greece.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*, 686d.

<sup>550</sup> *Republic*, 493d.

<sup>551</sup> *Republic*, 493a-c.

opinion. His interest is to gain wealth; and his commodity is kind of intellectual craft. He is thus “a sort of merchant or dealer [i s t hus] in provisions on which a soul is nourished.” he displays and sells words and “doctrines” or “lessons” [he di spl ] which supposedly help the souls of his students attain excellence.<sup>552</sup> But since nobody is clear about what this consists of or how to teach it, none of the students of these ‘soul-merchants’ obtains anything but the intellectual power to manipulate concepts and arguments. In fact, ‘virtue’ in the centres where sophistry thrives—i.e., the democracy—is precisely the ability to do what one wants; the sophists are therefore quite successful in making students attain the principle of their constitution. Sophistry is thus the appropriate kind of education in the democracy, speaking relatively. Nevertheless, some of the fathers, the dramatists, and the politicians (e.g., Anytus) see that this is not real virtue, despite being unable to say what it is themselves or to teach it to their young.<sup>553</sup>

In regarding wisdom as a craft which can be taught to anyone who pleases, the sophists, who are also called “the professors” [sophi st s, who ], “aver . . . that they can put true knowledge into a soul that does not possess it [t t t t t t t t ], as if they were inserting vision into blind eyes.”<sup>554</sup> But this is not what true education is. Rather, it is the art of turning the vision of the soul from the world of becoming to “the contemplation of essence [[ [ [ [ ] ] ] ] and the brightest region of being [ ] ] . . . ].”<sup>555</sup> Such an education has the important effect that one gains a “single aim and purpose in life to which all . . . actions, public and private, must be directed.”<sup>556</sup> In treating

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<sup>552</sup> *Protagoras*, 313c; cf. *Sophist*, 224b-d.

<sup>553</sup> Meno claims that he is “in the same plight as the rest of the world,” sometimes thinking that the sophists teach virtue and other times that they do not (*Meno*, 95c.) See also *Meno*, 92a-b, where the politician Anytus shows disdain for the sophists. Anytus is one of those who prosecuted Socrates as a sophist (*Apology*, 23e). Aristophanes paints the same picture of Socrates as a sophist in the *Clouds*.

<sup>554</sup> *Republic*, 518b-c.

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid.*, 519c; 521c.

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*, 519c.

knowledge as a thing to be possessed, transferred and used—that is, as a commodity—sophism has precisely the opposite effect: arbitrariness of action, determined solely by idiosyncratic desires. That is, it can be placed in others’ souls without transforming their desires, as proper education does.<sup>557</sup>

Unfortunately, sophistry has lured the best and rarest of the young characters in Athens, who have a keen intellect and a vague longing to be in contact with the whole of reality.<sup>558</sup> The “sophisticated [ The “sop], refined, or clever men” are hunters of a sort, who offer these young men the enticing skill of handling or laying hold of arguments [ ] instead of the truth they actually desire.<sup>559</sup> The students are enticed because, given this power, one may overcome external resistance to one’s will by confounding others with regard to what is honourable and just.<sup>560</sup> Thereby they may appease their adolescent desires. Thus the greatest damage is caused when the “best endowed souls” are turned away from virtue and towards self-gratification.<sup>561</sup> Possessing cleverness and conceit of wisdom, but not wisdom itself, these strong young men become brutal;<sup>562</sup> such was the tragic case, for example, with Alcibiades, who brought about not only the ruin of his soul but contributed to the ruin of Athens.

By treating knowledge as a commodity (and therefore only teaching disputation and opinion), the sophistic use of reason is commercial by nature; and the principle of commerce is private gain. For a transaction occurs when all parties believe they are profiting; whether the actual good of each party comes about through the transaction—let

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<sup>557</sup> See Dominic Scott, “Platonic Recollection and Cambridge Platonism,” *Hermathena* 149 (1990): 73-97, esp. pp. 93-94.

<sup>558</sup> *Republic*, 491b-e; 495a.

<sup>559</sup> *Ibid.*, 572c; 538c; *Sophist*, 223b. Cf. *Laws*, 891d for a similar expression about ‘handling’ impious arguments.

<sup>560</sup> *Republic*, 538d-e.

<sup>561</sup> *Republic.*, 491e.

<sup>562</sup> *Laws*, 863c.

alone the good of everyone else—is entirely accidental. Since all that matters is that each side *believes* to be gaining, commercial reasoning breeds trickery and dishonesty, and leads to mutual suspicion.<sup>563</sup> Though a peaceful co-existence can be maintained if all assume self-interest on the part of others, the possibility of real friendship is ruined, for that is based on mutual trust. This fact becomes clearest in the case of the friendless tyrant.<sup>564</sup>

Whatever the degree of worldly success of the sophisticatedly-trained individual, the mere practice of sophistic argumentation exacerbates the anarchic confusion occurring in the democracy: it deteriorates the system of shared order, and, perhaps most importantly, dissolves the bond of trust.

These results are most visible in the law-courts, the arena where the ability to manipulate concepts and arguments is most relevant in determining the fate of individuals. Since there is no unanimity concerning ideals in the polity, there is also no general sense of the spirit of its laws. Without this, the essential weakness of the letter of the law emerges clearly. As has been mentioned, the universal form of each law cannot adequately subsume the specifics of any actual situation. (This is why our judges have some discretion in applying the law.) When laws are therefore taken in isolation from the underlying intent and systematic order, which only the true “expert in law” perceives,<sup>565</sup> subtle reasoners are able to take advantage of this weakness for their own profit—granted, of course, that they have strengthened their power of abstract reasoning. What is being exploited in this situation is the fundamental difference between all particular things and the concepts we must use to speak of them. For the thing is always more than merely an instance of a single

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<sup>563</sup> *Sophist*, 223d (that sophism is a form of commerce); *Laws*, 705a (that commerce breeds trickery).

<sup>564</sup> *Republic*, 580a.

<sup>565</sup> *Laws*, 632d.

concept (e.g., ‘negligence’), while the range of the concept being applied is never exactly determined. That is, the thing may be described in various ways, and the concepts in use do not have precise rules for their application. Hence, what was initially regarded as an instance of a certain crime may, with clever reasoning, be regarded as something else. Thus the law may become a source of revenue for those who multiply law-suits and appeal just decisions solely for the sake of private gain.<sup>566</sup> Sophistic education enables such activity in that it provides training in the isolation and manipulation of words and abstract concepts so that, through subtle distinctions (such as those that Prodicus is master of), the possessor of this logical craft has the power to get whatever he wants.<sup>567</sup>

Judgments lose their efficacy if they can always be controverted with at least the semblance of good reasoning. This is true no less in the psychological sphere than in the legal sphere. When conclusions arrived at through reason do not determine the will immediately, or even at all, the intellect loses its power as an independent and effective force within the soul. Rather, it takes its cue from the particular appetite that one is pursuing and finds an acceptable or cogent argument to buttress it. With the executive decisions having already been made by the appetites, the legislative force of reason is only an afterthought, an adaptation, and an excuse.<sup>568</sup> And with sufficient skill, sophistic disputation renders impotent any form of human judiciary.

Only the authority of the gods now stands in the way of the democratic intellectual who has gained mastery over public opinion and the law. In order to discredit belief in the

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<sup>566</sup> *Ibid.*, 938b.

<sup>567</sup> That sly rhetoric and subtle reasoning are suitable for the law-courts is mentioned, for example, by Laches, who complains that Nicias’ “empty words” are fit for the law-courts rather than their conversation. (*Laches*, 196b).

<sup>568</sup> A similar point is made in reference to atheists, deists and those who believe they can bribe the gods: instead of “seeking to avoid wrong-doing, [they] do the wrong and then try to make it good.” (*Laws*, 885d)

authority of the gods, the most powerful tool is that which leads to disbelief in their existence. Particularly useful for this purpose is the materialist cosmogony, which is considered by most people to be the “wisest” [considered] argument.<sup>569</sup> The materialist physicists deny the ontological priority of soul and intelligence over matter, claiming that everything is ultimately inanimate matter in motion, out of which all bodies are brought together by chance.<sup>570</sup> The interaction of the forces of bodies eventually produces living beings, and indeed everything in the cosmos. All arts, including the political, are therefore contingent inventions of the human animal;<sup>571</sup> though not mentioned explicitly here, it is likely that under this position, religion would be regarded as a fiction employed for political purposes. For the claim that the arts are purely conventional, and in no way a discovery of the inherent rationality of the cosmos itself, is tantamount to the denial of any prior intelligence in the world. There is thus no eternal reason or divine nature of which the human mind (and potentially human life in general) is an image. Materialism is thus employed in releasing the human will from any objective order and wisdom, instead allowing humans to live ‘according to nature’ in the Thrasymachean sense—i.e., in being masters over all others.<sup>572</sup> From the belief that human convention is based solely on natural force, it follows that living according to this supposed principle of all things allows or even demands contempt for human convention—or perhaps for establishing it based on one’s own arbitrary will. Such contempt, in turn, depends on the belief in its independence from divine law.

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<sup>569</sup> *Laws*, 888e.

<sup>570</sup> *Laws*., 889b. In Plato’s time, this position had been argued by Archelaus. See Bury’s footnote on p. 313 of the Loeb Classics edition of *Laws* VII-XII.

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid.*, 889d-e.

<sup>572</sup> *Laws*, 889e.

Hence natural science, or physics, is employed not only in denying the existence of the gods, but also in the service of liberating the individual from all sources of possible authority and duty to others. Used for such purposes, it exacerbates the isolation of men from one another and disorients them by plunging them further into the anarchic kingdom of the appetites. That is not to say, though, that physics is necessarily in the service of evil. Just as in the mathematical sciences, which if studied in combination with “bad training,” could be used for the wrong purposes (e.g., commercial),<sup>573</sup> the same ambiguity applies to natural science. For so long as one studies nature with an interest not only in the “necessary forces” of matter (i.e., the mechanical), but also the “mental energy of the will aiming at the fulfillment of good” which animates and orders everything in the cosmos, then such study may stimulate piety and virtue.<sup>574</sup>

It is noteworthy that the Cretan is entirely unfamiliar with materialist arguments that the Athenian knows all too well. These arguments occur both in the old poets (such as Hesiod, in whose poetry Chaos is the first of the gods), and, more importantly, in the “new wise-men” [www] —i.e., the physicists.<sup>575</sup> Though the Cretan is aware of *akrasia* as a cause of atheism, this other cause, which is actually a kind of ignorance despite the cleverness, is unknown in the simplistic polities.<sup>576</sup> This indicates that the ‘disease’ of atheism is always present to some degree; but, nourished by the materialist arguments, it has become an epidemic in Athens.<sup>577</sup>

Atheism is also fostered by the sophistic craft. Specifically, it is one of the aids of:

those who, besides holding that the world is empty of gods, are afflicted by incontinence [i ncont i n] in respect of pleasures and pains, and possess also

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<sup>573</sup> *Ibid.*, 819a; *Republic*, 525c.

<sup>574</sup> *Laws*, 967a; 903b.

<sup>575</sup> *Laws*, 886d.

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid.*, 886b; cf. 689c.

<sup>577</sup> *Ibid.*, 888b.

powerful memories and sharp wits.... [B]eing specially ‘gifted by nature’ and being full of craft and guile, [this] is the class out of which are manufactured many diviners and experts in all manner of jugglery; and from it, too, there spring sometimes tyrants and demagogues and generals, and those who plot by means of peculiar mystic rites of their own, and the devices of those who are called ‘sophists’.<sup>578</sup>

Sophism helps the wiliest and cleverest of atheists to gain power, as though by becoming masters of argumentation, they could thereby gain the right to do whatever they pleased.<sup>579</sup>

Yet, as we have seen in the cases of Sparta and Crete, the sophistic craft may have no real effect in a polity; what is required is a specifically intellectual climate.

Such is the case most of all in Athens, which, “in the general opinion of the Greeks,” is “fond of talk and full of talk.”<sup>580</sup> According to (Plato’s character of) Prodicus, Athens is the “center and shrine of Greek wisdom.”<sup>581</sup> The so-called wisdom centred here is a distinctly modern intellectual phenomenon, which, unlike that of the ancients, publicizes what it thinks it knows.<sup>582</sup> (In Egypt, for example, wisdom was preserved by a priestly class of initiates.<sup>583</sup>) Books are written by Protagoras and others for the *demos*, so that “he who will may learn” how to dispute without any knowledge.<sup>584</sup> A key reason why atheism becomes such a problem in Athens is the publicity of intellectual pursuits, the opening up of ‘knowledge’ to anyone who will pay, either by enlisting in a sophistic school or by buying a book.<sup>585</sup> But what sells is what appeals to the commonest of desires, namely, the desire to do what one pleases, without any hindrance from above.

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<sup>578</sup> *Ibid.*, 908b.

<sup>579</sup> *Ibid.*, 907c.

<sup>580</sup> *Ibid.*, 641e.

<sup>581</sup> *Protagoras*, 337d.

<sup>582</sup> *Theaetetus*, 180c-d.

<sup>583</sup> *Timaeus*, 22a.

<sup>584</sup> *Sophist*, 232d-e.

<sup>585</sup> For a discussion of Plato’s portrayal of the sophists, and those in the *Protagoras* in particular, see W. K. C. Guthrie (1969), *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 3, part I: *The World of the Sophists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Given familiarity with the variety of theories in circulation and the impressive power of refutation, immediate acceptance of opinions (as was supposedly the case in the most ancient polities) becomes a sign of baseness or lack of education in this ‘highly talkative society’. If a point or argument is made without subtle analysis and skeptical objections, much like in the proverbs of ‘Spartan wisdom’,<sup>586</sup> it ought not to determine one’s will. Only the fool accepts these simple ideas with such credulity. The use of the term ‘*euēthes*’ therefore has a much different sense in an intellectual context than it did in the description of the simple men of ancient societies. There, to recall, it meant straightforward and lacking suspicion; but in a highly intellectual climate, it has the derogatory sense of ‘simplistic’ or even ‘foolish’.<sup>587</sup>

The best example of this connotation comes in the *Republic* when Thrasymachus uses the term to describe the good-hearted and naïve people who are taken advantage of by strong, intelligent, unjust, and ‘good’ men (according to his judgment). In their simplicity, the former do not recognize that they are merely serving the interests of the latter.<sup>588</sup> Later in that dialogue, the term is explicitly called a euphemism that is employed to describe an ignoramus who suffers “weakness of head” [i gnor]; despite having a good heart, such a person is not guided by a rational plan.<sup>589</sup> This is why he is so easily manipulated and exploited by others who are more intelligent. Indeed, according to the Stranger in the *Statesman*, the decent, well-behaved, quiet, or moderate person [t he dec] in whom true opinion has not been planted by the lawgiver to order his life properly, “justly receive[s] the shameful epithet of simpleton [shameful].”<sup>590</sup> Finally, an interesting use of the term appears

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<sup>586</sup> *Protagoras*, 343a-b.

<sup>587</sup> See, for instance, *Republic*, 529b.

<sup>588</sup> *Republic*, 343c; 348c.

<sup>589</sup> *Ibid.*, 400e.

<sup>590</sup> *Statesman*, 309e.

in the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates contrasts Phaedrus and other young, modern Athenians with the ancient Egyptians who, “content in their simplicity,” believed in supernatural phenomena (such as hearing trees and rocks speak). Phaedrus regards these ancients as gullible and superstitious, while Socrates seems to respect the fact that they are primarily interested in whether the truth is spoken, and not who they hear it from.<sup>591</sup> But the real ‘fool’, according to Socrates, is one who is ignorant of the truth of Ammon’s prophecy, namely that wisdom cannot be left behind in writing nor learned from someone else’s writing; only he who already knows can employ writing as a reminder to himself.<sup>592</sup> All those who read *Protagoras’* book *Truth*, for example, believing themselves to be educated thereby, would therefore qualify as fools in Socrates’ view. Likewise, Socrates uses this derogatory connotation in an ironic way when he criticizes his own dreadful and uncharacteristically impious speech which denigrated *Erōs*, implying that Lysias (who makes similarly clever, impressive and impious speeches) is the real ‘simpleton’.<sup>593</sup> In the more ‘enlightened’ society of modern Athens, then, in which various opinions and arguments have been publicized and the power of reason sharpened, the simplicity that once was a virtue in ancient societies, which were governed by true opinion and good law, is now regarded haughtily and contemptuously as gullibility and superstition that only the ‘simple folk’ still have.<sup>594</sup>

In general, the second connotation of the word ‘*euētheia*’ indicates that the reflective stance is assumed in all worthy interlocutors. The common element among them

<sup>591</sup> *Phaedrus*, 275b-c.

<sup>592</sup> *Ibid.*, 275c.

<sup>593</sup> *Phaedrus*, 242d. One last example of the use of the term to mean ‘foolish’ or ‘intellectually dull’ occurs when Timaeus claims that birds are derived from ‘simple-minded men’ who think that the most solid proofs come from sight. This lineage is only better than the beasts, who are derived from men who have absolutely no experience in philosophy (*Timaeus*, 91d).

<sup>594</sup> Recall that moderation, which is closely related to simplicity in the *Statesman* passage just mentioned, becomes known as rusticity [becomes ] (*Republic*, 560d), implying that this simple-minded moderation is typical only of unsophisticated country-folk.

is no longer the opinions and norms of the given world, accepted at face value without question (as in ancient societies). But what is left when ties to tradition—from *nomos patros*, from the laws and received opinions of the city, and from ancient religion—is only a loose system of abstract concepts standing alone, without a unifying purposive principle in itself, and without any effective hold on the soul as an agent. As a consequence of the “release of the unnecessary desires,”<sup>595</sup> individuals have thus isolated themselves from their past, and have placed themselves within the realm of abstractions, -regarded as organs of manipulation in service of their fluctuating appetites.

It must be noted that the power to consider ideas in abstraction from their ordinary and concrete use is a major advance for Plato, since that is the step over the line from the sensible realm into the intelligible. It is that step, to take an example, which Socrates is trying to induce in Laches, the non-intellectual general who cannot quite comprehend the task of grasping a concept in general.<sup>596</sup> But not only is this step of abstraction insufficient for wisdom, but downright pernicious when “forcibly enlisted in the service of evil.”<sup>597</sup> As Socrates claims in the *Republic*, “[t]he excellence of thought... [is] a thing that never loses its potency, but, according to the direction of its conversion, becomes useful and beneficent or, again, useless and harmful.”<sup>598</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>595</sup> *Republic*, 561a.

<sup>596</sup> *Laches*, 191e; 194a-b; 195d-6a.

<sup>597</sup> *Republic*, 519a.

<sup>598</sup> *Ibid.*, 518e. Plato’s view of the ambiguous value of the intellect, depending on its direction, is accurate, in my opinion, as it is quite easy to adduce brilliant minds who intentionally bring about benefits or evils for others.

In conclusion, what we see in modern Athens is the release of appetites from all control by passions or reason. This first becomes evident in the discord between pleasure and reason caused by musical miseducation. In the service of the appetites, authority is viewed with contempt, and the principle of liberty is established so that each may do what he pleases. Yet the most common goals do not extend beyond mere sensual gratification and vain dilettantism. It is true that self-determination has emerged here, for the individual now takes his own will to be the authority on how he ought to live. But his will is, from the perspective of reason, determined arbitrarily. Unencumbered by the demands of tradition and human authority, equipped to overturn any human law through sophistic reasoning, and emboldened by a disbelief in the reality of the gods, this new individual is free to turn his attention to worldly and sensuous objects. The power of reason is then employed under “the leaden weights of our birth and becoming” by “bad but clever men” in their pursuit of self-interest.<sup>599</sup> Knowledge for its own sake, or for the sake of virtue, does not appear for the most part. (Socrates, of course, is among the few exceptions prior to Plato.)

Human freedom in Athens is thus understood as the autonomy of the individual’s will.<sup>600</sup> It is equivalent to ‘*anarchia*’<sup>601</sup> because it is oriented by no law above idiosyncrasy—not even a personal ‘law’ such as Socrates’ *daimon*. This conception of freedom contrasts with the freedom of the ancient society, which was full of leisure but not self-determination. It contrasts even more strongly with the conception of freedom prevalent in Sparta and Crete, i.e., freedom as the power of the will to govern the appetites, given the goals already determined by tradition. Whereas the simple wisdom of Sparta and Crete taught that the appetitive goods are worthless without the development of a noble and

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<sup>599</sup> *Ibid.*, 519a-b.

<sup>600</sup> Cf. Gerasimos Santas (2001), “Plato’s Criticism of the Democratic Man in the *Republic*,” *Journal of Ethics* 5(1): 57-71.

<sup>601</sup> *Republic*, 560e.

manly character, ignorance prevails in Athens, despite its hypertrophied intellectual powers and arrogance. Saying one thing but believing another, or saying one thing then the opposite, the intellectual Athenians are hypocritical and not worth listening to. They are isolated in their private pursuits, having trampled on the bonds of trust and friendship that belong to the more simple forms of communal life. Only in the experience of tyranny does it become obvious that these goods of trust and friendship are higher than the appetitive ones, and that these higher goods demand the pursuit of virtue.

## Chapter 7 - Reconciliation in the soul and polity through reasonableness and knowledge

### Introduction

In the democracy, there is a nominal equality of rights, where every citizen is entitled to pursue whatever he desires.<sup>602</sup> What is thereby acknowledged is the equality of each individual's will. But that will is determined by egoistic motivations, stemming largely from the appetitive desires. Due to the disparity of wealth, and the idiosyncrasies of taste, the equality present in the democracy is mostly formal: people differ both in the ends they pursue and in the means they have. Furthermore, there is no law which unifies their beliefs concerning what is right and worthwhile, since beliefs and opinions get controverted by clever speakers and interlocutors. By contrast with this situation of merely formal equality, Plato presents a substantial equality in his depiction of the best possible state in the modern times. This occurs in the governance of reason, where all citizens love and believe in the same basic things which keep the polity unified: justice, friendship, trust, wisdom, and piety, which together constitute the spirit and purpose of their laws.<sup>603</sup>

Individually speaking, all parts of the soul are unified by their particular relation to this same end: the intellect through knowing it or having true opinion about it; the passions by

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<sup>602</sup> It should be noted that there is no consensus that Plato's thinking about democracy is consistent among the dialogues, nor even that the meaning of the term 'democracy' is constituent. For developmentalist arguments which deny unity, see Julia Annas (1995), "Introduction," in *Plato: Statesman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. xvii-xx; and Thanassis Samaras (2002), *Plato on Democracy* (New York: Peter Lang), p. 349. For arguments in favour of a unity in Plato's thinking, see Christopher Rowe (1998), "Democracy and Sokratic-Platonic philosophy," in D. D. Boedeker and K.A. Raaflaub, eds., *Democracy, Empire, and the Arts in Fifth-Century Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 251-252; and Malcolm Schofield, *Political Philosophy*, pp. 61-62. I agree with Schofield here, who claims that, while Plato may have had various views about democracy as a system of government, his consistent preoccupation concerns the more general social, cultural and economic life that characterizes democracy.

<sup>603</sup> Recall that this is a list of the opposites of the tyrant's features (*Republic*, 580a).

reacting with shame or boldness where it is due; and the appetites through taking pleasure in being moderate for the sake of the whole and in doing and witnessing what is just.

This much is evident from the *Republic*, where it is claimed that the ideal constitution being constructed in theory could come about in the present world if a philosopher should come to power or if, as Plato hoped would be the case with Dionysius in Syracuse, a king would become a philosopher.<sup>604</sup> Yet the account of the various constitutions in the *Republic* proceeds in one direction only—i.e., from the ideal to tyranny, without mention of when the best constitution could be brought about. Hence the so-called ‘cycle of constitutions’ is not explicitly completed. It seems, then, that a philosopher-king could only come to power out of a deteriorating democracy that is clearly threatened with tyranny, or out of a polity already in tyranny. (The case of Syracuse confirms this hypothesis, for it had recently changed from the democracy established by Thrasybulos in 467 B.C. to the tyranny of Dionysius in 405.) For in the timarchy, there is no opportunity for a properly philosophical education, since the mathematical sciences are neglected there.<sup>605</sup> Even if one were to be educated outside the polity, there is too much resistance to innovation to allow the foreigner to have any influence. (In any case, the examples we have of timarchies do not tend to allow their youth to be educated abroad.<sup>606</sup>) In the oligarchy, the mathematical sciences are at least taught, though generally for the wrong purposes (commercial and litigational). This could potentially be rectified, however, by one with a truly philosophical disposition. Even so, the problem in the oligarchy is that the struggle for power is factional; no single individual would ever become powerful enough to institute the necessary changes for a virtuous constitution, and the individual could not

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<sup>604</sup> See *Letter II*, especially 313c.

<sup>605</sup> *Laws*, 818e.

<sup>606</sup> *Protagoras*, 342d.

appease a faction while establishing the best polity, since there must be happiness for the whole and not just a part.<sup>607</sup> In the democracy, though, the lower class majority eventually rallies around a single individual in its struggle against the higher classes. It is possible then, especially considering that mathematics and dialectic are taught in some way, that an enlightened despot could arise instead of a blood-thirsty tyrant.<sup>608</sup> If this reasoning is correct, then the best possible constitution could only come about after a long decline toward tyranny, which decline, as was shown in Chapter 6, included the emergence of self-determination and the development of independent reasoning.

In this chapter, I will be showing how these two conditions are recombined in the aristocratic ruler as *wisdom* and in the citizens as *reasonableness*, virtues which mutually support one another through the mediation of the law.

I will be making two exegetical assumptions here. The first is that the same generic idea of the best theoretical polity is underlying the account of the aristocratic polity-to-be in the *Laws*, the ideal construction in the *Republic*, and the polity which the true statesman governs in the *Statesman*.<sup>609</sup> In the *Statesman*, this generic idea is not given much concrete characterization, since that is not the purpose of the dialogue. The idea begins to be

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<sup>607</sup> *Republic*, 519e.

<sup>608</sup> As for the possibility of the best constitution being introduced by violent revolution, one passage in the *Statesman* suggests that this is a possibility for Plato: it is claimed that persuasion is preferable to the use of force in the government of the best society, implying that the latter may be justified (296d-e). However, it does not seem consistent for the best state to be initiated through violence, since the initial violence is contrary to the principle of harmony, and the beginning is always an important indicator of the possibility of future success (*Laws*, 775e; 753e). The reaction to the revolution would be violent inwardly, if not also outwardly, and no violent element can exist within the reconciled constitution.

<sup>609</sup> Morrow is generally in agreement with this assumption, for he claims that Magnesia in the *Laws* “is what Plato calls an ‘imitation’ of the ideal, in the sense in which any particular thing imitates the Idea whose name it carries. The most that Plato would say of it, I think, is that it was as good an imitation as he thought was possible in fourth-century Greece ([*Laws*] 739e).” (*Cretan City*, p. 12) Likewise, John Dillon claims that the *Republic* gives the formal structure, while the *Laws* provides the details of the same polity. (Review of Ferrari, *City and Soul*, in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, 2003.11.07: <<http://bmc.brynmawr.edu/2003/2003-11-07.html>>) Finally, Christopher Rowe argues that the essential features of the preferred constitution in each of the *Republic*, *Laws*, and *Statesman* are the same. See Christopher Rowe (1998), *op. cit.*

characterized in the *Republic*, but only gets fleshed out in rigorous detail in the *Laws*. This assumption is objectionable, as the *Laws* and the *Republic* are not only different in tenor, but even in content. While it may be easy to say that the accounts represent different particular instances of the same generic idea, a stronger objection to my assumption is that there may be more than one *kind* of polity with the same fundamental principle of rational moderation; hence, even if the various accounts do illuminate one another, there is no need to assume that they are essentially the same in kind. To support this objection, it can be noted that the projected state of Magnesia, we are told, is to be the “second-best”.<sup>610</sup> It may therefore seem, as Bury claims, that the best polity (in contrast to the second best) is the *kallipolis* of the *Republic*.<sup>611</sup> However, I do not believe this is accurate. Within the context of the *Laws*, the best state is the reign of Cronos, as has been discussed in Chapter 4. The second best is the imitation of this in the age of Zeus, wherein the direct governance by the divinities is replaced by the rule of law. The same point is confirmed in the classification of polities in the *Statesman*: the first division among them is the best from all the others—i.e., the divinity-governed versus the human-governed.<sup>612</sup> The highest of the latter group is the monarchy under the rule of law, since no human statesman can be omnipresent as the divine one can.<sup>613</sup> The statesman is thus defined as an imitation of God as ruler. Since the *kallipolis* constructed in the *Republic* likewise has a human as its ruler who establishes a *nomos* (whether it is written or not is unclear), it too is the best of the human-governed polity—i.e., ‘second-best’ to the mythical divinity-governed society. Despite the many

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<sup>610</sup> *Laws*, 807b.

<sup>611</sup> See Bury’s footnote on page 65 of the Loeb edition of *Laws VII-XII*. Also, see Charles Kahn’s debate with Christopher Rowe about this issue in “Appendix: What is the First Best in the *Laws*?” in Charles H. Kahn (2009), “The Myth of the *Statesman*,” in *Plato’s Myths*, ed. Catalin Partenie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 148-166.

<sup>612</sup> *Statesman*, 303b.

<sup>613</sup> *Ibid.*, 297e.

differences (which I cannot go into), then, the *kallipolis*, Magnesia and the polity of the true statesman are versions of the same theoretical ideal: the polity settled under wise laws, in which reason governs for the sake of the virtue of each citizen and the happiness of the whole.

The second assumption follows from the first, namely that the best human statesman in the dialogue of that name is the same as the philosopher-king of the *Republic*; moreover, since the task of lawgiving falls within the craft of the statesman,<sup>614</sup> he is the same as the imagined lawgiver of the *Laws*. This philosophical statesman is, according to the *Statesman*, wise and does not need law for his own self-governance, or, theoretically speaking, for the governance of the polity.<sup>615</sup> Likewise in the *Laws*, *epistēmē* suffices as his ruler—*epistēmē* being precisely what only the philosopher attains in the *Republic*.<sup>616</sup> It should also be noted that the imagined lawgiver in the *Laws* differs from the ancient lawgivers (i.e., Minos and Lycurgus). Being directly educated by gods, the wisdom of the latter was more mysterious and miraculous; hence these ancient lawgivers are akin to oracles.<sup>617</sup> The lawgiver of the modern aristocracy, by contrast, attains wisdom through reason rather than revelation, enabling him to include ‘rational preludes’ to his laws in order to explain their principles.

#### A. Wisdom in the philosophical statesman

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<sup>614</sup> *Statesman*, 294a.

<sup>615</sup> *Ibid.*, 294a.

<sup>616</sup> *Laws*, 875c-d; *Republic*, 477d-80a. (Note that that this *Republic* passage shifts from ‘*epistēmē*’ to ‘*gnōsis*’ without a change in meaning, as in the *Charmides*.)

<sup>617</sup> *Laws*, 696b. Cf. *Meno*, 99d.

Like all the guardians, the philosophical statesman will be educated in gymnastics and music. Beyond this, of course, he is trained in the mathematical sciences (arithmetic, geometry and astronomy) and dialectic prior to his practical training. Through his studies in dialectic he attains *epistēmē*, by which he can give an account of the essence of each thing.<sup>618</sup> He thereby comes to know the ontological grounds of the universe, being able to reason from hypotheses

as springboards, so to speak, [rising] to that which requires no assumption and is the starting-point of all, and after attaining to that again taking hold of the first dependencies from it, so to proceed downward to the conclusion, making no use whatsoever of any object of sense but only of pure ideas moving on through ideas to ideas and ending with ideas.<sup>619</sup>

What precisely this means is most difficult to say; but what seems to be implied is that the categories of being, which are the bases of all becoming, can be deduced from a first principle. Granting that this is a central issue and difficulty in Plato's philosophy, suffice it to say that, through dialectic, the philosopher, and therefore the best possible statesman, comes to know the essence of all things in relation to the good as the first principle.<sup>620</sup> This is not a merely logical procedure, though, as if truth were a function of propositions or the series thereof. In *epistēmē*, the knower comes in contact with the reality that transcends the given aspect of the world, though the latter issues from it in some way. As opposed to those thinkers and professors of knowledge who are ignorant of the good and who therefore lack a transcendent purpose to which all their thinking ultimately refers, the true dialectician is the '*synoptician*' [?] in that he sees, through insight into the first principle, the interconnectedness of all things with the 'vision' of the soul.<sup>621</sup> It is the special task of

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<sup>618</sup> *Republic*, 533c-4b.

<sup>619</sup> *Ibid.*, 511b-c.

<sup>620</sup> *Ibid.*, 505b; 532a-b; 519c-d.

<sup>621</sup> *Ibid.*, 518c ("professors"); 505b (ignorant of the good); 519c (lack of transcendent purpose); 511d (to which thinking refers); 518c (vision of the soul); 537c (interconnectedness).

the philosophical statesman to bridge the essential difference between the sensible, temporal world and that transcendent reality by shaping the world in its image to the extent that this is possible.<sup>622</sup>

Though at the outset of his education, the philosophical statesman ought not to be concerned with worldly affairs or deal with *logoi* concerning humans,<sup>623</sup> it would be unjust for him alone to attain happiness in contemplation, since it is wrong for there to be happiness in only one part of the polity.<sup>624</sup> It is therefore his duty to return into the world which he was drawn out of, thereby sharing in both the contemplative and the political way of life.<sup>625</sup> He must re-accustom the vision of his soul to the world of becoming and understand it from the perspective of eternity.<sup>626</sup> He will thus have both of the two kinds of knowledge spoken of in the *Philebus*: divine knowledge of the eternal and unchanging reality and knowledge of the mutable human sphere.<sup>627</sup> The philosophical statesman therefore spends fifteen years studying political science in action.<sup>628</sup> Here he finds that the ‘preliminary’ mathematical sciences of his education serve as the basis of the ‘fairer sciences,’—i.e., ethics and politics.<sup>629</sup> In virtue of being the studies which turn the soul’s eye to unity in general, the mathematical ones allow for the generalizations and distinctions

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<sup>622</sup> Comparing the philosophical statesman with the demiurge of the *Timaeus*, Morrow writes: “For the cosmic demiurge such attention to his materials was necessary if he was to operate on the world of Becoming and remold it in the likeness of Ideas. Similarly the political demiurge cannot neglect the understanding of his social and human materials if he is going to construct a state that resembles the ideal. Just as the world craftsman in the *Timaeus* has to use the stuff that is available, with its determinate but unorganized and irregularly co-operating powers, so Plato has to use the Greeks of his day, with their traditions of freedom and respect for law, and their fallible human temperaments.” (*Cretan City*, p. 10)

<sup>623</sup> *Republic*, 500b-c.

<sup>624</sup> *Ibid.*, 519d-e.

<sup>625</sup> *Ibid.*, 520c.

<sup>626</sup> *Ibid.*, 516e-8a.

<sup>627</sup> *Philebus*, 61d; 62a. It is even suggested here that ‘unalloyed’ divine knowledge is neither possible nor profitable (63b). Though it is not entirely clear why it would not be possible, my guess is that knowledge of the good entails perception of the good as it is manifest in all things, including sensuous, temporal reality.

<sup>628</sup> *Republic*, 539e-40a.

<sup>629</sup> *Laws*, 967d; 818d.

between types.<sup>630</sup> Furthermore, astronomy in particular provides a model of harmonious, living activity, for the heavenly bodies have souls which are being governed by reason.<sup>631</sup> Just as the same musicality is applied by the *demiurge* to the soul or life-principle of the heavens through the use of ratio,<sup>632</sup> the philosophical statesman is to apply the connection between mathematics and musical theory to human character in ethics and politics.<sup>633</sup>

It also seems that a basic knowledge of physics is necessary for the philosophical statesman. Happiness, it is claimed, involves both spiritual and bodily virtue.<sup>634</sup> Hence the notion of harmony is also to be applied to the body (as in gymnastic education). Yet if the statesman must know the nature of the soul in order to legislate or govern with an eye to its virtue, it follows that he must also know the nature of the body and its constituent elements. Of course, his study of physics would not be like the natural scientists', who study the necessary (i.e., mechanical) causes without the divine intention inherent in all things.<sup>635</sup> Like the "problematic" style of astronomy, which is entirely rationalistic,<sup>636</sup> it would, rather, move from the basic categories of being into the realm of becoming, progressing from the elementary units up to the human entity (as in the *Timaeus*).<sup>637</sup> Physics is also necessary for the philosophical statesman who is to rule a modern polity. For in such circumstances, atheism has become a greater problem due to materialist arguments; hence, he must know how to refute such theories with the proofs for the existence and powers of the gods in order to assure piety in the polity.<sup>638</sup>

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<sup>630</sup> *Ibid.*, 818c-d.

<sup>631</sup> *Ibid.*, 967a-b.

<sup>632</sup> *Timaeus*, 36e-7a. As is well known, the construction of the soul of the heavens follows the Pythagorean ratios of musical intervals.

<sup>633</sup> *Laws*, 967e.

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid.*, 734d.

<sup>635</sup> *Ibid.*, 966e; 821a.

<sup>636</sup> *Republic*, 529c-30c.

<sup>637</sup> The account of the material elements and kinds of causes begins at 31b and continues until God's ministers frame mortal souls within bodies at 69c, where the account of human physiology begins.

<sup>638</sup> *Laws*, 966c-7e.

In short, the philosophical statesman must know the essentials in all aspects of what constitutes humanity and its place in the cosmos.<sup>639</sup> Indeed, that the *Timaeus* and the *Critias* follow in content from the *Republic* might indicate that natural and civic history must be known in addition to the unchanging nature of justice and goodness. Otherwise stated, it seems that complete knowledge of the philosophical statesman requires knowing not only the form of justice in itself, but its appearance in the world of becoming.

Thus the most prominent aspect of the virtue of the philosophical statesman is knowledge, both of the changing and the unchanging realms, all of which is systematically or ‘synoptically’ understood with reference to the first and unifying principle of all things. In regard to his own soul, such knowledge suffices for self-governance, for “no law or ordinance is mightier than knowledge [or di nanc], nor is it right for reason [ ], n] to be subject or in thrall to anything, but to be lord of all things, if it is really true to its name and free in its inner nature.”<sup>640</sup> By desiring the good that he knows is the principle of all things, he is able to attain that greatest wisdom, which is the harmony of the soul.<sup>641</sup> Given his knowledge, the rest of his soul is aligned with the true good, honouring it above all and fearlessly pursuing it; overcoming *hubris* and self-interest like a god,<sup>642</sup> he perceives and desires the universal good in all situations.

The philosophical statesman attains the means to salvation [The phi ] of his soul, since “...what saves us [is] justice and temperance combined with wisdom [since “.], which dwell in the animate powers of the gods, and of which some small trace may be

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<sup>639</sup> I agree that Plato’s philosophical statesman is both the ideal and yet highly unlikely to come to power. I do not, however, believe that the basis of wisdom is the vision of Forms, as I do not believe in their existence. It is difficult for me to criticize Plato further for two reasons: 1) I have no positive theory concerning the true basis of wisdom; 2) I have not been trained properly according to his standards to be in a position to judge the validity of his claims. The latter reason involves a claim concerning epistemic privilege, which, like a trump card, can bring an end to opposition whenever desired.

<sup>640</sup> *Laws*, 875c-d.

<sup>641</sup> *Ibid.*, 698d.

<sup>642</sup> *Ibid.*, 713c.

clearly seen here also residing in us.”<sup>643</sup> But as the ruler, he must also bring salvation to the rest of the polity by harmonizing its parts through that same knowledge.<sup>644</sup>

Theoretically speaking only, the ideal statesman rules just as the *daimones* did—that is, without the mediation of laws, applying knowledge and free reason by directly attending to every situation that requires his judgment, “dispens[ing] more to the greater and less to the smaller, giving due measure to each according to nature.”<sup>645</sup> This divine, and not mathematical kind of equality, is called the “judgment of Zeus”; and, as the Athenian claims, it is “precisely this which constitutes for us political justice, which is the object we strive for.”<sup>646</sup> His power of reason must be present and conformable to every particularity. Hence, he must have reason combined with perception [HHH

..... or oooooooooo ].<sup>647</sup> This *aisthesis*, which is perhaps better translated in this context as ‘sensitivity’, is the power of recognizing the good as it is manifest in every situation and being able to take that as the orienting principle of reasoning and action.

That *epistēmē* suffices for the ideal statesman to govern, as the gods and *daimones* did, supports Gerson’s argument that *epistēmē* in Plato is not fundamentally ‘doxastic’, i.e., propositional.<sup>648</sup> It is, rather, a kind of unerring intellectual perception of “what is”.<sup>649</sup> This is the basis of the worldly sensitivity of the philosophical statesman, which is not the application of rules to particulars (i.e., the subsumption of particulars under abstract universals, or ‘judgment’ in the Kantian sense.) This, of course, does not mean that the true

<sup>643</sup> *Ibid.*, 906b.

<sup>644</sup> *Republic*, 484c; 500c. Cf. Lear, “Inside”, p. 191.

<sup>645</sup> *Laws*, 757b.

<sup>646</sup> *Ibid.*, 757c.

<sup>647</sup> *Ibid.*, 961d; *Republic*, 546b. The first expression is actually used in reference to the synod which is to replace the initial lawgiver, but it is clear that the synod is to have the same ruling function as guardians of the law.

<sup>648</sup> Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, chapter 5.

<sup>649</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 197-200.

knower cannot also give an account of what he knows.<sup>650</sup> Indeed, such a translation into propositional form is necessary for the philosophical statesman, for “how could anyone... sit beside each person all his life and tell him exactly what is proper for him to do?”<sup>651</sup> Since knowledge is not for the multitude of men, who cannot sufficiently reason in the abstract in order to apprehend the intelligible forms,<sup>652</sup> the statesman or lawgiver must institute laws to accompany the rest of the citizens through an orderly system of life. Though general laws can never “provide exactly what is proper for each individual” in every particular case, written laws or unwritten customs are nevertheless required in order to approximate the direct guidance of the multitude.<sup>653</sup> The task of lawgiving, which fundamentally belongs to the philosophical statesman,<sup>654</sup> is thus the translation of the synoptic insight that is *epistēmē* into universal prescriptions which aim to embody the truth in a system of life.<sup>655</sup>

In the lawgiving capacity, the philosophical statesman employs *a priori* knowledge of the essential interconnectedness of all things by forming a political constitution that is systematically oriented towards the good. But once the laws have been established, he and his successors<sup>656</sup> continue to apply their knowledge in concrete situations, though now this activity is bound within the rule of law (unlike in the ideal or divinity-ruled polity). The activities which constitute the essence of the political science, namely “judgment and

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<sup>650</sup> *Republic*, 534b.

<sup>651</sup> *Statesman*, 295a-b.

<sup>652</sup> *Ibid.*, 292e; *Republic*, 493e-4a; *Timaeus*, 51e.

<sup>653</sup> *Statesman*, 295a.

<sup>654</sup> *Ibid.*, 294a.

<sup>655</sup> Laws are called “images of truth” in the *Statesman* (300c), being likened to paintings which employ the attention of the audience to evoke the things that are represented. The system of law established by the philosophical statesman manifests the truth not in a cognitive way, but in a practical way, so that people’s character come to embody this truth. It is also worth noting that changes to the law ought to be made only by later statesmen who have *epistēmē* (300c).

<sup>656</sup> *Laws*, 961a-2d. Cf. *Republic*, 502a.

command,<sup>657</sup> occur in both a mediated and an immediate way: the mediated judgment is through the laws, which are applied by other judges to particular situations; while, in cases where the situation has not been determined by law (say, decisions concerning war), the ruler judges and commands the situation directly.

The latter kind of direct judgment is grounded in knowledge and is essentially the same as that of the *daimones*, differing only in that it is now limited within the rule of law. This ability to govern through direct judgment—i.e., without the need to refer the situation to legal abstractions—reflects the kind of self-knowledge that is described as *sophrosune* in the *Charmides* (and was discussed in Chapter 2, § C): “knowing that knows itself and other knowledges.” For direct governance requires the self-assured presence of the knowing mind, perceiving the essential in all new (and therefore unknown) situations in light of synoptic knowledge. The constancy of such presence of mind demonstrates that the philosophical statesman has transcended his ego for the sake of the good of the whole—and this is the essence of *sophrosune*. He has overcome the temptation of tyranny and thus achieved what is virtually impossible for humans—that is, holding absolute power without succumbing to pride and injustice.<sup>658</sup> He does so by living fundamentally as a citizen of the ideal that exists in heaven, despite being engrossed in the political world.<sup>659</sup> As a result of this essentially intellectual *sophrosune*—the constancy of keeping the truth before him—he will also, as an embodied person, display the more standard feature of *sophrosune*, i.e., the moderation of his desires.

## B. Law and the virtuous citizen

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<sup>657</sup> *Statesman*, 292b; cf. 260a-b.

<sup>658</sup> *Laws*, 713c.

<sup>659</sup> *Republic*, 592a-b.

Whereas the philosophical statesman has all the virtues unified in his person, it seems that each of the citizens has only a specific virtue, depending on his class. The guardian honours the law above all else, and enforces it without fear and without the desire for personal gain (not having held any private property). The ‘producer’ works hard, accepts his due without envy of others, and yet takes these worldly affairs lightly.<sup>660</sup> The virtue of each class is therefore best described in the ordinary, non-philosophical sense of *andreia* and *sophrosune*: the guardian has courage, displayed most in battle, while the producer has moderation of the appetites, ‘minding his own business’ and ‘going about all things leisurely.’ Indeed, one of the main difficulties for the statesman is to blend these almost opposite character-types: the one tending towards war and the other towards peace.<sup>661</sup>

What I will show here is that the external element which combines the two classes is law and common opinion, instituted by the knowing lawgiver; while the internal element that unifies all citizens is what I will call *reasonableness*. This is the conception of virtue that is intended in the *Charmides* where *sophrosune* is defined as knowing one’s limits, and knowing what one knows and does not know. For reasonableness is a virtue of being able to assess given arguments on their own terms without the influence of personal gain or vanity.<sup>662</sup>

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<sup>660</sup> *Republic*, 349d; 550a. Cf. *Charmides*, 161b.

<sup>661</sup> *Republic*, 503c; *Statesman*, 309a-11b.

<sup>662</sup> Socrates, as discussed in Chapter 1, not only assesses, but draws out and finds arguments. He thus has a productive skeptical ability (in the Greek sense of the term) that goes beyond reasonableness. On a different note, I should make it clear that, like the ideal of the philosopher-king, I find the following depiction very reasonable and desirable as an idea, but extremely unlikely to ever occur on a widespread level.

□—i.e., in the age of arts and sciences—is an imitation of the truly best polity which existed in the age of Cronos.<sup>663</sup> It follows, then, that the character of its citizens ought to be an imitation of the ancient, child-like immediacy. To recall from Chapter 4, these simple-minded and artless men of old, without “the shrewdness of modern man to suspect a falsehood,”<sup>664</sup> immediately accepted as true what they were told concerning gods and men, and ordered their lives accordingly. But for the best state to come about in modern times, the imitation of the ancient mode must be an immediacy and straight-forwardness that has overcome the shrewdness and skepticism typified in sophistic Athens. For once the Athenian or democratic soul has experienced these modern phenomena, it cannot go back and live as though they never occurred, just as one cannot literally become a child again. The goal of imitation is therefore an entirely new result, one that would have similarities with the ancient mode of life, but would, as a matter of fact, have incorporated the changes that have since taken place.

The citizens of the mythical ideal society were governed by the *daimones*, who ‘steered their souls’.<sup>665</sup> Though the ancient subjects were happy, they were not free to determine their own wills. In modern times, these divinities are still active, but in a different way. Having departed to leave nature to its course, and having returned upon its verging on chaos, the *daimones* still oversee the souls of all people as agents of providence, protecting them and determining their fortune.<sup>666</sup> Yet instead of determining the agents’ intentions, as in ancient times, the power of the *daimones* applies only to the contingent element in human action—i.e., the result, which lies beyond the power of the agent. For example, in the case of the man who intends to murder another, but who only

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<sup>663</sup> *Laws*, 713b.

<sup>664</sup> *Ibid.*, 679c.

<sup>665</sup> *Critias*, 109c; *Statesman* 273e; cf. 296e-7a.

<sup>666</sup> *Laws*, 732c.

wounds him, the murderer's *daimon* has spared each of the two the intended result.<sup>667</sup> What this new, more limited role of providence indicates is that the age of Zeus is also the age of human autonomy—a crucial difference between the modern and ancient situation. The goal of imitation must therefore be a combination of autonomy and the constant determination of the will by what is rationally the best for all.

While the notion of the *daimon* in Plato deserves further treatment,<sup>668</sup> allow me to make a passing comment concerning Socrates' famous *daimon*. What is unique about Socrates is that he is in direct contact with it, unlike the murderer. Whereas the murderer only witnesses the activity of the *daimon* outside of him in the unfolding of fate, and indeed may not even recognize the hand of providence at work therein at all, Socrates witnesses it in his soul, hearing it admonish him when he has incorrectly or impiously used his reason (as in his first speech against *Erōs* in the *Phaedrus*, in which he assumes self-interest to be the principle of all action).<sup>669</sup> Socrates is able to communicate with his *daimon* because they both participate in reason. Hence, philosophy is defined within the sphere of  $\beta\beta$ , or the communion between gods and men.<sup>670</sup> Likewise, proper lawgiving belongs within this sphere, as is indicated by the story of Minos' periodic communion with Zeus in the cave on Mount Ida. In both cases, the common element is (intellectual activity in) the purely intelligible realm. As will be seen next chapter, the lawgiver mediates between the eternal and the temporal in the downward direction, bringing into existence the conditions that make the ascent possible for others—i.e., for each to become like a god.

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<sup>667</sup> *Laws*, 877a.

<sup>668</sup> Recent discussions of the notion can be found in John Partridge (2008), "Socrates, Rationality and the Daimonion," *Ancient Philosophy* 28(2): 285-309; Carl Levenson (2007), "The *Daimon* in the *Euthydemus*," *Philosophia* 36(2): 200-212; and John Partridge (2003), "Socrates' Daimonion in Plato's *Phaedrus*," *Skepsis* (p.13-14): 75-92. To my knowledge, there has not yet been anything written that incorporates what is said about the notion in the *Apology*, *Euthydemus*, *Phaedrus*, and the *Laws*.

<sup>669</sup> *Phaedrus*, 242b-c.

<sup>670</sup> *Symposium*, 202e.

But most citizens, as has been mentioned, do not have an internal relation to their *daimon* through philosophy. We must therefore locate elsewhere the force of necessity which replaces the determination of the will in ancient times by external divinities. Since the age of Zeus is the age of autonomy—i.e., since humans now have free will—that determining force must be internal to the soul. I suggest that, in the best polity, it is faith in the power of reason to discover the truth. For given such faith, coupled with the intellectual capacity to reason clearly and properly, one will immediately put into action what one concludes.<sup>671</sup> Failure to do so (i.e., to bring ‘necessity’ to the practical syllogism, in Aristotle’s terms) is evidence that one does not have faith in reason. By regarding the findings of reason as optional, as was the case in modern Athens, one is actually identifying oneself with some other power of the soul. For they are optional only in relation to something else taken as the fixed point of reference; they are optional ‘for me’, who is (mistakenly) considered different than ‘my mind’ which produced them. To have firm conviction in reason is therefore tantamount to self-identifying with the intellect. If one constantly believes that one’s true essence is one’s capacity to think, then the result of reasoning is immediate execution of its conclusions. One does what is shown to be true; in place, then, of the authoritative, paternalistic commands of the rule of the divinities (as well as the subsequent dynastic rule of *nomos patros*), reason in each soul drives one to order his life accordingly.

Yet, as was seen in Athens, there must be a unifying and ordering principle for reason; otherwise it is anarchical and a slave to baser goals. In the case of the philosophical statesman, the orienting principle is the good, in relation to which all things are comprehended *a priori* through *epistēmē* and dialectic. The rest of the citizens are only

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<sup>671</sup> This is the unity of *logos* and *ergon* that is a theme running through the *Laches*.

able to know the good through the mediation of the laws, that is, *a posteriori* given their laws and rational justifications of them. While the internal necessity in the citizens is derived from their power of reason, the external necessity is derived from their laws.<sup>672</sup> In the philosophical statesman, by contrast, there was no such difference between internal and external, since his own knowledge suffices beyond any law for self-governance. Indeed, the law is a derivative of this knowledge.<sup>673</sup>

In the citizens, then, the rule of *nomos*, taken in the broad sense to include both positive law and custom, replaces divine ‘cybernetics’ by guiding the immortal element within us, namely *nous*.<sup>674</sup> By doing so, the law co-ordinates the intentions of the citizens, even though the results of action can never be guaranteed (and are determined providentially). The laws are therefore likened, as the *daimones* were, to divine parents: Socrates addresses Athenian Law as such in the *Crito*, acknowledging the way that he was nurtured by her, and acknowledging his debt to her as to his true parent.<sup>675</sup> Likewise, the common opinions [common ] of the city are called parents of the citizens in the *Republic*.<sup>676</sup>

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<sup>672</sup> Cf. Ferrari, *City and Soul*, p. 45: “... a manual worker lacks strength in the best part of his soul; his reasoning part is too weak to rule his soul, to govern his life; therefore if he is to be so far as possible under the same kind of rule as the best person, his soul should be ruled by that best person, which is to say by one whose soul is ruled by its reasoning part ([*Republic*] 590c-d). The manual worker is a natural follower, not a natural leader. But this conclusion is not deduced from the analogy between city and soul. It is not a resemblance between the manual worker’s soul and a certain type of city that licenses Socrates to draw his conclusions. What lies behind them is a social attitude, the disdain felt towards those who work with their hands or engage in menial tasks, a disdain that Socrates justifies by appeal to the condition of their souls.” While I agree with his claim that the lower classes ought to be ruled by the higher, Ferrari does not mention the mediating role of the laws here.

<sup>673</sup> Citing *Republic* 428d, Ferrari claims that the ruler’s knowledge must only be knowledge of what is good for the city; from this it does not follow that he knows what is good for himself (*City and Soul*, p. 44). The implication here is that the ruler need not be virtuous according the city-soul analogy in the *Republic*. While this may be correct, strictly speaking, according to Book IV of the *Republic*, I think it is quite clear that in the ideal city, the ruler is the philosopher-king, who has undoubtedly attained virtue. Ferrari seems to be taking the analogy out of its context of the rest of the *Republic*.

<sup>674</sup> *Laws*, 713b; 714a. Cf. *Phaedrus*, 247c, where mind is called the pilot of the soul.

<sup>675</sup> *Crito*, 50d-1d. For the analogy between the law and parentage in the *Menexenus*, see Sandrine Berges (2007), “Virtue Ethics, Politics, and the Function of Laws: The Parent Analogy in Plato’s *Menexenus*,” *Dialogue* 44: 211-30.

<sup>676</sup> *Republic*, 538c.

Furthermore, the best of the lawgivers is regarded as the “son of Zeus”, who is the true author of the (Cretan) laws.<sup>677</sup> Since Zeus is the god of kinship and parentage,<sup>678</sup> the transference of wisdom to his ‘son’ is therefore an education in being a parent to the whole people. The lawgiver is thus compared to a judge who brings quarrelling brothers together in *philia*.<sup>679</sup> As a product of this education, the laws also have a parental role in political œconomy, indicating what is each one’s due and each one’s purpose—i.e., one’s rights and responsibilities. By knowing what belongs to each person in each situation, acceptance of the law makes it possible for the citizen to harmonize his soul in a concrete way, so long as he has been conditioned to desire the good. This means avoiding *pleonexia* by desiring only what is lawfully and rationally apportioned as one’s own.<sup>680</sup>

However, since free will and a developed intellect are assumed in the best polity of modern times, believing in the goodness of the laws requires more than mere obedience to it. The citizen is not simply like a child who must obey his parents out of fear of punishment. In the best polity, then, the laws are not obeyed drudgingly or slavishly, but wilfully by consenting to its rationality. It is for this reason that the Athenian in the *Laws* gives the ‘rational preludes’ to each sector of the laws: the lawgiver ought to try to persuade the citizens as much as possible through the presentation of the true reasons for the goodness of the laws, in order that they themselves see that it is for the best.<sup>681</sup> For the belief is that if their souls are internally at peace (which will be the case already if they have been raised in the best *nomos*), they will recognize the truth when presented rationally,

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<sup>677</sup> *Laws*, 625a.

<sup>678</sup> *Ibid.*, 881d.

<sup>679</sup> *Ibid.*, 627e-8a.

<sup>680</sup> *Republic*, 259c; 349b-50c; 362b; 586b; *Laws*, 906c; *Critias*, 121b. Note that at *Republic* 349b, ‘over-reaching’ or ‘taking advantage’ (*pleonexia*) is incompatible with ‘simplicity’ (*euētheia*).

<sup>681</sup> *Laws*, 722b-3a. This point is argued for in much greater detail in chapter 2 of Bobonich’s *Plato’s Utopia Recast*, esp. pp. 104-5.

just as even the slave in the *Meno* recognizes the truth of the argument concerning the Pythagorean theorem, given Socrates' drawings and questioning. The citizens of the best polity are able to recognize the truth *a posteriori* in the laws and their surrounding reasons.<sup>682</sup>

An objection naturally arises here that my argument is circular: the citizens require that truth be translated to them through law in order to harmonize their souls; yet to consent to the rationality of the laws already requires this harmony of the soul. That this is circular is undeniable; but that it is a problem is not true. For what is being described here is a polity in which citizens are educated properly so that when their intellects are fully developed, they will agree to the life they have been given and want it to be perpetuated.<sup>683</sup> This is why it is claimed that once a single philosopher-king comes to power and institutes proper education, it should suffice to save the polity beyond his lifetime.<sup>684</sup> (The synod in the *Laws* is added as a kind of senate, akin to the Council of the Areopagus, to further assure continuity.<sup>685</sup>) What is important to note, then, is that the constitution described here is not described genetically as the other constitutions were. Even the appearance of the philosopher-king presupposes the institutionalization of the ideal education. As the problem of the actual genesis of the best constitution certainly looms large, I will provide some indications to a solution in the next chapter.

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<sup>682</sup> Bobonich rightly notes that “the vast majority of the citizens [of Magnesia] falls short of genuine knowledge: they do not have a synoptic grasp of any body of knowledge, they are not capable of articulating and defending against all challenges any account of the basic ethical notions, and they do not seem to have extensive training in the use of the elenchus. Nevertheless, the *Laws* leads us to believe that the citizens can grasp, at least to a significant extent, what virtue is and can value virtue for its own sake.” (*Utopia*, pp. 118-9)

<sup>683</sup> Again, see Bobonich, *Utopia*, pp. 106-19 for a fuller justification of this point.

<sup>684</sup> *Republic*, 502a.

<sup>685</sup> *Laws*, 961a ff.

Returning to the description of the citizens of the best polity, they will need a minimal education in abstract thinking in order to consent rationally to their laws.<sup>686</sup> All citizens therefore have some training in the mathematical sciences, which, as has been discussed, fundamentally depend on the concept of unity, and whose true aim is the development of abstract thought. This is necessary for understanding the essential unity of the terms of the laws and their rational explanations. That all must be trained in basic mathematics is indeed evidence that, at least in the *Laws*, all citizens ought to be able to reason abstractly.<sup>687</sup> The Athenian states that:

in relation to economics, to politics and to all the arts, no single branch of educational science [educat ] possesses so great an influence as the study of numbers: its chief advantage is that it wakes up the man who is by nature drowsy and slow of wit, and makes him quick to learn [dr ows y ], mindful [[ , nī n] and sharp-witted [ ] and sh], progressing beyond his natural capacity by art divine. All these subjects of education will prove fair and fitting, provided that you can remove illiberality and avarice, by means of other laws and institutions, from the souls of those who are to acquire them adequately and to profit by them; otherwise you will find that you have unwittingly turned out a ‘sharper’ [t t t t t t t t (‘knave’)] as we call him, instead of a sage [[ ‘kna] ...<sup>688</sup>

This passage not only confirms the point just made concerning circularity, but it describes the intellectual virtues of the citizen.<sup>689</sup> Indeed, *egrēgoros*, *eumathēs*, *mnēmōn*, and *agchinous* almost perfectly describe Socrates.

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<sup>686</sup> *Laws*, 747b; 818a. Cf. 821a-c, where mathematics and astronomy are deemed necessary for free citizens to praise the gods and avoid blasphemy. Cf. Bobonich, *Utopia*, pp. 107-9.

<sup>687</sup> This is one significant difference between the *Laws* and *Republic*: no mention is given of mathematics being taught to the guardians in the latter, despite the argument that arithmetic is very useful for all soldiers (525e, 526a-b). It seems, then, that the guardians ought to be taught the basics in mathematics, and that this point in the *Laws* is a correction. The *Republic* does not discuss the education of the lower class at all, aside from perhaps the type of poetry that is popular. This point gets even more confusing, considering that the lower class of the *Republic* seems to be a slave class in the *Laws*, for no citizen is allowed to take up any of the crafts (864d), and must spend his time only pursuing virtue and attending to public office (846d-7a). Moreover, free citizens are contrasted with “slaves, craftsmen and other foreigners” (847e).

<sup>688</sup> *Laws*, 747b-c.

<sup>689</sup> The best models of reasoning are actually the philosophical-legal discourses just like the one that is the *Laws* (811d). Hence it would be a perfect example of what should be taught judges at least.

Beyond obeying all the written laws, the virtuous citizen consents to the law by his own power of reason. Moreover, he is persuaded to take the advice of the lawgiver in private matters which are ill-suited to legislation.<sup>690</sup> The reason for the rational precludes to both the written laws and the less rigid advisories is thus “to ensure that the person to whom the lawgiver addresses the law should accept the prescription quietly [whom t h]—and because quietly, in a docile spirit [and because ]....”<sup>691</sup> The terms used here for the qualities of the citizen are ‘qual i t i e’ and ‘’ and ‘e’, for which Liddell and Scott have: well-disposedness, friendliness, goodwill, propitiousness for the first; and readiness to learn, quickness to learn, and docility for the second. Being well-disposed here means not being instantly suspicious or hostile to the authoritative claim being made, like an “utterly savage soul”.<sup>692</sup> Nevertheless, the “gentle and cultivated” citizen must still be sufficiently critical in order to accept the rationale in a genuine way.

Instead of being passively directed, like the simple man in the reign of Cronos, the ideal modern citizen possesses not only the sheer intellectual power to reason abstractly, but an openness of mind, a willingness to consider honestly what is being presented to him, and to allow the rationale to be conducted through his mind. This requires freedom from distraction. Listening such that one may be persuaded by the argument, even if it is contrary to one’s current opinion, is only possible if one is not barred from agreeing with certain conclusions prior to actually hearing the argument. For example, if a land-owner is wrapped up in concern that he might lose some of his property, he will not be open to hearing an argument for redistribution. The presentation of the rational precludes of the lawgiver is therefore not meant to incapacitate, dazzle or trick the citizen (as the ‘noble lie’

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<sup>690</sup> *Laws*, 718b; 822e-3a.

<sup>691</sup> *Ibid.*, 723a. Cf. 684c; 718c.

<sup>692</sup> *Ibid.*, 718d.

is);<sup>693</sup> it is rather a show of respect for his capacity to be reasonable in the highest degree, unencumbered by suspicion, anxiety, envy, or vengefulness that results from the prioritizing of self-interest over the good of the whole.

### C. Freedom as reasonableness

Such a capacity for being reasonable is what largely defines the free citizen in the *Laws*.<sup>694</sup> In a discussion of the treatment and education of young children, it is feared that one of the injunctions which would be ridiculous to put into positive law (i.e., how much they are to be carried by nurses) would not be received by the nurses, “with their womanish and servile minds [aaaaaa].”<sup>695</sup> In contrast, the free man [ In cont ] might actually listen and see that by adopting these injunctions in his household—of which he is the rightful master—he would achieve happiness in both his private affairs and contribute to the good of the whole.<sup>696</sup>

A similar contrast is then drawn through an analogy between the way a lawgiver and a doctor would each address freemen versus slaves.<sup>697</sup> There are, we are told, two kinds of doctor: one who contemplates nature rationally and the other who proceeds empirically.

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<sup>693</sup> *Republic*, 414b-5d.

<sup>694</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the concept of *eleutheria* in the *Laws*, see André Laks (2007), “Freedom, Liberality and Liberty in Plato’s *Laws*,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 24(2): 130-152 . Laks argues that the conception of freedom as reasonableness that I am putting forward here is curiously not very developed in the *Laws*; moreover, elsewhere in the *Laws*, it seems that freedom is a necessary condition for the practice of rationality, as it requires leisure.

<sup>695</sup> *Laws*, 790a.

<sup>696</sup> *Ibid.*, 790b.

<sup>697</sup> *Ibid.*, 720b-e. I agree with Schofield’s argument that the doctor analogy should be taken hypothetically “as bearing on the citizens’ *entitlement* to persuasion,” as opposed to dictating the actual method of applying the laws. See Schofield, *Political Philosophy*, pp. 84-88.

The first is called the free doctor, who administers to freemen; the latter is the slavish doctor, who treats slaves. Unable to give an account of the ailment he sees, the slave-doctor only knows what prescriptions have worked in the past. In contrast, the free doctor does not simply observe the patients, but talks with them and even their friends in order to gain the fullest possible understanding of the problem; he then “gives no prescription until he has gained the patient’s consent, and only then, while securing the patient’s continued docility by means of persuasion, does he attempt to complete the task of restoring him to health.”<sup>698</sup> The free patient, who is also the free citizen, is thus distinguished from the slave here by his ability to co-operate with the doctor or lawgiver by coming to understand the rationale of the prescription. The slave merely accepts it and obeys, with no questions asked on either side. The free man is thus not only capable of being reasonable, but it is his right to be treated as a reasonable person. That is the respect that is his due.<sup>699</sup>

Once again, we see a very particular conception of freedom in this governance of reason. Freedom is defined here as the capacity to be reasonable, which, in the management of one’s affairs is also called *phronesis*.<sup>700</sup> Furthermore, it is also equivalent to ‘*philia*’, for the free man is similar to all other free men and to the philosophical

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<sup>698</sup> *Laws*, 720d-e.

<sup>699</sup> For a more detailed treatment of the analogy between the doctor-patient relationship and the lawgiver-citizen relationship in the *Laws*, see Bobonich, *Utopia*, pp. 98-105.

<sup>700</sup> *Laws*, 693c. On the use of this term in this context, Bobonich writes: “...the cognitive condition that is to play the role of the leader of the other virtues and that is a condition of the Dependent Goods being valuable for their possessor includes both some kinds of true opinion, as well as more epistemically advanced states. Nevertheless, insofar as ‘wisdom’ [*phronesis*, referring to *Laws* 688b] is the name of a virtue, it is partly honorific and applies in a strict sense only to the highest sort of cognition. But since some sorts of true opinion are sufficient to make the Dependent Goods valuable for their possessor, Plato is quite willing to call such a state ‘wisdom’ and to hold that the goal of Magnesia’s laws is to bring about at least such a state in all the citizens.” (*Utopia*, p. 198) Bobonich proceeds in Chapters 3 and 4 of his book to show that Plato’s later epistemology and psychology ground the claim that non-philosophers “have access in their ethical thinking to the very same non-sensible value properties that philosophers know,” (p. 209) and therefore may attain a genuine, though still lesser, form of virtue that that attained through philosophical wisdom. I concur with Bobonich’s conclusion, which is rightly placed in Plato’s eschatological context: “The sort of virtuous life in the city that is open to non-philosophically virtuous citizens in Magnesia is both a genuine expression of rationality and an essential state in further rational progress [of the soul in future lives].” (p. 497)

statesman in virtue of his open-minded participation in the true reasoning that all find persuasive. Being united in *philia* means being alike in some fundamental way; this is contrasted with the relation between masters and slaves on one hand, and with the relation of *erōs* on the other.<sup>701</sup> For in *erōs*, the elements in relation are opposed to one another. Thus the constitution here is the extreme of *philia*, since there is harmony among all due to a common ordering principle which everyone takes to be his own good. Tyranny is the opposite constitution of extreme *erōs*, where maniacal desire rules arbitrarily.<sup>702</sup>

The capacity to be reasonable is the subjective condition that is necessary for unity among the citizens, for it is in being reasonable that the citizens are reconciled to one another freely. Hence friendship, wisdom (*phronesis*) and freedom represent the same ideal, despite the differences in the words.<sup>703</sup> Indeed, these are named as the highest goal in the polity along with faithfulness, truthfulness, happiness, virtue, peace (which, properly speaking, is a result of virtue), and harmony.<sup>704</sup>

A final note before concluding. Piety is also named as the mark at which the best laws must aim.<sup>705</sup> This opens up another important, yet difficult question, namely the relation between piety and reason in Plato. Assuming that the four virtues of justice, temperance, courage and wisdom are unified through the latter, and hence reason, the question of the relation between piety and reason is tantamount to whether piety is entailed in the unity of these four virtues, or whether it is separate from the others in some way. Plato does not address the question directly, as he does with the unity of *andreia* with the

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<sup>701</sup> *Laws*, 627e-8a; 837a. Cf. *Lysis*, 214a-e.

<sup>702</sup> *Republic*, 573a-d.

<sup>703</sup> *Laws*, 693c.

<sup>704</sup> *Ibid.*, 631c; 689d; 701d; 705e; 730c; 743c; 770c-e; 829a; 854b; 961c; 963a.

<sup>705</sup> *Ibid.*, 717a.

other virtues (in the *Protagoras*).<sup>706</sup> In favour of supposing piety to be entailed by the unity of the other virtues, it should be noted that:

he who is to become dear to ...[God] must needs become, so far as he possibly can, of a like character; and, according to the present argument, he amongst us that is temperate is dear to God, since he is like him, while he that is not temperate is unlike and at enmity,—as is also he who is unjust, and so likewise with all the rest, by parity of reasoning.<sup>707</sup>

This passage clearly suggests that virtue is the best way to be pious. This does not mean, however, that there is not a specifically religious component to piety, since “to engage in sacrifice and communion with the gods continually, by prayers and offerings and devotions of every kind, is a thing most noble and good and helpful towards the happy life, and superlatively fitting also, for the good man.”<sup>708</sup> For there is always a difference between the gods and men—even the wisest of them. The gods “know and hear and see all things, and ...nothing of all that is apprehended by sense or sciences can escape their notice.”<sup>709</sup> The attainment of *epistēmē* in the philosophical statesman is therefore only an approximation of divine omniscience; consent to laws that are based on *epistēmē* in the citizens is also a participation in the divine nature, but at a step removed—i.e., through true opinion with reasons.<sup>710</sup> This essential difference between the gods and wise and virtuous men suggests that virtue through reason must be supplemented by a religiosity that is not the same as imitation of the gods through rational self-governance.

The interpretation of the relation between piety and the rest of virtue that seems reasonable to me is that they are equivalent in the philosopher, but not in the citizens. This difference would hinge on the difference in the relation that each has to truth, namely,

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<sup>706</sup> See note 51 above for a recent debate concerning piety as a virtue in Plato.

<sup>707</sup> *Laws*, 716d-e.

<sup>708</sup> *Ibid.*, 716d.

<sup>709</sup> *Ibid.*, 910d.

<sup>710</sup> Cf. Bobonich, *Utopia*, p. 118.

contemplation of the truth itself in the philosopher versus rational consent to the ‘images of truth’ in the citizen. For those who have not been initiated into philosophy, it is not evident that philosophy is a form of communion with the gods (i.e., part of *to daimonion*); they might not, therefore, recognize the divine origin of their laws even if they recognize their rationality, and *vice versa*. In the case of Megillus and Clinias, for example, who have not delved into the rationality of their laws prior to their conversation with the Athenian, the loyalty of these citizens to their laws is at least partially based on their belief that the true authors of their laws were gods (Apollo and Zeus respectively). But in Magnesia, which would not be a polity that has ancient and mythical roots, the Delphic tradition is to be used as the religious part of the laws.<sup>711</sup> That is, religious authority, which is also considered “the traditional lawgiver” in the *Republic*,<sup>712</sup> must be maintained in order that citizens should know that their polity is ultimately under the auspices of the gods.

Clearly this is not a fully worked-out position; I present these comments only in order to indicate the problem, since it would be inaccurate to ignore the issue of piety. What is clear, however, is that the laws are regarded as having their source in eternal and immutable reality, whether this be conceived as gods or as the intelligible entities (*ta noēta*) which both gods and wise men contemplate.

## Conclusion

To conclude, the governance of reason has a different form in the statesman and in the citizens. The knowledge of the philosophical statesman suffices for the justice of his

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<sup>711</sup> *Laws*, 716c; 717a.

<sup>712</sup> *Republic*, 427b-c.

own soul, but must be translated into a coherent system of laws which aim at the virtue and happiness of all.<sup>713</sup> Yet the effectiveness of the law requires active consent on part of the citizens, based on good-will and the ability to be reasonable—i.e., to follow arguments, to recognize sound conclusions and to apply them without strain. If one were overly concerned about his own future material welfare, as the oligarch is, or insulted by the mere hint of being told what to do, as the democrat is, then one would not be able to be open to the reasoning being presented; resistance to what is rationally sound even constitutes evidence of having strife in the soul between the public good and private gain (the latter of which would *de facto* be irrational). The ability to listen to reason dispassionately thus requires that the citizens be free in the sense of identifying themselves with that universal element in them which is above the private and idiosyncratic. They are to be free from distraction caused by their passions and appetites.<sup>714</sup>

We have not yet seen this capacity to listen to reason. In the reign of Cronos, there did not seem to be this kind of persuasion: the divinities controlled the subjects more directly, like children who are not yet old enough to reason independently. In Sparta and Crete, there was no room for reason, and no need to persuade anyone of the goodness of the law, since it was strictly and consistently enforced without question. In modern Athens, there was an excess of reason—so much of it that no one listened seriously. There was also no mutual trust, since the practices of reason there, though ostensibly used for the greater good, in truth concealed the desire for private gain. Such an employment of reason

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<sup>713</sup> See John M. Armstrong, “After the Ascent: Plato on Becoming Like God,” in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, volume xxvi, summer, 2004, ed. David Sedley, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 171-183.

<sup>714</sup> Bobonich is right to regard Plato’s use of the term ‘freedom’ in the *Laws* not as pertaining primarily to autonomy, but rather to the realization of the power of reason in the soul (*Utopia*, pp. 204-5). The focus on autonomy, along with concerns over lifestyle restrictions, would be symptomatic of presupposing a democratic conception of freedom.

therefore bred suspicious skepticism. At best, the Athenian was the “expert calculator, trained in all accomplishments and in everything that fosters agility of soul,” but ignorant of the true goods in life.<sup>715</sup> But the reasonable citizen is the ‘reverse’ of the latter, who harmonizes his soul through being persuaded that the good of the whole is also his own good.

This is simply to say that the reasonable citizen is the just man. For justice is the “belief in the highest good... prevail[ing] in ... souls and regulating each man...,” while “the domination of passion and fear and pleasure and pain and envies and desires in the soul...I [the Athenian] term generally ‘injustice’...”<sup>716</sup> From the perspective of the intellect, justice in the soul of the citizen includes the calm self-awareness of the limits of what one knows and the courage of reasoning honestly without fear for oneself or one’s own. Respectively, these constitute *sophrosune* and *andreia* as intellectual virtues.<sup>717</sup> But justice in the citizen does not require independent contemplation of pure intelligible reality or mastery of the art of dialectic that constitutes *sophia* in the philosophical statesman. Rather, it requires the kind of self-possession in which one is able to determine one’s will by consenting to the universal rationale of the laws. In the just citizen, there is therefore no difference between obedience to authority and self-determination.

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<sup>715</sup> *Laws*, 689c-d.

<sup>716</sup> *Ibid.*, 863e-4a.

<sup>717</sup> See Chapter 1. Cf. *Meno*, 81d, where one may display courage in learning.

## Chapter 8 - Salvation and recollection

### A. The history of the soul and the need for philosophy as recollection

It is now possible to construct a schematic overview of the whole progression of ‘the soul’ through history up until Plato’s time by looking at his version of Athenian history. Athens, to recall, undergoes the decline of constitutions from the *kallipolis* to the democracy, where its intellectual tendency is shaped into a multi-faceted and powerful tool. Within Plato’s texts, however, we are only given explicit accounts of the blessed ancient Athens, nine thousand years prior to Solon, and modern imperialist Athens roughly since the Persian War. Indeed, it seems there were no Greek records of most of the interim that Plato knew of.<sup>718</sup> Yet, as was argued in Chapter 3, §C.iii, it can be inferred that Athens must have gone through a timarchic phase before its oligarchy and democracy, since its decline roughly follows the same general logic as that of the decline of constitutions in *Republic*, Books VIII and IX, wherein the underlying principle of change is the diminution of moderation. To learn of the timarchic phase, then, we must substitute the extant examples of timarchy discussed by Plato—i.e., Sparta and Crete. There is not, unfortunately, a concrete description of oligarchies; Thessaly is mentioned in passing as a particularly wealthy place, but it seems to be similar to Athens in its love of wisdom and rhetoric.<sup>719</sup> Indeed, it seems even more anarchic than Athens, for Socrates would not want his children raised in a place where “disorder and lawlessness prevail.”<sup>720</sup> Yet the oligarchic tendencies can still be perceived in democratic Athens; most notable is the commercial use of reason

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<sup>718</sup> *Timaeus*, 23a-c. Recall that the ancient history is known through Egyptian records.

<sup>719</sup> *Meno*, 70a-c.

<sup>720</sup> *Crito*, 53d.

(along with the growth of the Piraeus). This should make sense, since both oligarchy and democracy share in being appetitive constitutions, the main differences being the scope of who gets to pursue their desires and which desires are regarded as worthy of pursuit. The looming question for Plato, especially as a disciple of Socrates, is whether Athens will slide fully into tyranny or be saved by a recovery of virtue.

To summarize the last few chapters, then, the soul in the mythic constitution of Cronos enjoys an effortless temperance within an all-providing, divinely-guided natural order. In ancient Athens and Atlantis, the gods no longer govern directly, and labour is necessary; yet the moderation and simplicity of former times is maintained through good breeding and obedience to the divinely established law. For reasons that are too obscure to comprehend, there is a fall from this simplicity into self-dividedness on both the political and psychological levels. Plato does not develop any theodical position concerning this fall and, say, the need for free will—though it is human will indeed that becomes the focus of life at this point.

The result of the fall is the timarchic constitution, in which an upper class forcibly controls a slave class. Since it is no longer immediately present, virtue has now become something to strive for constantly. But the ideal here is not of virtue as wisdom, but rather an ideal of manliness in which one dominates feelings of fear and the desire to be comfortable.<sup>721</sup> The law which orients life towards this ideal is constantly enforced and vitalized through athletic and ascetic passions, which aim to foster, shape and direct anger. Occasionally, the decision-making faculties in the soul and the polity are overthrown by an untrammelled demand to vent anger upon an opponent. Yet for the most part the timarchic

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<sup>721</sup> It seems that the Spartan ideal represents the hatred of the need for labour, manifested in physical exertion for a non-utilitarian purpose.

constitution maintains a steady suppression of the features of the soul regarded as shameful. Though a sense of the freedom of the will to fight against a despicable element in human nature has emerged here, the range of reason has not been freed from the given values and structures of society and therefore cannot generally operate on an abstract level.

In the rule of the appetites and especially in the democracy, the general *enkrateia* that was once pervasive in the timarchy has given way to *akrateia*, where the commonest desires are given free reign. The intellect flourishes in this context in the service of the individual will, which has broken free from tradition and asserted its right to pursue whatever it desires. Independent reason therefore comes at the cost of the break-up of the common social bonds of custom, opinion, language, and trust.

Plato's history ends at a pivotal point, where what ensues is either the extreme of liberty, which dialectically turns into tyrannical oppression, or the salvation of the polity through a spiritual practice of reason in the philosophical statesman, and the education of the citizens to become reasonable. The hope is that, at least somewhere in the Greek world, the *kallipolis* may yet come about.

Athens has a privileged role in this history in virtue of being its intellectual centre, for the hope of salvation lies in the retrieval of virtue through philosophy. To recall an illustration of this importance, the Spartan and the Cretan in the *Laws* were mostly ignorant about the cause and the treatment of the worst of evils in a polity, namely atheism. It is only because the Athenian is so familiar with the arguments employed to justify and spread atheism that he can be of service in drafting laws which aim to protect the polity from this plague. (The Athenian is thus an example of the position taken by Socrates in the *Lesser Hippias*, that although uncorrupted or simple virtue is undoubtedly a good thing, it is necessary to be familiar with evil in order to stabilize virtue.) Just as Athens once saved the

Greeks from Atlantis, and just as it played at least a major role in saving Greece from the Persians, modern Athens has the means to protect Greece from this last onslaught—which is essentially to say that it has the means to save it from itself. But as with the defeat of Xerxes, Sparta must also to play a crucial role in the salvation of Greece. It is not clear whether in legislating for an envisioned Cretan colony and in setting his sights on Syracuse for the rise of a philosopher-king Plato was pessimistic about the hopes of salvation in Athens itself. His presentation of Socrates’ demise certainly does have foreboding tones to it. Considering that the *Laws* takes Spartan and Cretan law as its starting point, and that the colony in question will be a Cretan one (with Cretan emigrants),<sup>722</sup> it seems that the Athenian power of intellect is best used in the context of a nobler and more robust *nomos*.<sup>723</sup> The goal represented by the Magnesian colony is to combine the Spartan elevation of the power of the will to conquer appetites and fear with the Athenian power of the intellect, which has the potential to discover truth in itself. The intended result is to free the common will from the domination of the appetites through a new *nomos*, stabilized by contact with eternal and unchanging reality.<sup>724</sup>

Speaking of Athens, though, Socrates claims that “a drought of wisdom, as it were, has come on.”<sup>725</sup> As we have seen, cleverness has prevailed in modern Athens over all forms of ancient wisdom and authority, and “every form of knowledge when sundered from

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<sup>722</sup> *Laws* 702c, 708a. See Morrow, *Cretan City*, p. 11 for a brief discussion on the populace of Magnesia.

<sup>723</sup> *Laws*, 625a. Morrow rightly comments that the intention is to mix the “Dorian simplicity and grace” with the “intelligence of later developments in Ionia,” for wisdom was still present in Athens. (pp. 87, 91-2).

<sup>724</sup> The ideal Magnesian citizen need not have undergone the whole process of maturation from immediacy through self-division to reconciliation. The lawgiver’s experience in having purified his soul suffices for the entire polity. The reason is that the product of the lawgiver’s work—i.e., law and the establishment of common opinion and belief—ought to habituate the citizens to the moderation and selflessness required for being reasonable. That is why it is said that of the abstract *mathemata* that “all these subjects of education will prove fair and fitting, provided that you can remove illiberality and avarice, by means of other laws and institutions, from the souls of those who are to acquire them adequately and to profit by them.” (*Laws*, 747b)

<sup>725</sup> *Meno*, 71a.

justice and the rest of virtue is seen to be plain roguery rather than wisdom.”<sup>726</sup> The proposed solution for the problem is stated clearly: “When wisdom flows away, the proper influx consists in recollection.”<sup>727</sup> To confess, I have enlarged the scope of this comment by removing it from its context. At this point in the *Laws*, it is argued that citizens of a good polity ought to be reminded constantly of minor precepts which will keep their souls moderated and hopeful. Yet such reminders are not quite possible in modern Athens, where it has become an affront to others’ autonomy for anyone to dare speak with such paternalistic authority. Furthermore, it is a difficult matter, to say the least, to be reminded of precepts whose validity is doubted. Constant reminders are effective only so long as the soul is oriented in the right direction in the first place, having agreed in principle to the content or purpose of the precepts. In a state of *akrateia*, then, there can be no recollection of forgotten wisdom unless there be a fundamental turning of the soul away from its interest in worldly and bodily objects of desire. This is therefore where the “therapy of the soul” [§§§§§§§§] must begin: “a conversion and turning about of the soul from a day whose light is darkness to the veritable day—that ascension to reality ... which we will affirm to be true philosophy.”<sup>728</sup>

Both the starting point and the endpoint of philosophy—namely the turning of the soul and the recollection of forgotten wisdom—are described in the long myth of the *Phaedrus*.<sup>729</sup> Having once travelled with the gods in contemplation of the eternal forms, the soul loses its wings and falls to earth, forgetting what it has known. (This seems to be a

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<sup>726</sup> *Menexenus*, 246e-7a.

<sup>727</sup> *Laws*, 732b.

<sup>728</sup> *Republic*, 521c. Cf. 518c-d.

<sup>729</sup> *Phaedrus*, 246b-53c. In particular, the turning of the soul is mentioned at 251a, while recollection is discussed at 249c.

parallel to the transition between the reign of Cronos to the age of Zeus, when the world is left to its own natural motion and spins backwards.) Through *erotic* desire, the soul of the beloved may become filled with a longing for true beauty, which is an intellectual and moral quality. Under the guidance of a philosophical lover, the soul begins to grow its wings again and may eventually return to its community with the gods, recollecting fully the contemplative knowledge it had prior to embodiment.

A very similar idea of recollection is discussed in the *Meno*, where, taking Pindar's poetry as the lead, Socrates claims (albeit without complete confidence) that, if the soul is led properly through philosophy, it may come to know that which it beheld prior to embodiment.<sup>730</sup> And again in the *Phaedo*, learning is claimed to be nothing but recollection of ideas which the soul must have had in its independent existence.<sup>731</sup>

All this is very well known and has been heavily treated by scholars.<sup>732</sup> In light of the loss of wisdom that has ensued in democratic Athens, after falling from its glorious and divine origins, I want to offer an historical parallel to the doctrine of recollection. My interpretation is primarily intended as a supplement to the literal version of recollection, which relies on the soul's immortality and its knowledge prior to embodiment. Considering the fact that, upon embodiment, the soul forgets what it knew, and considering the fact that recollection of the forms requires philosophical education, it is clear that prior knowledge and a similar present perception do not by themselves suffice for recollection. My intention is to fill in the conditions that are required and show that the contingencies of historical

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<sup>730</sup> *Meno*, 81b-d.

<sup>731</sup> *Phaedo*, 72e-6e.

<sup>732</sup> See, for example, Franklin Lee (2005), "Recollection and Philosophical Reflection in Plato's *Phaedo*," *Phronesis* 50(4): 289-314. In claiming that recollection refers to ordinary learning, Franklin's interpretation is the opposite of Scott's. See also Eleni Christoforatu (2004), "The Theory of Anamnesis in Plato," *Skepsis* 15(2-3): 524-39; Terence Irwin (1974), "Recollection and Plato's Moral Theory," *Review of Metaphysics* 27: 752-72; and Gregory Vlastos (1965), "Anamnesis in the *Meno*," *Dialogue* 4: 143-67.

conditions affect whether philosophical discovery is possible or not. The ways in which the contingencies of history are pertinent to the possibility of knowledge will become evident through an examination of the theory of recollection and the myths which concern prior knowledge. To be clear, the historicized parallel to recollection is, I believe, compatible with the literal reading of recollection. Yet, I should add that it could replace the theory of recollection if, as will be discussed, certain Kantian explanations are employed to explain the innateness of logical categories. Combined with the historicized version of recollection in regard to moral knowledge, this would serve to purge the Platonic account of knowledge of any commitment to the soul's pre-existence and prior knowledge.<sup>733</sup> It would not, to be sure, refute any of Plato's arguments for the immortality of the soul; instead, it would show that, based on the rest of the Platonic corpus, there is another (less mystical) way to explain how knowledge is possible.

Stated very briefly, my interpretation is that philosophy consists of uncovering or retrieving the insight into reality that stood at the basis of the establishment of the polity, and which is still implicit in the constitution—albeit in an increasingly opaque manner—via its inherited customs and language. Whereas the establishment of custom is an application of divine knowledge which produces a concrete form of life, philosophy is the other side of the process, so to speak, in which the concrete form is analyzed so as to make explicit the intelligible content that lies at its heart.

## B. Translation of the idea into and out of life

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<sup>733</sup> In *Recollection and Experience*, Dominic Scott writes: "...we should not try to purge the theory [of recollection] of any commitment to pre-existence and literal recollection by claiming that Plato was only speaking metaphorically. This fails to do justice to the fact that in the *Phaedo* Plato sets out to prove the pre-existence of the soul, for which he needs to claim quite literally that the soul was once in possession of its innate knowledge. Even in the *Meno*, where the emphasis is more epistemological, there is still a short argument for the claim that the soul has been in existence from eternity (85d9-86b4)." (p. 17)

i) The life of ideas as regulative principles

To begin, it is claimed that the most persistent laws indicate the most divine origin;<sup>734</sup> hence Minos, the most ancient of the Greek lawgivers whose law is still in effect, is regarded by Homer as one who was educated through “colloquies with Zeus”, by which is meant that Minos was “a disciple [of Zeus] by means of discourse.”<sup>735</sup> (Though Lycurgus established Spartan law much more recently,<sup>736</sup> he too is considered to have been divinely educated, as has been mentioned.<sup>737</sup>) To such a lawgiver is revealed the end at which all laws ought to aim—i.e., the Good, in which we participate through virtue.<sup>738</sup> The nature of this revelation is, of course, unclear. But what is certain—and important—is that the intelligible reality with which he comes into contact through divine revelation is the same reality that can be reached through philosophy in *epistēmē*.

In contemplating the Good, one has insight into a transcendent reality which, in the case of a philosophical statesman or a lawgiver, is made the basis and model of life through the idea of virtue, which permeates all the laws. Just as the artist or craftsperson begins with an idea of the thing which guides its production and use, the idea of virtue (or happiness, or harmony, etc.—whatever we may call it) is a regulative principle in a most concrete way; as the unifying principle of the diversity of specific laws, it co-ordinates the

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<sup>734</sup> *Minos*, 318c-d.

<sup>735</sup> *Ibid.*, 319b; 319e; 320b. Cf. *Laws*, 624b. Though the longevity of a system of law is clearly not a proof of its divine origin or its supreme justice, it does at least indicate that they work, that they sustain a way of life and guard it from ruin. Anything which saves or guards (i.e., the *sotēr*) is, I believe, regarded as divine by Plato. (See, for example, *Laws*, 775e; 903b; 906b; 960b (combined with 969b); 960e; 961c-d; *Republic*, 493a; 502a, 502d; 549b.)

<sup>736</sup> *Minos*, 317c.

<sup>737</sup> *Laws*, 630d; 632d; 691e; 696b.

<sup>738</sup> *Ibid.*, 705e.

actions, practices, schedules, and even intentions of the citizens.<sup>739</sup> In a state with good laws, derived through insight, all activity is oriented, however consciously, towards making this transcendent reality immanent in historical life. So long as the people have faith in their way of life or *nomos*, believing without hesitation that it is good and right, that transcendent idea of virtue is felt as a real motivating force and goal.

Consider an analogy with sport. The idea of victory in a game is similarly regulative. It is true that this idea lives in the imagination of all who hope for it; moreover, while the game is still being played, it cannot be said to exist in the sense of being actual in the world. Yet it is real insofar as it motivates the game and is felt with sometimes extreme passion—even by spectators, whose own lives are at least temporarily wrapped up in that goal. But the idea would lose its hold as the vital force if the players were to question the value of the win. Consequently, the play would become insignificant. Similarly, when the idea of virtue specific to a polity loses its hold therein, giving way to the pursuit of wealth, fame or individuality, the result is a decay of the laws and customs, disregard for ancient ways, and outright hostility towards traditional authority. The inherent force of custom is no longer felt, but regarded askance as something external to one's real being. But, as we will see, the corruption of the laws does not fully exhaust the effectiveness of the idea; for it is still implicit in the common opinions and the language which form an underlying thread of continuity across even quite radical changes in the constitution.

## ii) The embodiment of the idea in belief, opinion and language

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<sup>739</sup> Kant takes the proper definition of the term 'idea' to be a regulative principle (*Critique of Pure Reason*, transl. Werner S. Pluhar, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), division I, book 1, §1-2). However, he limits its domain to the syllogistic syntheses of judgment. In the political context, the idea is not primarily an internal condition for the subjective use of reason—though it does indeed turn out to be the basis of dialectical reasoning as it is defined in the *Republic*.

In order to create a polity that is harmonious, peaceful and prosperous, the statesman must “interweave the characters of restrained and courageous men, . . . drawing them together by friendship and community of sentiment into a common life.”<sup>740</sup> These are, of course, the natures that ought to be dominant in the producing and guardian classes respectively. To weave them together, the thread he uses consists of “common beliefs [[ e s p e c t i v ] and honours and dishonours and opinions and interchanges of pledges, thus making of them a smooth and, as we say, well-woven fabric.”<sup>741</sup> Without this “divine bond” of “really true and assured opinion about honour, justice, goodness and their opposites,”<sup>742</sup> the courageous natures would tend toward brutality and ultimately madness, while the self-restrained and modest natures would become sluggish and crippled.<sup>743</sup> (The “human bond” of intermarriage is also needed here, so that the natures actually mix.<sup>744</sup>) Though knowledge is the most reliable governor,<sup>745</sup> as occurs in the soul of the philosophical statesman, “right opinion [pppp] [is] no whit inferior to knowledge [[ [ i s ] n ] in worth or usefulness as regards our actions.”<sup>746</sup> If it rules in their souls, right

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<sup>740</sup> *Statesman*, 311b-c. On the use of the weaving analogy and its history, see Ruby Blondell (2005), “From fleece to fabric: weaving culture in Plato’s *Statesman*,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 28: 23-75. Schofield has followed the thread of politics as a kind of expert management of other experts (which is called the ‘architectonic’ approach) throughout Plato’s dialogues. He criticizes Plato’s use of it in the *Statesman* (as is evident in part in the use of the weaving analogy) on the grounds that the statesman as manager is disconnected from the citizens insofar as he does not use rational persuasion, as does the lawgiver in the *Laws* (*Political Philosophy*, pp. 175-176). That is, the managerial conception ultimately rests on compulsion. I do not see, however, how this criticism makes sense with the *Statesman*’s claim that a divine bond of true opinion is required (310e); for true opinion in the citizens includes the belief in the validity of the statesman’s rule and of the laws themselves. This seems to be an equivalent point as the need for the preludes in the *Laws* and the claim there that public opinion ought to be consecrated (*Laws* 838d).

<sup>741</sup> *Statesman*, 310e.

<sup>742</sup> *Ibid.*, 309c, 310a. Cf. *Republic*, 538d.

<sup>743</sup> *Statesman*, 309e, 310d-e.

<sup>744</sup> *Ibid.*, 310b.

<sup>745</sup> *Meno*, 97c.

<sup>746</sup> *Meno*, 98c; cf. 97b.

opinion therefore produces good men who are useful to their polity.<sup>747</sup> Indeed, even great statesmen—though not the philosophical statesman—are governed by right opinion, though their greatness lies in the fact that right opinion comes to them extraordinarily by divine inspiration, like seers who do not know what it is they say.<sup>748</sup>

Right opinion is even equated at one point in the *Minos* with *nomos*, which is defined as “state opinion” [ddd], or the “belief of the polity” [ ]]

, or ].<sup>749</sup> Though the definition of *nomos* here is clearly incomplete, lacking at least the purpose of the law, it nevertheless points to the vital importance of common opinion as the bond or thread of the political constitution, which holds together not only the various classes, but the multiplicity of positive laws.<sup>750</sup> This is one of the reasons why the Athenian advises the Cretan that public opinion ought to be consecrated.<sup>751</sup> The other reason, which is the one mentioned explicitly, is that it is through the efficacy of this acquired opinion that lusts can be ruled. Indeed, as is stated in the *Phaedrus*, the acquired opinion “which strives for the best” is considered, along with the “innate desire for pleasure” to be one of two potentially ruling principles in the soul.<sup>752</sup> If this opinion governs the lusts through reason and *aidōs* (and not through force), the soul is in its proper state of *sophrosune*.<sup>753</sup>

But acquired opinion seems to govern all polities, for the ordinary citizen is “bred and parented” by the common beliefs [and par ] of the polity concerning its supposed goods [ [ ]].<sup>754</sup> It is therefore quite reasonable to suppose, as

Protagoras and Anytus do, that virtue is taught simply through socialization: like an

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<sup>747</sup> *Ibid.*, 98c; *Laws*, 689b.

<sup>748</sup> *Meno*, 99b-c. I will return to this point in §D.ii.

<sup>749</sup> *Minos*, 314c.

<sup>750</sup> *Laws*, 793b.

<sup>751</sup> *Ibid.*, 838d.

<sup>752</sup> *Phaedrus*, 237d.

<sup>753</sup> *Ibid.*, 237e. The opposite state here is *hubris*.

<sup>754</sup> *Republic*, 538c; 491c.

apprentice learning a craft or a child learning the language, one mimics others who already know.<sup>755</sup> This is only true, however, if the supposed goods of common opinion are actually the true goods at which one ought to aim; otherwise, the ‘virtue’ that is taught is only the practical knowledge of being successful in one’s particular time and place. That is, education through socialization can at best teach a kind of ‘relative virtue’, unless the polity happens to be a properly just one.

Assuming then that we are dealing with a lawgiver who has insight into the true good (whether by revelation or philosophy), an important method of determining public opinion that he must employ is public distribution of praise and blame where each is due—that is, to actions and characters which exemplify or embody the idea of virtue.<sup>756</sup> He will do so by calling this or that ‘virtuous’ or ‘noble’, etc. The appropriate use of words is therefore an important feature of proper statesmanship, for it establishes or rectifies correct linguistic usage—i.e., proper denotation. This point is connected to one made in the *Cratylus* that is somewhat mystifying and easy to dismiss (like much of that dialogue). Early on in the discussion, Socrates and Hermogenes agree without any hesitation that the original namer of things must have been the lawgiver.<sup>757</sup> This bold claim makes sense if we understand the rest of the role of the lawgiver for Plato. The best (human) lawgiver has epistemic contact with reality, and must be able to translate this into prescriptive terms for the laws, which are, to recall, “images of truth”.<sup>758</sup> If all common activity and opinion are intentionally designed to mimic that truth in a temporal form, it follows that linguistic usage (which is common to all citizens) ought to embody or symbolize that truth as well.

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<sup>755</sup> *Protagoras*, 327e; *Meno*, 92c.

<sup>756</sup> *Laws*, 632a. Cf. *Republic*, 538d.

<sup>757</sup> *Cratylus*, 388e.

<sup>758</sup> *Statesman*, 300c.

Hence the lawgiver assigns names based on his knowledge of the essence of things and of letters as aural symbols, where the reality is mimicked in the sound of the words.<sup>759</sup> (The point is also closely connected to the claim in the *Republic* (and discussed in Chapter 6) that music naturally mimics reality: sound in general is a sensuous medium in which the essences of things may be approximately perceived within the temporal realm.) The name is thus considered an “instrument of teaching and of separating reality

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..... ]].<sup>760</sup> Hence, the true lawgiver knows the substance, the definition, and the name of each thing.<sup>761</sup>

Since the linguistic problems here are clearly beyond the scope of this work, let it suffice to note that the claim that the lawgiver is the original name-giver amounts to a further claim that the lawgiver’s knowledge is infused into all aspects of the life which he (or the god through him) produces, and that this knowledge is implicit in the very words that are used—even if the people have taken to using them improperly. As we saw in Chapter 6,§B, this was the case in modern Athens, where there was an overhaul of linguistic usage to reflect the new and mistaken democratic values. But the true meaning, at least according to the *Cratylus*, is still inherent in the words themselves. In other words, the pragmatic aspect of language cannot fully encroach upon the semantic, in which the correspondence to reality established by the lawgiver persists despite ignorance.

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<sup>759</sup> *Cratylus*, 389d.

<sup>760</sup> *Ibid.*, 388c.

<sup>761</sup> *Laws*, 895d; 964a. It will be objected that this implies that only one language can get the name right in terms of mimicking the true essence in sound properly. However, the plurality of languages is still compatible with correct naming (according to the *Cratylus*). The case is likened to the use of different pieces of iron in order to make the same instrument for same purpose: the lawgiver has the ‘absolute or ideal name’ [i i i] ] in mind when naming, just as the smith has the idea of the tool in mind (*Cratylus*, 389d-91a). Of course, it does seem to me that some tools are better than others in terms of their function; I therefore do not see how this objection is met.

iii) The recovery of truth from false opinion

As was seen in modern Athens, the common beliefs and opinions may easily be a source of vice, for the mistake of believing apparent goods to be true goods is widespread. In this case, then, it may be better for the consistent use of language to be disturbed and for one's faith in the given normative opinion to be uprooted by the *elenchos* of "those who lay hold of arguments" [hhhhhhhh].<sup>762</sup> As has been discussed, this causes disobedience to the given morality and leaves one in a state of confusion.<sup>763</sup> But, again, if one has been brought up in a decayed state, then this distancing from incorrect linguistic and moral prejudices must be the starting point of turning souls toward the true good. Hence, the Socratic method is not far from the sophistic corruption of the given *nomos*, and serves to undo the damage that sophism has caused by turning the questioning against the sophism. It is like a magical drug which, when taken twice, serves as an antidote to itself.

There must be some special conditions for such a reversal to be possible. In the anarchic, individualistic, and sophistic mode of thought, the given world is placed at a reflective distance from the thinker who believes it is only there to be mastered. The interpretation of this situation as a loss of something essential to the good life—trust, friendship, the pursuit of a common good, etc.—is therefore accompanied by a sense of nostalgia for the vital and unifying presence of the idea of virtue. But there cannot be a simple restoration of the past; for the newly acquired depth of the intellect cannot be ignored, except, perhaps, in Bacchic frenzy, which could not become the rule for an everyday form of life that seeks justice. One is just as much barred from becoming a child

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<sup>762</sup> *Republic*, 538c-d.

<sup>763</sup> *Ibid.*, 538d.

again through the drunken shedding of self-consciousness; one is merely released temporarily from the bonds of inhibition and isolation.

The remaining option, then, is a return not to the immediate mode of life, but to the idea itself—that is, through intellectual contact with it. If one encounters the idea in itself, through the activity of the mind, it can become a vitalizing principle once again for that knower, making it possible to harmonize the soul through a unifying idea and to bring a new necessity to practical reason. What, then, are the tools by which to arrive at that same insight?—At the most basic level, they are the power of analysis applied to the circulating opinions and words which conceal the initial truth in reference to which they were first established.<sup>764</sup> The problem is not that true opinion is gone, for it is still perceptible in, say, the maxims of the ancient sages; rather, the difficulty is that the whole realm of opinion has been muddled and confounded so that their coherence is no longer readily apparent. As Scott has commented, “recollection only enters the story when we have already reached the level of ordinary conceptual thought and start to become puzzled and dissatisfied with the perspective thus gained of the world.”<sup>765</sup>

But does not the *aporia* arrived at through Socratic dialectic leave one even more disconnected from one’s intuitive basis and given world, in which access to truth is supposedly hidden? Yes. However, the hope is that the *aporia* leaves one with the desire to know the truth of the matter that one has become confused about. (This requires overcoming the sense of shame that one has upon recognition of one’s ignorance—a feat which Alcibiades, for example, could not perform.<sup>766</sup>) As the so-called ‘Socratic dialogues’ demonstrate, one is not left with empty skepticism, as though the negation of all hypotheses

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<sup>764</sup> As will be seen in Part II, Scripture is another route for recovering the truth, according to the Cambridge Platonists.

<sup>765</sup> Scott, *Recollection and Experience*, p. 8.

<sup>766</sup> *Symposium*, 216b.

or opinions annulled their existence altogether. One is left with a series of incorrect or incomplete opinions which one intuitively knows had some truth to them. There is no doubt, for example, that *andreia* involves boldness and endurance, even though these do not fully define the idea. What one is left with in *aporia* is therefore the analyzed parts of a whole whose unity is not yet comprehended. It is only in light of these parts that one is compelled to know the truth of the matter; indeed, it is only in light of the parts that the whole is sensed as a whole.

Socrates is therefore always interested in the many guises of the idea of virtue: piety, knowledge, justice, temperance, courage, friendship, etc. He is able to inquire about them with other people because everyone agrees that they are real and that they are good; they just don't know the true meaning of the terms. They may be able to recognize instances of it, though, if these still exist; Laches, for example, refers to the soldiers (or generals) who hold their ground in battle—Socrates being a case in point.<sup>767</sup> Alternatively, one may recognize the virtue in the heroes or forefathers that one has learned about.<sup>768</sup> But, given the innovations in music and the controversial treatment of opinions, these models can no longer be imitated simply. For the model may not actually be a good one; for instance, it is not clear whether Odysseus is prudent or wily. Moreover, even if the model is taken to be a good one, there is always the problem of applying the model to the particulars of one's situation. The only stable way to clarify all of this, then, is to come to an understanding of the idea of virtue itself, so that one may be able to have a proper orienting principle in deciding what to do or what to strive for. In other words, knowledge must now be the saving grace. How, then, is knowledge possible?

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<sup>767</sup> *Laches*, 190e; 181a-b.

<sup>768</sup> *Laches*., 179c, where Lysimachus and Melesias are lamenting their inability to mimic their fathers in being able to demonstrate virtue to their sons.

### C. The conditions for philosophical recognition

#### i) The power of understanding and orientation in thinking in the *Meno*

Whereas sophism teaches mere dexterity in the realm of opinion [XXXXXXXXXXXX or  
or ereas ο],<sup>769</sup> philosophical practice aims at discovering the truth of the given opinions and  
fastening it with repeated questioning from various angles.<sup>770</sup> The problem, of course, is  
how to know which is true: How will you know you've hit on the truth when you don't  
already know it?<sup>771</sup> Considering that the dialogue in which this famous paradox is raised  
centres around virtue and education, the ultimate response is an assertion of the belief that  
all souls retain a vague sense of the truth in the moral sense of how life ought to be—that  
all actually desire true and not merely apparent goods, and that, if pursued honestly, reason  
will naturally lead one to accept this fact.<sup>772</sup>

The more proximate response to Meno's paradox is the demonstration that true  
opinions are innate in the uneducated slave [οο ] and that Socrates  
has merely drawn them out of him through questioning—the conclusion being that  
everyone must have true opinions prior to the embodiment of the soul as a human being.<sup>773</sup>  
Taken on its own, the argument here is not very convincing. For it is quite easy to explain  
the result without recourse to innate knowledge or opinions. Socrates is able to lead the  
slave to the recognition first of his own ignorance, then of the truth of what we call the

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<sup>769</sup> *Sophist*, 231b; 233c.

<sup>770</sup> *Meno*, 85c; 97c-d.

<sup>771</sup> *Ibid.*, 80d.

<sup>772</sup> Cf. *Republic*, 505e.

<sup>773</sup> *Meno*, 85c; 86a.

Pythagorean theorem because Socrates himself already knew this theorem. Given the innate power of reason, which universally functions according to the same basic logical rules, and axioms which are immediately evident or acceptable to everyone, anyone, whether educated or not, may be led by a series of precise questions where only assent is required because the result is already in the mind of the questioner, who is guiding the investigation.<sup>774</sup> If the text were to be read in this way, the theory of recollection could amount to a kind of dispositionalism, which, as Scott has discussed, is characteristic much more of the Stoics.<sup>775</sup>

But the paradox would then simply get pushed back into a regression: how could the questioner attain the knowledge in the first place? Presumably by the same means. And so, we must either posit a god at the beginning of the regression, who eternally knows the truth and educates a human, initiating an earthly tradition; or simply ask the question concerning the possibility of knowledge outside of the context of question-and-answer altogether. In regard to the first option, Plato often does follow typical Greek mythology (e.g., Prometheus) and speaks of the bestowal of practical and theoretical knowledge by the gods to humans.<sup>776</sup> To repeat, though, it is difficult to shed any light on a postulated encounter with a god—whether it be a kind of direct and lucid education between two actual subjects, as it supposedly was with Minos, or through the mouthpiece of an oracle, which remains mysterious enough. But if this expression ultimately means a kind of illumination in which the presence of the truth is taken to be a divine presence itself (as it

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<sup>774</sup> As Scott puts it, Meno and Socrates can be arbiters of slave because they already know (*Recollection and Experience*, p. 29).

<sup>775</sup> See *Recollection and Experience*, pp. 179-86.

<sup>776</sup> See Chapter 3, §B. Hence, I do not, therefore, think Scott is quite right in his comment: “When asked to explain how these beliefs can have the reliability to play such a role, the dispositionalist may invoke God or nature to act as their guarantor. Thus, in effect, the theory satisfies the fore-knowledge principle by supplying another being, God, as the pre-existent knower. For Plato, however, it is as if the pre-existent knower cannot be anyone else but the learner himself.” (*Recollection*, p. 216)

would be, considering that truth is eternal for Plato), then the event of initial discovery must be explicable without recourse to intersubjectivity. It is here (in this second option) that Meno's paradox is most acutely pertinent, for there is no other confirming or guiding mind. In that case, then, it seems that there must indeed be something latently within the mind of the discoverer which resonates with the discovered object of knowledge.

However, even if, by this logic, we grant that knowledge must be innate in at least an initial (human) discoverer who stands at the origin of a tradition of knowledge (a claim which would be difficult to defend on Platonic grounds), there is still a major problem that we are presented with: while there was clearly geometric knowledge already in the world, the *Meno* itself stresses that there is no moral knowledge to be found anywhere. Hence, the conditions for knowledge that have been outlined so far—the power of reason, with its inherent rules of logic, and a questioner who can be a guide towards the truth—do not suffice. For without the moral knowledge already being known by someone, there is no one to guide others. One possible response is that the geometrical demonstration rests on axioms that are immediately evident even to the slave; perhaps, then, there are moral axioms as well, and so long as these are recognized as true, then sound reasoning will lead to further conclusions.<sup>777</sup> But in the ethical and political realm, where conventionalism and relativism lurk, it is a major presumption to *assume* that analogous axioms exist. Even if the innateness of axioms, rules, or categories which give rise to mathematical concepts is granted, there is no clear argument that moral categories are also innate, let alone that they have objective reality.<sup>778</sup> Without such an argument, the whole position still rests only on the assumption that we all actually desire the true good and would recognize this when

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<sup>777</sup> This happens to be Henry More's approach. See *Enchiridion Ethicum (An Account of Virtue)*, esp. Chapter IV and his notion of *noemata*.

<sup>778</sup> Indeed, 'Platonism' has only survived to this day, for the most part, with respect to mathematics and logic.

encountering it.<sup>779</sup> Notwithstanding, Plato clearly does not limit the result of the demonstration to geometry alone: “You see,” says Socrates, “he can do the same as this with geometry and every branch of knowledge.”<sup>780</sup> In the overall purpose of Platonic philosophy, which includes showing that the ideas of goodness and justice, etc. are eternal and unchanging, this move, taken on its own, seems to be a colossal case of question begging.

This is to say that given his position of ignorance with respect to moral truth, Socrates’ method of questioning is based on a mere belief in the existence of truth, a belief which underlies his typical question of ‘*vv*’. In his joint investigations, we clearly see that he believes there to be a single idea of virtue, or perhaps of each virtue, which can be comprehended, even though he himself does not fully comprehend the content of the idea. He claims he does not know the answers to his own questions; yet what impresses people, among other things, is his unambiguous orientation given his belief in the existence of an answer.

Whereas his ability to question the slave in geometrical matters depends on his having had prior knowledge of geometry (for he has, after all, been educated—in rhetoric by Aspasia, in music by Connus, in natural science by Anaxagoras, in philosophical method as *eros* by Diotima, and perhaps in geometry by Pythagoreans, as was Plato),<sup>781</sup> his ability to question others about virtue depends on his having acquired the belief in the existence of truth as pure ideas—something which, at least in the case of beauty, he gathered from Diotima. This is to say that the practice of questioning and investigation in order to recover

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<sup>779</sup> Scott notes this objection to the analogy between geometry and morality, but points out that it’s not an issue for Plato as it is for Aristotle (*Recollection*, p. 71).

<sup>780</sup> *Meno*, 85e. As will be shown in Part II, Cudworth makes the same leap in his argument for the existence of moral absolutes.

<sup>781</sup> *Menexenus*, 235e-6a; *Phaedo*, 97d; *Symposium*, 201d.

the idea of virtue through analysis of the lifeworld depends upon being initiated into a tradition of either knowers (in the case where the tradition has already begun) or believers (in the case where it is expected to begin).<sup>782</sup>

ii) Receptivity and transmission

The problem that Plato is faced with here is the problem of prior knowledge: there must have been some actual knowledge in some knower that stands at the basis of a later recognition of that knowledge. In the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, that prior knowledge is attributed to the soul prior to its embodiment. However, what I intend to show in the next few sections is that another possibility can be garnered from Plato's texts, namely that prior knowledge in one mind might actually serve as the basis for knowledge in another.<sup>783</sup>

At one point in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates claims that "...we say that when anyone transmits them [*technai* and *epistemai*] he teaches, and when anyone receives them he learns, and when anyone, by having acquired them, has them in that aviary of ours, he knows [knows [ an] them."<sup>784</sup> But as knowledge is not fundamentally propositional, it cannot simply be transferred from one individual to the next as this passage suggests.<sup>785</sup> As

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<sup>782</sup> This is related to the point about philosophers needing to be initiated into the mystery of purification in order to go next world properly (*Phaedo*, 69c).

<sup>783</sup> The passages from the *Meno* and *Phaedo* concerning recollection clearly involve literal recollection by an individual soul of knowledge gained prior to embodiment. While I do not wish to deny that the literal reading of these passages is most appropriate, the following historicized version of prior knowledge may be applied to the *Meno* and *Phaedo* passages. My view is that something similar to recollection occurs in history on the collective level; it does not require that the *Meno* and *Phaedo* passages be re-interpreted in order to avoid attribution of recollection to the individual soul. It may therefore be more appropriate to say that what occurs on the collective level is 'recognition' and not 'recollection'. See note 792 below.

<sup>784</sup> *Theaetetus*, 198b.

<sup>785</sup> Keep in mind that this passage is in the middle of a defense of a position that gets refuted. See chapters 4 and 5 of Gerson's *Knowing Persons* for a lengthy defense of the position that knowledge is not ultimately propositional for Plato. Following what I have argued about what's left after Socratic refutations, I do think there is some truth in this comment that has to be integrated.

Scott has argued, this belief is much more characteristic of the sophists, for they openly profess to sell their knowledge like a commodity.<sup>786</sup> The learning that Plato is most interested in is not a matter of the transference of information, but a guidance of the soul inward.<sup>787</sup> This aspect of the teaching-learning dynamic is stressed in the famous description of the Socratic process as a kind of giving birth to an idea that was latent within the soul.<sup>788</sup> Socrates does not take himself to be a teacher, but only a midwife of ideas, for he claims to be barren (i.e., ignorant) and therefore has nothing to transmit to others. All he can do is help others see what was inside them and judge its validity. Yet Socrates is perhaps the teacher *par excellence*, as Nicias and Lysimachus openly assert in the *Laches*.<sup>789</sup> The question arises, then, whether there really is any learning going on in Socratic questioning according to the conception above which stated that learning involves a transmission of knowledge. My response is that there is a transmission, as expressed in the above passage from the *Theaetetus*, and that indeed it is not directly from Socrates to his interlocutors.

To explain, the fact that Socrates understands his role as distinguishing between viable from non-viable births<sup>790</sup> clearly implies that the “births” can occur without him, including viable ones. That is to say, a “midwife” is not necessary for ideas to emerge from the soul. Nevertheless, no one, taken individually, can be a sufficient cause for such a birth. In the case of actual child-birth, the seed must have been incorporated and integrated with the organism in order for the offspring to develop and become viable. That is, gestation cannot (obviously) begin without insemination. Likewise, though Socrates’

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<sup>786</sup> Scott, “Recollection and Cambridge Platonism,” p. 93. Cf. Chapter 5, §C above.

<sup>787</sup> *Meno*, 93b; *Republic*, 518c.

<sup>788</sup> *Theaetetus*, 150b-e. As will be discussed below, Scott notes this difference between instilling opinions and ‘maieutic’ questioning within the *Meno* (*Recollection and Experience*, p. 42).

<sup>789</sup> *Laches*, 200c-d.

<sup>790</sup> *Theaetetus*, 150a-b.

companions may “find within themselves many fine things,”<sup>791</sup> the gestation of their knowledge requires external material. Though this point is not discussed in the *Theaetetus*, it follows from what has been argued in §B above that the material is the set of concepts and beliefs acquired through ordinary learning (i.e., socialization). As a receptive agent, a soul must be able to give something that it already has to the seed in order for it to grow. Though Socrates is not able to sow seeds of knowledge in other souls exactly, the entire process of knowing that he initiates depends on there being a starting point of common sense concerning the idea at issue. Thus, when inquiring into the nature of virtue, the interlocutor must already have some conception of virtue in order to begin the process of attaining actual knowledge of virtue. If the interlocutor had never heard the word or had no equivalent concept whatsoever, there could be no investigation. What is becoming clear is that, for knowledge to be possible, the learner must have some sort of prior familiarity with the idea being learned; if actual learning takes place—i.e., if knowledge comes to be possessed—then that knowledge is transmitted by the teacher in conjunction with the integrative activity of the learner.

Thus, in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates speaks of the tradition of philosophical education among true lovers as a kind of dissemination of ideas among capable souls, where the lover nurtures the soul of the beloved so that the implanted seed may sprout into life, character, and further fecundity:

The dialectician selects a soul of the right type, and in it he plants and sows his words founded on knowledge, words which can defend both themselves and him who planted them, words which instead of remaining barren contain a seed whence new words grow up in new characters, whereby the seed is vouchsafed immortality, and its possessor the fullest measure of blessedness that man can attain unto.<sup>792</sup>

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<sup>791</sup> *Ibid.*, 150d.

<sup>792</sup> *Phaedrus*, 276e-7a. (transl. Hackforth)

The fact that Socrates advocates the need for a philosophical lover indicates that the words alone do not suffice for the idea to grow properly. That is to say, the growth of the idea into an effective and motivating principle of life requires an integrative contribution by the soul in whom it is growing, a contribution which must be guided. The philosophical lover must know how to tend to this garden, and he selects his garden by knowing that it is nutritive.<sup>793</sup>

Individual souls are thus carriers of the seed which existed in the world (in other souls) prior to them. Souls must have a varying power of receptivity to the philosophical ideas being disseminated. This passive power involves not only the capacity to think, speaking from a formal perspective, but also the content of ordinary understanding, including conceptions of things being spoken of. Without this, the student could not even get to the point of awareness of ignorance, since he clearly needs to have some sense of what he is ignorant of. To put this in terms of the *Theaetetus* again, there must be some basis of imprints on the soul—i.e., perceptions—which go into one’s memory so that later perceptions (of what the teacher is saying) can be recognized on the basis of comparison with prior impressions. Despite the fact that the Homeric image of the wax in the *Theaetetus* is provided in the context of what seems like a purely formal epistemological discussion—which is to say, a discussion about the way perception and memory function, without regard to the content of thought—it is, nevertheless, quite *a propos* here:

When the wax in the soul of a man is deep and abundant and smooth and properly kneaded, the images that come through the perceptions are imprinted upon this heart of the soul. . . . When this is the case, and in such men, the imprints, being clear and of sufficient depth, are also lasting. And men of this kind are in the first place quick to learn, and secondly they have retentive memories, and moreover they do not interchange the imprints of their perceptions, but they have true opinions. . . . But those in whom [the wax] is shaggy [or ‘overgrown’]: true op

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<sup>793</sup> *Ibid.*, 276b. Note that Socrates is always asking about the brightest new students (e.g., *Theaetetus*, 143d; *Charmides*, 153e); if he is not to be their lover, he at least wants to keep their “soil” from being sullied.

and rough and stony, infected with earth or dung which is mixed in it, receive indistinct imprints from the moulds. So also do those whose wax is hard; for the imprints lack depth. And imprints in soft wax are also indistinct, because they melt together and quickly become blurred; but if besides all this they are crowded upon one another through lack of room, in some mean little soul, they are still more indistinct. So all these men are likely to have false opinions. For when they see or hear or think of anything, they cannot quickly assign things to the right imprints, but are slow about it, and because they assign them wrongly they usually see and hear and think amiss. These men, in turn, are accordingly said to be deceived about realities and ignorant.<sup>794</sup>

The occurrence of false opinion is related here to the difference in the receptive capacity of souls: those who are overcrowded and not cultivated properly will have unclear and indistinct impressions of things and will therefore not be able to identify properly what they see. While it makes sense to attribute this difference in passive capacities simply to individual differences, such differences are, as we have seen, connected to differences in political constitution and hence to the contingencies of common sense. As was discussed in Chapter 6,§B with respect to the modern Athenians, the very classifications of perceptions as being this or that (e.g., the truly audacious and irreverent man is commonly misidentified as being courageous) are unclear and confused. Hence, the opinions and beliefs that are internalized are generally confused as well. Again, though I do not think Socrates is particularly intending to say so at this point in the *Theaetetus*, the modern Athenians can, generally speaking, be regarded as instances of the overgrown and coarse-hearted (while the Spartans might qualify as hard-hearted). And if this confused set of impressions has not been sorted through, one will, as most Athenians did, not recognize the appearance of virtue when they see it (i.e., Socrates). Hence, the varying power of receptivity of the soul depends, at least in part, on one's historical context.

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<sup>794</sup> *Theaetetus*, 194c-5a.

iii) On the negative presence of the idea

In order for the recognition to occur in present experience, there must be something already in the soul with which perceptions (or conceptions of particulars) are compared, identified with, and yet distinguished from.<sup>795</sup> What I propose is that, in the case of moral ideas, this something already in the soul is the idea itself; however, the idea is only in the soul *negatively*, and yet suffices for a sense of recognition upon perception of a particular. Allow me to explain.

As was just discussed, the soul maintains in its memory impressions from past experience; those impressions are formed in a way that is contingent on the character of the recipient soul (as is attested to by the different kinds of wax); and, as argued in Chapter 3, the character of the soul is determined largely by the character of the polity. As discussed in §A of this chapter, the idea of virtue—in a polity with a knowledgeable lawgiver—is the regulative foundation of the entire set of laws, customs, opinions and beliefs. The idea permeates the entire way of life. Hence, the set of impressions that are internalized by citizens retain the mark of that idea insofar as they are cohere with one another through that idea. It is as though the entire set of impressions had a certain hue that is not immediately recognizable. It is required to have some reflective distance from one's own inherited opinions in order to be able to detect this hue. As has been mentioned, sophism and Socratic questioning are both possible because of this dislodging from a dogmatic adherence to given opinions while perpetuating the distance. Hence, we may add another condition for the possibility of knowledge as recollection—namely, the reflective distance

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<sup>795</sup> These are the conditions that are necessary for recollection set forth in the *Phaedo* (72e-77a, especially 73c). Again, the *Phaedo* passage need not be re-interpreted in order to draw a more general conclusion from it and employ it in the historicized version of recognition. For a detailed analyses of the *Phaedo* argument, see Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, pp. 65-79, and Scott, *Recollection and Experience*, pp. 53-73.

which, as discussed in Chapter 6, results from the increasing dissolution of the ancient constitution and from an augmented power of abstract thinking.<sup>796</sup> Now, it might be objected that the slave in the *Meno* is not educated in abstract thinking and yet is perfectly able to “recollect”. However, the slave is not being asked to assess his moral opinions, which would require both moral education as a citizen and, as interlocutors such as Laches illustrate in the negative, some training in considering one’s own background from a distance—training which would not be afforded to a slave.

Continuing with my explanation of the negative presence of the idea in the set of impressions, in the case of a virtuous (i.e., self-reconciled) constitution, souls would have perceived things in the correct manner in the first place and internalized true opinions concerning virtue; that is to say, in an explicit and accurate idea of virtue, the individual might have a distinct impression of the glue that holds the entire set of impressions together. In that case of a perception of something or someone virtuous, the idea itself may very well already be in the soul in a positive way; and yet, the soul need not have known the idea prior to embodiment, since moral judgments do not (unlike judgements of likeness) begin at birth. In the ordinary case of a degraded constitution, however, the impressions one has received concerning virtue will be false (to varying degrees)—which is to say, retained perceptions will have been classified incorrectly right from the start of perception and understanding in childhood. If, however, these impressions (i.e., prejudices) have been rigorously considered, then the present perception may be recognized properly if there is a new sense of coherence among the confused impressions.<sup>797</sup> That is to say, analysis of given

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<sup>796</sup> See Blair Campbell (1984), “Thought and Political Action in Athenian Tradition: The Emergence of the ‘Alienated’ Intellectual,” *History of Political Thought*, 5: 17-60.

<sup>797</sup> The persistence of the idea as a regulative principle serves as the link between the form of virtue and the results of Socratic *elenchus*—a link which Gentzler, for one, finds unclear. See Jyl Gentzler (1994), “Recollection and The Problem of the Socratic Elenchus,” *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 10: 257-95.

opinions in order to expose their falsity leaves a sense of what is true about them (see above); what is then needed is the idea which encompasses all of the partial truths left over. This idea can be initially recognized within the soul as the intuitive feeling of coherence; and such recognition can be prompted by perception of an instance of true virtue, or, if moral knowledge were ever to exist, by the consideration of the proper definition of virtue.<sup>798</sup>

In addition to the conditions for knowledge discussed above—namely, the power of reason and its logical rules, and the encounter with a tradition of either knowledge or at least an orientation in thinking—three other conditions are required. First, the soul of the learner must be furnished with common sense derived from socialization, which, *depending on historical circumstances*, may (in the case of a virtuous constitution) positively contain the idea which is to serve as the basis for comparison with the perception, or may (in the case of a formerly virtuous constitution) contain the idea negatively. Second, the learner must have enough reflective distance in order to consider his content—a distance which is the result of a long historical process. Third, there must be a perception of an exemplar which prompts the deeper idea that is already in the soul either positively or negatively.

In regard to the latter, for some of the modern Athenians, Socrates was the exemplar whose mode of being prompted the sense of the idea of virtue within. Though many were apparently annoyed with what they interpreted as interrogations, many also recognized Socrates' virtue despite his inability to say what it was that he embodied. That is the reason why fathers, such as Lysimachus and Melesias, wanted Socrates to be their sons' educator. Though they wanted to follow the precept of imitating the virtue of one's fathers,<sup>799</sup> they

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<sup>798</sup> Scott explicitly says that Plato is not an intuitionist at all (*Recollection and Experience*, p. 262). I believe, however, that whether he is or not depends on the history behind those intuitions.

<sup>799</sup> Cf. *Menexenus*, 248e.

themselves did not possess enough virtue for their own sons to imitate.<sup>800</sup> They therefore needed a truer exemplar and found it only in Socrates' mode of being. For "the most effective way of training the young—as well as the older people themselves—is not by admonition, but by plainly practicing throughout one's own life the admonitions which one gives to others."<sup>801</sup> What is evident in the character of Socrates is the combination of intellectual power with the freedom to determine his own will according to higher values than those of his contemporaries—but ones which he believes, as we will see, to be essential to the 'young' and 'forgetful' Athenians. The followers of Socrates witness in his character an image of who they could also be, of a soul who is turned away from merely natural desire in favour of a divine purpose.<sup>802</sup> He thus awakens the sense of their own freedom potentially to do likewise—a sense which both inspires and infuriates some, such as Alcibiades.<sup>803</sup> As will be discussed in the section E., this sense of recognition of one's own possibility has to do with the history of the character of the Athenian soul.

But the question naturally arises how Socrates became virtuous in character despite his ignorance, and despite being raised in a corrupted *nomos*. The only answer that Socrates himself can come up with (though he does not say that he is speaking of himself specifically) is that, when virtue does appear, it comes by "divine dispensation" or fate

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<sup>800</sup> *Laches*, 179c; *Meno*, 94a-c.

<sup>801</sup> *Laws*, 729c.

<sup>802</sup> The notion of pleasure as the restoration of natural harmony in the *Philebus* (31d) may be applicable here. When one recognizes virtue through an exemplar, as Alcibiades does in Socrates, what he feels is the sense of virtue welling up inside of him; he recognizes the possibility for himself and desires to pursue it (temporarily) because it brings a sense of what he lacks, and therefore a sense of future pleasure. There is likely an immediate but slight sense of restoration and pleasure when one becomes aware of one's deficiency as such, since it is the first step towards restoration. As for the harmony of the soul being natural, recall that the virtuous autochthons of ancient times were planted by the gods.

<sup>803</sup> At *Symposium*, 215d, Alcibiades claims that the presence of Socrates transported one to a higher plane—that is, Socrates himself was *daimonic*, in the sense of being a power which mediated between the human and the divine. Simply stated, this means that the experience of being with Socrates had the power to at least make others aware of the existence of true virtue and desire some sort of union with this divinity.

[[[[[[]].<sup>804</sup> For such people [ . ] do, in fact, appear in all states—though not often.<sup>805</sup> This is therefore one way in which providence or divine fate [ . ] can, as Socrates says in the *Republic*, save the polity:<sup>806</sup> the embodiment of virtue affords others concrete opportunities for recognizing the virtue they have been inadequately taught and for testing the various inherited opinions against it. Moreover, it awakens their own desire for virtue, which is the first step towards acquiring it.

#### D. On the question of discontinuity with common sense

The interpretation that I have developing conflicts with Dominic Scott's position regarding Plato's brand of innatism in two intimately related ways. The first conflict follows from the ambiguous value of common sense as the condition of receptivity in the learner: Plato, I argue, does not have a "full-blown pessimism about common sense";<sup>807</sup> for whether or not philosophical learning is a "radical revision" of common sense, as Scott claims it is, depends on one's constitution. When Scott claims that "if the results of ordinary learning are so unreliable, there is little to be gained by giving an account of it," he is overlooking all of the ramifications of the link between psychological and political constitution.<sup>808</sup> The unreliability of ordinary learning is a contingent matter and may, in some circumstances, be rectified. While it is true that Plato spends little time on the epistemological details concerning ordinary thought and mundane concept acquisition,

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<sup>804</sup> *Meno*, 100b.

<sup>805</sup> *Laws*, 951b.

<sup>806</sup> *Republic*, 493a.

<sup>807</sup> Scott, *Recollection and Experience*, p. 52.

<sup>808</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

there is much more concern with the empirical side of his innatism and with the status of common sense than Scott acknowledges.

The second conflict with Scott's position concerns the notion of divine dispensation that has just been alluded to and what we are to make of it. Considering the importance of the appearance of the exemplar as a prompt for the recognition of ideas, the notion that virtue may appear by divine dispensation ought, at least, to be further examined. Scott claims that "Socrates gives us very few clues about what lies behind the notion of divine dispensation, and he explicitly warns Meno at the end of the provisional nature of their findings ([*Meno*,] 100b4-6)."<sup>809</sup> Scott then claims that we may ultimately dismiss the seriousness of Socrates' comment by arguing that the passage above is ironic. I will dispute Scott on this question of irony and provide some of the supposedly missing clues about the nature of divine dispensation.<sup>810</sup>

#### i) Scott's discontinuity thesis

To begin with the issue of whether philosophical knowledge requires a radical revision of common sense, we must consider Scott's "discontinuity thesis". He claims that there are two ways to interpret Plato's theory of recollection:

...in the first interpretation, philosophy is not seen as marking a radical transition from ordinary thought, but as the continued recollection of concepts that have, to some extent, already come to light in our pre-philosophical thinking. The second interpretation, on the other hand, involves a strict discontinuity between these two perspectives and presents Plato as the severe critic of common sense. The few who do start to recollect find that their perspective of the world, both metaphysical and moral, becomes utterly transformed. That Plato adopted this kind of approach to

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<sup>809</sup> Scott, *Recollection and Experience*, p. 52.

<sup>810</sup> Though Scott has more recently granted that the claim might not be ironic, he does not give any positive reasons to think that it is actually not ironic, which I will now do. See Dominic Scott (2006), *Plato's Meno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 192-193.

philosophy elsewhere, for instance in the central books of the *Republic*, is very often conceded. What is not appreciated is that he also took this line when he proposed the theory of recollection itself, especially in the *Phaedo*.<sup>811</sup>

Scott proceeds to defend the second interpretation by going back to the *Meno* along with the *Phaedo*. While I agree with much of his subtle analysis, and agree that the discontinuity thesis is evident throughout Plato's dialogues, I will be arguing that, in fact, both interpretations are appropriate, and that the correct interpretation depends on the historical situation of those doing the philosophizing. Scott claims that "recollection only enters the story when we have already reached the level of ordinary conceptual thought and start to become puzzled and dissatisfied with the perspective thus gained of the world."<sup>812</sup> I agree that the theory of recollection is primarily intended to account for the transition from ordinary thought to philosophical knowledge (as opposed to ordinary concept and language acquisition) and that it presupposes a different perspective. But the different perspective Scott means is one in which the fundamental assumptions about the nature of the good life are radically opposed to those of one's upbringing—that is, from the perspective of the body (i.e., the calculation of pleasures)<sup>813</sup> to that of pure mind (i.e., participation in the eternal through virtue). In a virtuous constitution, no such revision would be necessary, as what is intuitively known would already reflect the true idea of virtue. This point might be granted and taken to be irrelevant, since the true aristocracy has never come about (and the most ancient societies were not ripe for philosophy, since the condition of reflective distance was absent therein). Indeed, Scott pretty much admits this point by noting Plato's

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<sup>811</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8. Scott uses the fabled Damaratus tablet as metaphor for this second interpretation: there is a layer of wood which contains the true message (i.e., prior knowledge from our disembodied state), and a layer of wax on top which entirely obscures the wood (i.e., common sense). My claim in those terms is that the wood and the wax are actually related: the wood is not from prior to birth, and the wax is derivative, though it may even be a complete inversion of the truth (as in modern Athens). Hence common sense appears to be totally distinct, but it is not necessarily. There is, in fact, an account of how the wax came to be—that is, of the 'cultural accretions', as Scott calls it (e.g., p. 175).

<sup>812</sup> Scott, *Recollection and Experience*, p. 8.

<sup>813</sup> *Phaedo*, 68c.

more “optimistic” treatment of *demotic* or inferior virtue in the *Republic*, since the context is the ideal state.<sup>814</sup> Moreover, the *Meno* is not referring to this context, but the given, corrupted constitutions.

More significantly, then, if the common opinions are derivative of initially true opinion, and their falsity or confusedness is due to a decline in constitution (as there was in Athens), then the change in perspective that is required would not be a radical revision but a corrective retrieval of the truth obscured within common sense. That is, the opinions that one has from common sense need not be fully rejected in the process of attaining knowledge. Though it would not be quite accurate to call this a gradualist account, as Scott calls Aristotle’s, neither is Plato’s position simply a revisionist one. Whether Plato’s theory of learning is revisionist depends on how one’s given constitution was initially formed, and, if it was (divinely) established according to the idea of virtue, on the extent to which that idea is still effective.

Scott’s case for the discontinuity thesis is based on three main texts: the *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, and *Meno*. In all cases, his treatment is very detailed; and as I concur with him for the most part, I will not engage with those details. Very briefly, though, from the *Phaedo*, he shows that the perspective afforded by sense perception is deceiving and that the philosopher must therefore separate himself from his body as much as possible in order to attain truth;<sup>815</sup> moreover, this is closely linked to the claim that philosopher needs to purge himself of the popular conception of virtue before attaining real virtue<sup>816</sup>—the connection, of course, is that the perspective of “the many” is that which is centred around

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<sup>814</sup> Scott, *Recollection and Experience*, p. 52.

<sup>815</sup> Scott, *Recollection and Experience*, p. 72.

<sup>816</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51; cf. *Phaedo*, 60bff.

sensual pleasure.<sup>817</sup> Second, from the *Phaedrus*, he shows that the person who experiences recollection through philosophy feels it as an extraordinary state to the point of appearing mad;<sup>818</sup> and that to return to the forms, one must employ reasoning in order to ascend to the universal, whereas in ordinary thinking, there is no need for reasoning in order to move from the plurality of particulars to the singularity of the universal.<sup>819</sup> Thus, in both the *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*, there are good reasons to think that Plato conceived of philosophy as a radical departure from ordinary understanding.

It should be said that Scott does take note of what evidence there is for the first interpretation of Plato's theory of learning, both within the discussions of recollection and outside of them; furthermore, he admits that there is a tendency for Plato to move towards the first interpretation, especially in the later dialogues (e.g., *Theaetetus*), but that it would be anachronistic to read this tendency back into the earlier theory of recollection.<sup>820</sup>

My view is that, rather than attributing this ambivalence in Plato to a wavering in his position over the span of the dialogues, it is due to the fact that he needs both sides. In Scott's view, the *Meno* is a particularly ambiguous dialogue in this regard, and he detects in it only an embryonic form of the discontinuity thesis.<sup>821</sup> I want to focus on these ambiguities in order to highlight the reasons why both theses (i.e., continuity and discontinuity) are needed.

According to Scott, the *Meno* is, despite the demonstration with the slave, not actually "optimistic" with regard to the possibility of knowledge for the ordinary person;<sup>822</sup>

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<sup>817</sup> *Phaedo*, 68c.

<sup>818</sup> Scott, *Recollection and Experience*, p. 74.

<sup>819</sup> Scott, *Recollection and Experience*, pp. 77-9.

<sup>820</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84. With respect to the term 'recollection', Scott is correct here. To repeat, my view does not depend on any re-interpretation of recollection.

<sup>821</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>822</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

for there is actually no such thing as partially genuine virtue, which would be the best the pre-philosophical world has to offer. Knowledge proper, and hence genuine virtue, demands an “utterly different perspective”—and only very few are enticed to take up this transformation.<sup>823</sup> Scott writes:

By the end of the dialogue, Socrates concludes that there are two kinds of virtue: one is knowledge, which comes by teaching, the other is an inferior kind of virtue that is based upon mere true belief and that comes by ‘divine dispensation’. On my interpretation, knowledge here is to be taken as philosophical understanding arrived at by a laborious process of recollection and prompted by questioning by a ‘teacher’ in the form of a Socratic questioner. The whole process essentially involves thinking for oneself. As for the true beliefs mentioned in the conclusion, the only good thing about them is that they are true. Otherwise they are disparaged as the product of learning by hearsay or tradition, ironically referred to as ‘divine dispensation’. True belief is marked by an absence of reflection and an unwillingness or even inability to think for oneself. Precisely because it is instilled by an external source, hearsay, its development is entirely independent of recollection. There are thus two quite independent sources, one for knowledge, the other for true opinion.<sup>824</sup>

There is an incisive objection here which Scott addresses. It is that the slave attains true opinion on the way to knowledge; it therefore appears that true opinion is indeed a necessary condition for knowledge. That is, true opinion is far from being an independent source of virtue in this case. Scott’s response to the objection is to distinguish two kinds of true opinion: that which is arrived at within the process of recollection and that which is derived from hearsay and tradition.<sup>825</sup> True opinion that is on the way to knowledge, as in the recollecting slave, does qualify as a kind of partial knowledge or partial virtue; for the “tethering” of the true opinion is only a gradual solidification of the now-possessioned opinion through continued questioning.<sup>826</sup> Yet the second kind of true opinion is disparaged altogether as being a result of “divine dispensation”—an expression Scott takes to be ironic. I disagree that this notion is employed ironically and that Scott’s distinction between two

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<sup>823</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>824</sup> Scott, *Recollection and Experience.*, pp. 38-9.

<sup>825</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42-3.

<sup>826</sup> *Meno*, 85c-d; cf. 98a.

kinds of true opinion holds. Without such a distinction, the discontinuity thesis is strongly weakened; hence it can be shown how philosophical learning may be continuous with common sense.

ii) On the distinction between two kinds of true opinion and the meaning of “divine dispensation”

In support of the claim that the attribution of “divine dispensation” is ironic, Scott makes three main points, each of which I will respond to. First, Scott claims that

the people to whom this ‘virtue’ is dispensed include Themistocles and Pericles and, since we know from *Gorgias* 515c4ff. that such people never ranked very high in Plato’s estimation, the attribution of divine dispensation to them in the *Meno* is likely to be tongue-in-cheek. The main purpose behind Socrates’ irony seems to be to stress—at several points—that those with mere true belief have no knowledge or understanding of what they are saying. [99c3-5; cf. 99e6-100a1] They hit upon the truth only in spite of themselves.<sup>827</sup>

I agree that those with mere true opinion have no genuine knowledge or understanding of what they are saying. Hence, relative to those with genuine knowledge, their moral-epistemic status is inferior. Yet relative to those who are simply ruled by their appetites, they are superior. Moreover, it is true that Themistocles and Pericles are not regarded very highly in the *Gorgias* passage cited. However, Socrates’ critique there is based on their effects on others: not only did they not make other men better, but perhaps even worse. This makes these men *bad statesman*, though—and not necessarily lacking in virtue altogether. That good men must change others into better men is only a description of good statesman, not of virtue as such. Socrates’ conclusion states this quite clearly: “Then Pericles was not a good statesman, by this argument.”<sup>828</sup> Pericles could indeed have been

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<sup>827</sup> Scott, *Recollection and Experience*, p. 43.

<sup>828</sup> *Gorgias*, 516d; cf. 516e-7a.

partially virtuous, but, lacking proper self-understanding, was unable to impart his virtue to others. That is to say, he was not a philosophical statesman (as discussed in Chapter 7).

Yet his character would not need to be entirely transformed in order to become genuinely virtuous: what would be needed, rather, is to maintain that goodness throughout the process of reflection on himself. This is not so different than the questioning from various angles that the slave would have to go through to move from true opinion to genuine knowledge.

Scott then adduces the following evidence in support of his claim that the end of the *Meno* (where Socrates says that the existent forms of virtue must come from divine dispensation) is “heavily laced with irony”:

In his conversation with Anytus, Socrates, with obvious irony, calls him a prophet for claiming to know that the sophists are not teachers of virtue without ever having encountered one. The Greek word Socrates uses for ‘prophet’ at 92c6 is *mantis*, and, when talking of the recipients of divine dispensation a little later on, he uses, among other terms, the Greek word *theo-mantis* (99c3). Furthermore, after Socrates has attributed ‘divine dispensation’ to the great men of Athens, Meno remarks that Anytus would take umbrage (99e2). This suggests that Meno, at least, is taking Socrates’ remarks ironically.<sup>829</sup>

To begin, the significance of Meno’s comment itself is ambiguous: it is possible that Meno takes Socrates ironically without Socrates actually intending it that way. More importantly, though, it is also possible that Meno knows that Anytus has no respect for such notions as divine dispensation. As for Scott’s main point here, however, the comparison of recipients of divine dispensation to seers or prophets is not necessarily a denigration. While it is true that they possess an inferior kind of “knowledge”, this does not mean that they do not still speak the truth. As Scott himself notes, Anytus is quite right about the sophists.<sup>830</sup>

Whatever the source may be, the truth ought to be listened to. The oracle at Delphi, to take the most pertinent example, is a source of truth which Socrates trusts and takes very

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<sup>829</sup> Scott, *Recollection and Experience*, p. 43.

<sup>830</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

seriously. In the *Apology*, we also see the claim that prophets and oracles may “say many fine things, but know none of the things they say.”<sup>831</sup> Nevertheless, these fine things still contain truth, and this is not to be dismissed. After all, at his trial, Plato has Socrates say: “For of my wisdom—if it is wisdom at all—and of its nature, I will offer you the god at Delphi as a witness.”<sup>832</sup> Beyond merely calling up the god as a witness, though, he clearly makes the pronouncement a kind of orientation for his life: “After this then I went on from one to another, perceiving that I was hated, and grieving and fearing, but nevertheless I thought I must consider the god’s business of the highest importance. So I had to go, investigating the meaning of the oracle, to all those who were reputed to know anything.”<sup>833</sup> If it be objected that Socrates is being ironic here too, then one must go so far as to believe that Socrates is lying while saying the following: “There you have the truth, men of Athens, and I speak without hiding anything from you, great or small or prevaricating. And yet I know pretty well that I am making myself hated by just that conduct; which is also a proof that I am speaking the truth and that this is the prejudice against me and these are its causes.”<sup>834</sup>

The similarity between divine dispensation and prophecy is not, by itself, reason enough to set aside as a worthy source of true opinion.

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<sup>831</sup> *Apology*, 22c.

<sup>832</sup> *Ibid.*, 20e.

<sup>833</sup> *Apology.*, 21e.

<sup>834</sup> *Ibid.*, 24a. In his book, *Platonic Piety*, Michael L. Morgan says flat out that “[w]hehter Socrates did revere the gods of Athens—Athena Polias, Zeus Meilichios, Apollo, Demeter, Dionysos, Artemis, and so on—is, I think, beyond serious question.” Morgan, Michael L. *Platonic Piety* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 9. In the first chapter, entitled, “Socratic Piety as Plato Saw It,” Morgan provides a much more nuanced account of Socrates’ form of piety, especially as it is reported in the *Apology*. His claim is that Socrates partially adopted the Thracian ecstatic rites—which centred around the immortality of the soul—but revised them in order to render them more rational. Morgan agrees that (Plato’s) Socrates maintained a Delphic affiliation, though he was also radical in believing that the gap between the human and the divine could be bridged to some extent through rational inquiry.

In a similar vein, Scott takes Socrates' comment that those who are "virtuous" by divine dispensation are like those who "know" things by hearsay only, such as the person who can give directions to Larissa without ever having been there.<sup>835</sup> Scott writes:

The analogy of divine inspiration is in fact a very apt way to denigrate those who rely on hearsay. Such people hold their beliefs by proxy much like a prophet or a medium who is taken over by another force. Both groups are allowing someone else to speak through them. ...Anytus has never actually encountered the sophists and is relying on hearsay which prevents him from knowing anything about the sophists. So here we have a true belief based on hearsay being called the result of divine dispensation.<sup>836</sup>

Once again, while it is certainly preferable to have self-possession (as exemplified by Socrates to an extreme), being possessed is not necessarily a denigration. We must keep in mind that *Eros* is a kind of spirit which possesses certain souls and raises them up towards the divine.<sup>837</sup> Hence, the right kind of love is considered a form of madness (as Scott himself had already noted). Socrates describes the philosophical lover in the *Phaedrus* as follows: "Standing aside from the busy doings of mankind, and drawing nigh to the divine, he is rebuked by the multitude as being out of his wits, for they know not that he is possessed by a deity."<sup>838</sup> Being "taken over by another force", being possessed, and speaking as a kind of mouthpiece may, in fact, be a good thing, if the force guides one in the right direction or brings about some good (as in the case of some oracles). All in all, to compare divine dispensation to prophecy is clearly not a simple denigration, and perhaps not even a denigration at all. Perhaps there is even some gratitude and piety in those words of Socrates at the end of the *Meno*—whether Meno or Anytus share those sentiments or not.

The third point of Scott's that I take issue with concerns the claim that true opinion derived from divine dispensation cannot be taught or defended. In reference to the analogy

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<sup>835</sup> Scott, *Recollection and Experience*, p. 46.

<sup>836</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46-7.

<sup>837</sup> *Symposium*, 195e; 202e-3a.

<sup>838</sup> *Phaedrus*, 249c-d.

that knowledge is to true opinion as giving instructions to Larissa while having been there is to giving instruction without having been there, Scott writes the following:

...If one implication of the analogy is that true belief comes by hearsay, 'divine dispensation' ought therefore to embrace in its meaning the notion that those under its spell live on borrowed opinions, which might explain why they can neither teach nor defend what they believe. So now the conclusion of the dialogue is that knowledge and those true beliefs acquired *en route* to knowledge are opposed to another type of true belief, which is formed by hearsay. It is only the latter that we find in evidence at Athens, if at all.<sup>839</sup>

The problem with this point is that those who, like the slave, attain true beliefs *en route* to knowledge cannot, at that point of mere true opinion, teach or defend what they believe either. For that, they need the further reasoning that brings them to understand their own belief. Likewise, those who have true opinion from hearsay and tradition, even though he did not arrive at the truth through their own faculties alone, may, with the right kind of education, come to understand what they already believe; that is to say, they may come to know the reasons why the belief is true.

When Scott says, regarding true beliefs whose source is divine dispensation, that "the only good thing about them is that they're true,"<sup>840</sup> that is actually saying a lot. While this state of belief is problematic inasmuch as it is unstable and lacking self-understanding, the truth itself cannot be overlooked, and certainly does not need to be rejected outright in order to return to the same truth through philosophical knowledge. As argued above, the partial truth that is inherited in common opinion is not to be discarded, but rather maintained while the real principle is sought (i.e., the idea), which can then account for the various partial truths. As a starting point for philosophical investigation, then, it is false to

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<sup>839</sup> Scott, *Recollection and Experience*, p. 46.

<sup>840</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

conclude with Scott that “[p]recisely because it is instilled by an external source, hearsay, its development is entirely independent of recollection.”<sup>841</sup>

That tradition contains some truth is a point to be taken seriously, especially since it conflicts with the discontinuity thesis. For if there is some truth in it, a radical revision of common sense would a) only apply in cases of relatively extreme degradation of the constitution; and b) would, in cases where there has been a decline from a virtuous ancient constitution, be more of a revival rather than a revision.

In the end, the problem with the notion of divine dispensation is, as Scott says, its lack of clarity. Scott claims that, at least in the *Meno*, “Socrates gives us very few clues about what lies behind the notion of divine dispensation.”<sup>842</sup> The fact is, however, there are clues elsewhere in the Platonic corpus about what lies behind it. Most notably, there is the claim, which was central in Chapter 3, §C.ii, that divine dispensation [*theou moira*] refers to the immediate, non-reflective kind of temperance, which was characteristic of all of ancient Atlantis—as a polity and of its citizens:<sup>843</sup> it is given by a god either directly, through the governance of *daimones*, or indirectly through an inspired lawgiver. While the nature of this bestowal or revelation will indeed remain mysterious to us, the dispensation was the cause of an entire polity’s initial well-being and power. This shows that, regardless of its mysteriousness, it can have great consequences which must be reckoned with. We are also told that the decline of constitutions is attributed to a fading of this divine dispensation; as was shown in Chapter 3, §C.ii, this meant, again, a decline in temperance as the psychological and political norm.

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<sup>841</sup> Scott, *Recollection and Experience*, p. 39.

<sup>842</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>843</sup> *Critias*, 121b.

Another clue, which has not yet been discussed, comes at *Phaedo* 83d, where we are told that one whose beliefs about pleasure are bound to the body can have no part in the communion with the gods. The term here for having no part in the communion with the gods is *amoiros theou*, which is a negation of the adjectival cognate of the noun, *theou moira*. The *amoiroi theou* are, again, the intemperate. In sum, then, those who were temperate by virtue of being socialized into a temperate constitution did have a share in the *theou moira*; the decayed constitutions—both political and psychological—are a result in the loss of this *theou moira*; and the condition outside of this share—*amoiros theou*—is governance by the body—i.e., intemperance. Hence, when the decline in constitution was reduced in Chapter 3, §C.i to a departure from temperance, it can be also be described as a gradual fading of the divine dispensation. This is to say, philosophy has to make up for precisely what has been lost of the divine dispensation. The latter, therefore, is far from independent of philosophical activity: positively speaking, it is the background which makes it possible to begin the process of recognition through philosophy insofar as it provides starting points that have an intuitive basis;<sup>844</sup> negatively speaking, it is the scarcity of divine dispensation that makes philosophical inquiry necessary.

The significance of tradition in this regard is that it can act as a carrier or medium for truth over time even when individuals do not understand that truth, or even the fact that they are carriers. Unbeknownst to the individuals who hold true opinions without having genuine knowledge, they serve as one of the conditions for others to come to knowledge proper. That is, the divine dispensation of virtue is spread (and gradually lost) through unknowing individuals. Yet insofar as individuals have internalized the opinions of their

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<sup>844</sup> Scott himself points out how crucial the starting points are, but doesn't proceed to inquire into the contingencies of this starting point (*Recollection and Experience*, p. 29).

culture and externalized them once again (and thus perpetuate the culture), they transmit the material into other souls who then have the capacity to come to know it through philosophy.

iii) Tradition and correction

Before trying to explicate the notion of prior knowledge as it is presented in the myths of the *Phaedrus* and *Meno*, here is a summation of the position arrived at thus far. Given the receptive power of the soul, it takes in its first impressions from internalization and education. If these impressions are formed according to an accurate conception of virtue, then there will be little or no need for revision: civic virtue would suffice for most people. But if the divine dispensation has been largely lost, then these first impressions will be confused and not clearly coherent. Nevertheless, since as a set of beliefs, they are initially derived from a coherent set centred around the idea of virtue, that set of impressions still retains a trace of the idea, albeit negatively. Hence, the perception of the exemplar of virtue triggers in the soul a sense of recognition and coherence with scattered elements of common sense, but not a direct overlapping of perception and impression in the “wax” of the soul. The perception falls in between, as it were. The prior knowledge that is required for recognition of truth is thus intuitive and, most often, distorted or corrupted.

The reality of the idea in the world—i.e., its existence insofar as it can be perceived—lies in its regulative function within the polity. Hence, the idea cannot give rise to a particular impression unless it has been discovered through philosophy and presented to others. Rather, once it has been internalized in the soul through the set of impressions and opinions, of which it is the basis, the idea is duplicated as the regulative principle within the

mind, since the whole way of life has been internalized as system of beliefs. That is to say, the idea of virtue now underlies the system of beliefs and opinions one has, despite the confusedness of that system due to corruption. This is why analysis of the lifeworld, especially the Cretan and Spartan, which are much less corrupted and confused, serves to discover the idea within. So given the five conditions set out above—i.e., the logical powers of understanding, the reflective distance from the given world, the guidance of an initiated questioner, the content of common sense, and the perception (or imagination) of an exemplar—there can be a discovery of the idea internally; this also constitutes an explication of the original idea at the founding of the constitution. In other words, the idea becomes known explicitly as idea once again after a period of implicit efficacy in the *nomos* and *ethos* of the polity and the system of opinions in the soul.

Since the history that determines our given norms is greater than what we consciously conceive, there may be true opinions present in the bonds of social life that we can come to recognize, despite our being oblivious to them. Since they are part of that woven fabric that brings order and comprehensibility to our world, they will resonate with us and make sense to us if we come upon them in conscious experience. Given a virtuous origin (and this is a crucial qualification), true opinion is always inherited and lies dormant within each of our souls, however shrouded by a history of decay and distortion it may be. What may occur, then, is a recognition of something that has been forgotten but still persists unconsciously. When one continually reflects on the purpose of all practices or institutions that exist in the polity (e.g., the gymnasium, pederasty); when one assesses the partially true opinions (which have been shown to be inadequate taken individually); and when one reconsiders the poetry that has remained or become popular, the common factor

that may be apprehended is the regulative idea of virtue which was the source of all these phenomena.<sup>845</sup>

This is exactly what the interlocutors in the *Laws* begin to do with respect to Spartan and Cretan laws, beginning with the practice of common meals.<sup>846</sup> For “the most efficacious lessons in making the learner a better man” are the studies of good and noble legal systems (along with the writings and speeches of the lawgiver, if available).<sup>847</sup> The Spartan and Cretan quite quickly recognize that all their practices are aimed at success in war by means of the virtue of *andreia*, and that this must have been the intention of the original lawgivers.<sup>848</sup> It should also be noted again that in following the path to the cave at Ida, they are mimicking Minos’ revelatory education through philosophical investigation.<sup>849</sup>

In the case of Sparta and Crete, which do have good and noble constitutions, the original insight still only aimed at a part of virtue and not the whole. This is why Athens is so important for the Greeks (who are supposedly alone in being interested in goods higher than mere existence and safety):<sup>850</sup> its founding virtue is wisdom, through which all other virtues are unified. Indeed, by the end of the *Laws*, there is a discussion of the unity of virtue and a re-iteration of the arguments from the *Laches* and *Protagoras* against *andreia*

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<sup>845</sup> Notice that recollection is also described as the comprehension of many perceptions into a unity through reasoning (*Phaedrus*, 249b). There is only one other discussion of recollection in Plato which seems quite different than the conception here; however, it is still compatible with my historicized version of philosophical learning. Recollection in the individual mind is defined in the *Philebus* as the soul recalling experience apart from its occurrence in the body (34b). In the historical sense, then, the soul which ‘recollects’ is indeed separate from the bodies whose experience it comes to recognize once again (e.g., the ancient Athenians’); individually speaking, the ‘recollecting’ souls and the original souls are also distinct, but collectively speaking they are members of a continuous entity.

<sup>846</sup> *Laws*, 624b.

<sup>847</sup> *Ibid.*, 957c-d. Cf. 811d; 858c.

<sup>848</sup> *Laws*, 635a. Cf. 802c.

<sup>849</sup> Though it pertains only to the role of the lawgiver as name-giver in this context, the following passage from the *Cratylus* is pertinent: “And who can best superintend the work of the lawgiver and judge of it when it is finished, both here and in foreign countries? The user, is it not? ...And is not this he who knows how to ask questions?... And the same one knows also how to make replies? ... And the man who knows how to ask and answer questions you call a dialectician.” (390c) The lawgiver thus stands on one side of the tradition and the philosopher on the other side, each of them holding the idea of virtue explicitly.

<sup>850</sup> *Laws*, 707d.

without wisdom.<sup>851</sup> In other words, the Spartan and Cretan constitutions are useful in leading one to the idea of virtue because their constitutions are closer to the aristocracy; but they require correction in order to hit upon the unified idea of virtue.<sup>852</sup>

#### E. Historicized interpretation of prior knowledge

To recall, the theory of recollection depends on the postulate of knowledge prior to embodiment. The reality of this state is only described through the *Phaedrus* myth of riding with the chariots of the gods in contemplation of the forms (246a-e), and the *Meno* claim, which has yet to be treated, that the soul has gained its prior knowledge through past reincarnations. Since the notion that we have had knowledge prior to birth is necessary to account for how knowledge is possible, and hence how salvation of the soul and polity is possible, what I would like to do here is offer a rational explanation of it—one that does not depend on literal belief in the stories recounted by Socrates. Again, I do not want to deny the possibility that there may be some mysterious truth to the myths, or that Plato or Socrates may have believed in them. Indeed Socrates knows that the *Phaedrus* story will not be believed by clever people,<sup>853</sup> and admits that he cannot affirm the truth of

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<sup>851</sup> *Ibid.*, 961c-8b.

<sup>852</sup> Morrow makes the same point: "...[O]bviously the Athenian Stranger does not think that Athens has ceased to be a leader and a teacher of the Greeks. He guides the inquiry carried on in the *Laws* and he alone formulates the legislation set forth. He finds in the ancestral constitution of Athens an example of the moderation which he regards as essential to a healthy state.... There must be a return to the vigor and simplicity of the Dorian way if any lasting improvement is to be made in the life of the Greek city—that Plato certainly believes. But some of this simplicity is also evident in the institutions of early Athens; and in any case the Dorian ways, if they are to serve the highest purpose, must take on some of the grace and intelligence manifested in the later developments of Ionian life. It is to Athens that Plato apparently looks to provide this necessary supplement." (*Plato's Cretan City*, pp. 91-2)

<sup>853</sup> *Phaedrus*, 245c.

reincarnation with confidence.<sup>854</sup> While Socrates does claim that both ought to be believed, I will, rather, try to make the idea of prior knowledge plausible to us “clever men”.

i) The notion of “following the gods” in the *Phaedrus*

The basic story of the famous *Phaedrus* myth is that, as pure souls, we once rode with the gods in the circuit of the heavens, viewing “the real realities” [ἄλλοις ἰσθῆ].<sup>855</sup> But, through some mischance, the unruly horse of evil nature weighs our souls down.<sup>856</sup> If the soul has been fortunate enough to have seen the Forms, then it will fall into a human body; this is the condition for the soul’s embodiment as a human.<sup>857</sup> In those few in whom the memory of this vision is strongest, the sight of beauty in the world triggers a sense of recollection of the form of beauty and an indistinct though powerful longing to see the rest of the Forms again. Through the perception of beauty in the world and by the guidance of a philosophical lover, we may purify our souls once again in order to perceive the forms themselves—our souls may “grow wings” again so as to be lifted up to pure contemplation.<sup>858</sup>

The point that I want to focus on is that fact that, during this supposed journey with the gods, each of us followed and danced in a chorus behind a particular god;<sup>859</sup> and as lovers, we are attracted to others who followed that same god.

The followers...of each of the gods go out and seek for their beloved a youth whose nature accords with that of the god, and when they have gained his affection, by imitating the god themselves and by persuasion and

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<sup>854</sup> *Meno*, 86b.

<sup>855</sup> *Phaedrus*, 247e.

<sup>856</sup> *Ibid.*, 248c; 247b.

<sup>857</sup> *Ibid.*, 249b,e.

<sup>858</sup> *Ibid.*, 250d-2c.

<sup>859</sup> *Ibid.*, 246e-7a; 252c-3b.

education they lead to beloved to the conduct and nature of the god, so far as each of them can do so; they exhibit no jealousy or meanness toward the loved one, but endeavour by every means in their power to lead him to the likeness of the god whom they honour.<sup>860</sup>

One may understand this by simply saying that we are attracted to a soul of similar character and, due to the lover's prior experience, he can raise the beloved up into that character as he ought to be; he helps the beloved "realize his potential," as we say. In Platonic language, the lover helps the beloved "become like the god". "The god", then, is the ideal essence within a soul which may or may not be actualized. Association with a particular god is equivalent to possessing an essential type of character, where the perfection of that character is represented by the god. That is, the particularities of the gods and their followers represent the apotheosis of particular conceptions of virtue and the approximations of these various ideals in actual human life.

Why is it, then, that individual souls have the character they do? Admittedly, there is no reason to discount with certainty the possibility that, for Plato, there simply are different kinds of people and that their existence is due purely to chance. But this seems unlikely, as nothing is really due to chance in Plato.<sup>861</sup> The other options, then, are that character is determined by family genealogy, or that character is determined by education. The first of these options collapses, though, once we note the *Theaetetus* comment that there is simply too much mixing for any pure type to exist now. Those who claim to be purely descended from a god are, according to Socrates, silly and vain, since they must have had thousands of ancestors, including "the rich and the poor, kings and slaves, barbarians and Greeks."<sup>862</sup> If people are indeed similar to particular gods, and not just complete mixtures (which would be the case if character were determined primarily by

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<sup>860</sup> *Ibid.*, 253b-c.

<sup>861</sup> See *Laws* X.

<sup>862</sup> *Theaetetus*, 175a.

genealogy), then this specificity of character formation must be due to the education one receives, and thus the constitution one is born into.

To connect this back with the notion of following particular gods, we have seen that the gods participated in the origin of at least certain polities (e.g., Poseidon in Atlantis; Athena in Athens). Taken literally, the god makes a people in his or her image through the founding of a constitution. Taken figuratively, the human founder of the polity bases the establishment on a particular conception of virtue that is symbolized by the deity. Either way, the establishment of a way of life is the worldly imprint of an aspect of the idea of virtue as a kind of character which is the goal and principle of the system of laws. Thus we noted that being the “children of Athena” meant that those in the polity had the same character as her: and this was due to having internalized the constitution based on her character (or actually legislated by her, if we believe that).<sup>863</sup> Likewise, those who “follow” Athena are those with the intellectual propensity—such as the Athenians, of whose constitution the idea of virtue as wisdom is regulative. The contingency of character that is attributed to having the same character as certain gods in the *Phaedrus* is a contingency that is based on the culture that one has internalized. In following the god, we supposedly retain the same character (or an approximation of it) though we become oblivious of the Forms themselves; while the same basic character (e.g., the intellectual proclivity of the Athenians) is retained over many generations while the citizens are oblivious to the idea which animates their form of life. The crucial point here is that it is the character itself which subsists through time.

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<sup>863</sup> Socrates’ address to the Athenian laws as his parents in the *Crito* reflects this point as well (*Crito*, 50e) Cf. Sandrine Berges (2007), *op. cit.*

By combining the *Phaedrus* myth with the notion of divine political establishment, it becomes apparent that, in particular polities or peoples, a single kind of character is manifested in the world, is extended into time, and interacts with others. It is the character itself that has a history—e.g., ‘the Athenian soul’ in an abstract sense.

I can foresee three likely objections. The first is that the character of the Athenians is diverse; one will find “followers” of all sorts of gods within Athens itself—not just of Athena. Yet, as was discussed in Chapter 3, §C.iii and Chapter 6, §C, Athens as a whole is the “sanctuary of wisdom” and has had an intellectual proclivity since its inception. The fact that its character is diverse is due to the fact that its constitution has declined into democracy. In polities such as Crete and Sparta, there is no such diversity of character since there has not been much of a decline. The further away from the original virtue the constitution is, the more scant its essential character is, as the presence of the divine dispensation has faded and been scattered. To this point might be added the fact that the further along in history one is, the more mixed one’s ancestry is—at least in a polity which is not strict in this regards.

Furthermore, considering the context of a lover choosing a like character for his beloved, it should be noted that, though Socrates may have had his favourites, he did not dedicate himself to a single individual as his beloved. Rather, he philosophized with nearly anyone he could in Athens. That is to say, his real beloved is Athens as a whole, whose fundamental character he wants to restore and re-actualize—a character which lies deeper than the superficial differences that have emerged due to constitutional decay and mixed genealogy.

From what I have been arguing, it should follow that there is an isomorphic relationship between local deity worship and the character of people. The hierarchical

worship of local deities ought to signify the hierarchy of values particular to that culture; the worship could be understood as a definition of the common character of that culture and a pronouncement of the intention to maintain that character. More simply, a polity which has been founded by a particular god should have the same character as its ideal, which is to say, as its regulative idea. The objection arises, then, that Cretans should be Zeus-like, since Minos was both a son of Zeus and directly educated by Zeus in the cave at Ida. However, as a militaristic, timarchic constitution, it does not seem that “Zeus-like” would be the correct idealization of the Cretan character. We would perhaps expect Ares to be the god whom the Cretans follow. However, the Cretans did actually worship Zeus above all, and depicted him as a youth with long hair, who, along with the *kouretes* (i.e., ecstatic armed dancers), “presided over the rigorous military-training and secret rites of the Cretan *paideia*.”<sup>864</sup> Thus, in Crete, Zeus is in fact a militaristic-athletic-timarchic god.<sup>865</sup>

A final objection follows from this second one. We are told in the *Phaedrus* that the philosophical lover will choose a follower of Zeus as his beloved, since their shared character is “philosophical and lordly” [cccccccc].<sup>866</sup> Does this mean that the philosophical lover prefers the Spartan-Cretan type of character? If so, is Socrates wrong to choose Athens or Athenians as his beloved? I believe that Plato’s eventual answer to both questions was yes. Plato did not follow Socrates’ strict adherence to remaining within Athens and conversing with the Athenians. The problem with Athena-followers is that their intelligence is too strategic; that is, the strategizing kind of wisdom is too close to

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<sup>864</sup> See Robin Hard and Herbert Jennings Rose, *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology*, (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 75.

<sup>865</sup> Ares, it should be noted, was worshiped in Sparta and Sparta alone—specifically, in preparation for war. It should also be noted that Athena is also a military goddess, but she is associated with strategy rather than brute force, as Ares is. Worship of Athena is thus befitting of the Athenians and their reliance on intelligence rather than ferocity and discipline.

<sup>866</sup> *Phaedrus*, 252e.

sophism. By the end of Plato's life, he was writing in the *Laws* of an Athenian stranger (not Socrates) who now educates the Spartan and Cretan in order to bring out their proper nature and who intends to use Cretan emigrants to populate Magnesia. That is, the Cretan soul is the proper kind of soil in which to plant the seed of virtue through the set of laws. But in Book I of the *Laws*, the Athenian shows that, as they stand, their constitutions are not actually as representative of Zeus' virtue as they ought to be. They have fallen short of the ideal insofar as they lack a kind of intelligence (due to lack of abstract thinking) and need rectification of this. This is to say, it is the Spartan-Cretan character that is to be fully actualized through philosophical education.

In this historicized interpretation of at least part of the *Phaedrus* myth, it is a type of character itself, summarized and idealized as a god, that first appears in the world through the establishment of a political constitution, which, through education, becomes internalized as psychological character which persists over time. The history of that constitution is the history of how that character fares in the world. The "children" or "followers" of Poseidon fall to those of Athena, for example; thus the affairs of the gods take place in and through human civilization.

## ii) Reincarnation and the accumulation of knowledge in the *Meno*

With this notion of an essential character of a collective entity (i.e., a people or polity), the historical interpretation can make sense of the accumulation of experience and knowledge spoken of in the *Meno* through reincarnation. Socrates claims that he has heard from the priests and priestesses, along with Pindar, that, "seeing that the soul is immortal and has been born many times, and has beheld all things both in this world and in the nether

realms, she has acquired knowledge of all and everything; so that it is no wonder that she should be able to recollect all that she knew before about virtue and other things.”<sup>867</sup> It is important to note immediately that the soul has acquired and accumulated knowledge in past lives, and that this cumulative acquisition makes later recognition possible. Scott takes this passage to be metaphorical, but does not say much about what the literal meaning could be.<sup>868</sup> The interpretation that I offer is that the individual soul acquires the knowledge needed for subsequent recognition through ordinary education; since that education is an internalization of the common opinions, concepts, and values of the polity, then the individual soul internalizes the common sense at the particular time of its embodiment (or upbringing). Yet that common sense is a result of the polity’s past—its cycles of externalizations and internalizations. Given the fact that the constitution undergoes changes and that new ideas are at least met with and incorporated into common understanding in some way, it follows that the collective entity—i.e., the common character, the polity, the soul of the people—is the entity which accumulates the experience that is necessary for subsequent recognition in the individual soul.<sup>869</sup> Thus, it is not literally the individual soul which has seen all things in past lives; it nevertheless inherits this experience as its basis for later learning as a kind of recognition of what is latently within.

The individual soul externalizes its experience insofar as it participates in discourse and its actions have effects on others. This contribution to linguistic, epistemic (doxastic) and ethical norms is, in effect, a way in which one’s experience is made to last beyond the individual’s lifetime. The continuity of common sense over generations is thus a kind of place or repository of memory, the material in which individuals imprint their

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<sup>867</sup> *Meno*, 81c.

<sup>868</sup> Scott, *Recollection and Experience*, p. 34.

<sup>869</sup> For a fuller discussion of this idea of the accumulation of collective experience, see Ortega y Gasset, “History as a System,” in *Toward a Philosophy of History*, *op. cit.*

characters and their acquired knowledge. Of course, the individual's particular experiences are not usually remembered in the future as such; this intersubjective medium digests and incorporates the externalizations of individuals. That is to say, there is no isomorphic relationship between what gets externalized by individuals and what gets internalized by future individuals. The medium of common sense depersonalizes the externalizations before they become re-personalized, so to speak.

If we do take re-incarnation literally, then, given the claim that those who have practiced social and civic virtue (i.e., *sophrosune* and *andreia* without philosophy) can become humans again,<sup>870</sup> it seems that the individual soul may accumulate knowledge with each successive rebirth despite losing all memory of former lives. That is, it inherits the depersonalized collective memory upon reincarnation into a polity. Common sense is thus a medium for the communication of past to future souls—and perhaps even the past and future of the same soul (if it happens to be reborn into the same polity).<sup>871</sup> But if we do not take reincarnation literally, the collective soul is still the entity which accumulates experience and absorbs it into its customs, its opinions, its ranking of values, its language, and perhaps its constitution.<sup>872</sup>

That the Athenian character or identity is understood as a whole and has a single history is evident in the *Timaeus*, where it is supposed by the Egyptian priest who tells

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<sup>870</sup> *Phaedo*, 82b.

<sup>871</sup> To my knowledge, Plato says nothing about which particular polity one gets reincarnated into. He speaks only of particular vocations (*Phaedrus*, 248d-e.).

<sup>872</sup> Departing from the Platonic corpus, it is quite easy to demonstrate that the collective experience of the past determines our present as individuals. For example, becoming a Christian in Western countries today must be a different experience than in has been in other places and times. For one cannot simply ignore the weight of our inherited post-Enlightenment opinions and prejudices which deem all religion to be nothing but superstition, or the hypocrisy of the Catholic Church's earthly power, etc. In the earliest Christian communities, these could not have been obstacles to conversion as they are to any ordinarily educated person today. It is in this sense that souls cannot help but be deposits of accumulated opinions which are already present before we are, and which we must employ in our ordinary thinking prior to the independent use of reason.

Solon that the Greeks are young in comparison to the Egyptians: the Greeks are unaware of their past, and therefore in a state of relative youth.<sup>873</sup> The common knowledge, or common memory, of the modern Athenians does not extend back very far, and this makes them young; for identity depends on the extent of memory.<sup>874</sup>

But, despite crude opinions (such as the one represented by the *Menexenus*) that Athens has always been democratic, it has actually changed over the course of its long history, though its citizens may not be aware of their own past. Though modern Athens may be young on the level of consciousness, it may be much older on a subconscious level. In publicizing the story of ancient Athens related by the Egyptian priests, Solon's intention must have been to extend the Athenians' memory back in order for them to mature, which is to say, to realize what their origin is and to retrieve it. Since the memory of the past persists unconsciously, the conscious learning of the story would resonate with that something else deep within the soul, and constitute a sort of recollection of something once known but forgotten.

While the notion of accumulation of collective experience seems straightforward, my application of it to the theory of recollection might sound ridiculous: if it is the polity that accumulates the experience, why should the individual be able to recollect it? For I

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<sup>873</sup> *Timaeus*, 22b. It is interesting to note, as Dombrowski has, that, in the *Menexenus* oration, one of the critiques of the enemies of the Athenians is their short memory (*Philosophy of History*, pp. 27-8). The point made by the Egyptian priest lends support to the ironic reading of the *Menexenus*.

<sup>874</sup> Though by no means does she intend to extend the notion of personal identity to collectives, a comment of Jennifer Whiting's still makes sense here taken out of her context: "It is this capacity to attribute past and present actions to itself, together with the closely related capacity to plan and execute future actions, that makes a responsible agent out of what starts off as a predominantly passive and reactive subject of phenomenal appearances." (Jennifer Whiting (1986), "Friends and Future Selves," *Philosophical Review*, 95: 547-80, p. 34.) If such attribution may extend to others' actions, the implication is that a collective agent could be formed through the activity of the individual who identifies herself with others. On memory as a condition for personal identity, see Locke's *Essay*, II.xxvii.26; and for a more recent exposition, see David Velleman, *Self to Self: Selected Essays*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). If one were to try to put my argument concerning the collective entity in the contemporary language of personal identity theory, Sydney Shoemaker's concept of 'quasi-memory knowledge' could be well adapted. See Sydney Shoemaker (1970), "Persons and Their Pasts," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 7: 269-85.

only recognize something which I myself have experienced before. I do not recognize, for example, photos of people that my ancestors may have seen. Would it not, then, be the polity itself that does the recollection? And if so, would it not require having a mind, literally speaking? The answer is that the individual indeed does the recollection of the collective experience of the polity. For it is not knowledge of particulars accumulated in history that I necessarily inherit. As is the case with most people, I may be ignorant of documented historical facts for my entire life. What I cannot avoid, however, are the epistemic and normative bonds that I inherit and that determine the way I understand the world, ‘initially and for the most part’. (This is the notion of a ‘horizon’ in Gadamer’s hermeneutics.) The question, then, is how an experience of mine may constitute a recognition of this past accumulation. But this too happens regularly. In our own experience we come to recognize the validity or invalidity of these opinions *in concreto*, witnessing, say, the hypocrisy of a religious leader or the beauty of a purified soul. Laches, to take an example from Plato, has confirmed the traditional conception of virtue as courage in his own experience, seeing how a brave warrior really does display a kind of spiritual excellence of self-mastery. In short, learning occurs when a new thought or experience is understood in light of what one already has in mind, and what one already has in mind is dependent on our history.

iii) Collective recollection of ancient wisdom through *muthos*

In the *Timaeus*, it is claimed that the idea of justice, exactly as defined through philosophy in the *Republic*, appeared as much as is possible in the temporal world at

Athens' inception; that is, the true aristocracy is the actual origin of all subsequent

Athenian life. The Egyptian priest tells Solon, the great educator of the Athenians,<sup>875</sup> that

the noblest and most perfect race amongst men were born in the land where you now dwell, and from them both you yourself are sprung and the whole of your existing city, out of some little seed that chanced to be left over; but this has escaped your notice because for many generations the survivors died with no power to express themselves in writing.<sup>876</sup>

The revelation of this story to the Athenians by Solon through poetry, as he had planned to do, would have carried a strong message, as if to say: virtue is in you, but you have forgotten it.<sup>877</sup> The bold claim being made by Plato here is that the Athenians would indeed recognize that truth when they were to hit upon it because it is in their blood, so to speak. They would know their true and original character if they were to see it, and they would desire to re-appropriate that mode of being for themselves. Solon's revelation would have been a poetic means of educating the Athenians through leading them back to their true selves. The ancient character has deteriorated, as we know; and lacking writing, the ancient polity could not record its way of life for future generations, as the Egyptians were able to do. This is a very interesting point, considering what Plato says about writing in the

*Phaedrus*:

He who thinks, then, that he has left behind him any art in writing, and he who receives it in the belief that anything in writing will be clear and certain, would be an utterly simple person, and in truth ignorant of the prophecy of Ammon, if he thinks written words are of any use except to remind him who knows the matter about which they are written.<sup>878</sup>

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<sup>875</sup> As is argued by Morrow, though the Athenian constitution is generally attributed to Solon and Cleisthenes (p. 78), Plato ultimately ascribes it to Solon ( *Cretan City*, pp. 79-96).

<sup>876</sup> *Timaeus*, 23b-c.

<sup>877</sup> In Dombrowski's reading of the *Menexenus*, "Socrates makes it clear that history has a moral orientation, and that the historian has a moral obligation to draw the lessons from history so that the hearers of these lessons will become more virtuous." (*Philosophy of History*, p. 30) Solon would have been acting as an historian in this sense. Indeed, a key point of the *Menexenus* is that "here, as in the other early dialogues, the understanding of history is of the utmost importance. That is, the hope that future generations will be virtuous can only be fulfilled if they learn of the deeds and virtues of their predecessors, however embellished these deeds are virtues become in the hands of historians." (*Philosophy of History*, p. 31)

<sup>878</sup> *Phaedrus*, 275c-d; cf. 278a.

Writing is supposedly only useful as a reminder, written by someone who already knows to someone else who already knows. In the simplest case, the one writing is the one who will be reminded. However, in the case of the ancients writing of their way of life, the readers would clearly be different individuals. And yet, they would have to already know the matter of the writing. This is the case for the Egyptians, whose priests, possessing the art of writing, are responsible for the continual recollection of the past. This, of course, is better described as the preservation of their conception of virtue and its embodiment in a form of life.<sup>879</sup> Reading the accounts of the past are useful, according to the criterion mentioned in the *Phaedrus*, because they are already familiar with the content insofar as their constitution and common sense are inherited and known at least intuitively. The reading may serve as a reminder and corrective for any present straying from virtue. This was the sense intended in the *Laws* when the Athenian claims that “[w]hen wisdom flows away, the proper influx consists in recollection.”<sup>880</sup>

Perhaps if the ancient Athenians had been able to write, their virtue would have persisted up until the present. But the wisdom of that polity has flown away for a great period of time, leaving a long gap of oblivion concerning their original virtue. The condition for being reminded, however, remains, though in a much weakened form as confused intuition. Had Solon publicized the story—or as Plato actually did—then the appropriation of that ancient way would have constituted a recollection on behalf of the polity as a whole: it would have moved from explicit knowledge at the origin, through a period of latency and forgetfulness, to a moment of explicit self-understanding and recollection.

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<sup>879</sup> At the very end of the *Laws*, the “divine synod” is given this same responsibility.

<sup>880</sup> *Laws*, 732b.

One reason Socrates is so interested in this point is that Solon intended to do through *muthos* what Socrates does through philosophy—which is to say, to initiate recollection of the idea of virtue that is implicit in the Athenian way of life but whose actuality has long been forgotten.

#### F. History as the manifestation of ideas

We may now speak of Platonic history from the perspective of the objects of knowledge, which is to say, from the perspective of the eternal. Initially, the idea exists in the mind of God, or in the minds of the various gods and *daimones*. This is to say that it exists eternally in divine wisdom, by which the entire cosmos is initially governed. Knowledge is then duplicated in the temporal world, being passed to humans as the discovery of the various arts, from agriculture to theurgy, and as direct revelation to the most ancient lawgivers. In the latter, all of the arts and sciences are unified by the idea of virtue, which appears now explicitly in the human mind and stands as the model for the artistic formation of a system of laws and customs. Upon the lawgiver is laid a “compulsion...to practice stamping on the plastic matter of human nature in public and private the patterns that he visions there [the divine order], and not just merely to mould and fashion himself.”<sup>881</sup> Through the mediation of the lawgiver, then, the idea is transformed into an implicit and intuitive form as the regulative idea of the constitution, and is sustained in common opinion, belief, language and institutions. So long as the *nomos* is strictly followed, the idea remains alive but only implicitly known, or potentially rediscovered. But the *nomos* does lose its hold and decays, making the idea itself more

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<sup>881</sup> *Republic*, 500d.

difficult to sense in an immediate way, but also fostering the possibility of recognizing it in a purely intellectual way. At first, it becomes known as a transcendent ideal that all should strive towards actualizing in their own character; what it is, though, does not get questioned. The idea is thus sensed as a goal but still only known vaguely. But given further decay of the *nomos*, reflective distance becomes possible, and hence abstract reason is developed. Through philosophical investigation, the idea may now become known once again. What prompts the explicit recollection of the idea—which is to say, *epistēmē*—is the appearance by divine fate of a living exemplar of the idea, who has been partially educated through contact with a religious and a philosophical tradition. At last, there is the possibility for future statesmen and private citizens to put the idea into effect once again in their own characters and in their institutions and practices.

## Transition to Part II:

By considering the ramifications of the analogy between the soul and the polity, the empirical aspect of Plato's innatism has been shown to be much more extensive than Scott acknowledges. The supplemental history of the appearance of truth in the world reveals that the relationship between philosophy and common sense is complex and depends on historical circumstances. My guiding questions for Part II are therefore: How extensive and in what form is the empirical aspect of the Cambridge Platonists' innatism? More specifically, does their moral epistemology logically require a similar historical supplement, and in what way might this be treated in their writings? In other words, what kind of account is there in the Cambridge Platonists of the appearance of truth? Finally, in what way, if at all, does this account resemble the historical version of Platonic recollection?

## Part II: Reason, Revelation and Recollection in the Cambridge Platonists

### Chapter 9: Reason and revelation in the Cambridge Platonists

#### A. Introduction: Reason and the soteriological problem in the seventeenth century

With no achievements that have remained outstanding for over three hundred years, the Cambridge Platonists have understandably been regarded as transitional figures in the history of philosophy and religion. Despite differences in scholars' perspectives, most, if not all assessments of their significance centre around their conception of reason in some way. Ernst Cassirer, for example, argues that the real spirit of these men was contained in their adherence to what he calls 'the doctrine of Eros'—namely, the striving of the soul towards disinterested contemplation of God as absolute beauty through the rational purification and governance of the soul. In this, Cassirer writes, "they preserved a nucleus of genuine ancient philosophical tradition, and passed it on uncontaminated to the centuries to come."<sup>882</sup> From a more ecclesiastical perspective, Gerald Cragg has located their significance in their then-radical espousal of religious toleration, which, Cragg argues, was grounded in their belief that reason is an elevated natural faculty common to all humanity and is the only vehicle to a consensus in regards to the essential truths of religion. Cragg writes that "[r]eason had a twofold meaning for the Cambridge Platonists. On the one hand

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<sup>882</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, transl. James P. Pettegrove, (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953), p. 202. Cassirer views the Cambridge Platonists as "a sort of connecting-link between minds and epochs, one of the piers of that bridge linking the Italian Renaissance with German humanism in the eighteenth century." (p. 201) Henceforth, "*Renaissance*".

it meant the discipline of thinking exactly and philosophically about the things which are Real. On the other hand it involved the unification of the whole personality in the pursuit of truth.”<sup>883</sup> Reason thus has a theoretical and a practical aspect, the combination of which renders it capable of the attainment of truth in the scientific sense and in the religious sense. Thus their conception of reason as the very force of moral and religious life is what, for Cragg and others, places them centrally within the movement in English intellectual history from Cromwell-era Puritanism to the ‘Age of Reason’ in the eighteenth century.<sup>884</sup> As Benjamin Whichcote, the spiritual head of the group, was fond of saying, reason is “the Light of the Candle of the Lord” within.<sup>885</sup>

As pre-Enlightenment rationalists, though, the problem of the relation between reason and revelation looms large for the Cambridge Platonists. Revealed religion is far from being superstition for them, though they acutely perceived various forms of superstition abound in their intellectual surroundings. Their general solution—and this can only be a vague statement at the outset—is that reason and revelation are not only compatible, but they are linked in an essential way. None of them, however, was able to formulate this position in a fully coherent way. In this chapter, we will see that, at least for Whichcote and More, the matter is fairly complicated; and I hope to provide an orientation to the problem in the works of the Cambridge Platonists before delving into Cudworth’s more developed—albeit still incomplete—position.

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<sup>883</sup> Gerald Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason: A Study of Changes in Religious Thought within the Church of England – 1660-1700*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), pp. 42-3. Henceforth, “*Puritanism*”.

<sup>884</sup> See, for example, James Deotis Roberts, Sr. *From Puritanism to Platonism in Seventeenth Century England*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968).

<sup>885</sup> Benjamin Whichcote, *Selected Sermons*, (London: A. and J. Churchill, 1698), Sermon 1, p. 15. Henceforth “*Sermons*”. Whichcote is referring here to *Proverbs* xx, 27.

The most rigorous analysis of the Cambridge Platonists' conception of reason and its significance in intellectual history has, in my opinion, been provided by Frederick Beiser, who regards this conception of reason as their response to the soteriological problem of the 'rule of faith' that was menacing Europe and especially England since the Reformation. Beiser argues that the Cambridge Platonists ultimately regarded reason as the proper way to determine the true Christian faith, as opposed to Church authority, tradition, Scripture and inspiration. For Beiser, Cambridge Platonism constitutes a crucial step in the transformation of the conception of reason as an instrumental faculty that serves only earthly purposes to the very means by which to attain and be assured of salvation.<sup>886</sup> In the sixteenth-century, Calvin, for example, had claimed that there was, as Beiser writes, "a fundamental difference in kind, indeed an infinite gulf, between the mind of God and that of man," while Luther had warned that the use of reason in divine matters would only disturb faith.<sup>887</sup> For Luther, Christian Scripture alone could indicate the means to salvation.<sup>888</sup> While these comments concerning Luther and Calvin are highly simplified, they are meant to emphasize that the Cambridge Platonists' emphasis on reason was quite radical in this context, which they viewed as being highly problematic.<sup>889</sup> For the Protestant response to the Catholic insistence on the role of the Church as mediator of salvation relied on the proper interpretation of Scripture, which could only be guaranteed by divine

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<sup>886</sup> Frederick C. Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason: The Defense of Rationality in the Early English Enlightenment*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 5. Henceforth "*Sovereignty*".

<sup>887</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150 (Luther); p. 152 (Calvin)

<sup>888</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>889</sup> Cf. John Tulloch, *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England in the Seventeenth Century*, vol. 2. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1874), p. 234: "It would be far from true to say that Puritanism was unfavourable to learning. In its higher representatives it was eminently learned. It was none the less its tendency in all its extreme forms to depreciate natural knowledge, and separate the provinces of rational inquiry and religion. The very name of Reason excited suspicion, and was supposed to carry with it the taint of heresy." Henceforth "*Theology*".

inspiration. In turn, whether one was truly inspired by the Holy Spirit could only be known through conscience. Yet competing sects, and even opposing members of the same sect, justified their conflicting views by appealing to conscience.<sup>890</sup> As a solution, Perkins—a major force in the rise of Puritan theology in England—proposed that conscience was the voice not only of the heart but of reason, which ought to operate according to premises derived from Scripture.<sup>891</sup>

In Beiser's view, the Cambridge Platonists were an extension of this movement, which culminated in Kant, from Scripture to reason as the rule of faith. Hence, Beiser writes that "Cambridge Platonism marks the decisive turning point from the Reformation to the Enlightenment in seventeenth-century England."<sup>892</sup> For although the Cambridge Platonists sometimes avowed that Scripture was their rule of faith,<sup>893</sup> they insisted that the truths revealed in Scripture need to be examined by reason because they are rational in nature. Moreover, the fundamental message of Scripture and the essence of the Christian religion was the life of "purified and disciplined reason,"<sup>894</sup> which is to say, a moral life based on the governance of reason in the soul, unencumbered by prejudice and self-interested passion. Though reason is indeed normally employed for merely mundane purposes, it may be transformed through spiritual discipline into what Henry More calls "divine sagacity".<sup>895</sup>

Yet despite the soteriological centrality of reason, Beiser makes it explicit that there is an ambiguity running throughout the writings of the Cambridge Platonists—and even

<sup>890</sup> Beiser, *Sovereignty*, pp. 152-3.

<sup>891</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156. See Tulloch, *Theology*, p.12 for comments on schisms within Puritan theology and the schism between theory and practice.

<sup>892</sup> Beiser, *Sovereignty*, p. 138.

<sup>893</sup> E.g., Whichcote, *Sermons*, Sermon 1, p. 37: "For Scripture, as a Rule of Faith, is not one Scripture but all." Cf. Beiser, *Sovereignty*, pp. 11, 181 for this point in Cudworth.

<sup>894</sup> Cragg, *Puritanism*, p. 43.

<sup>895</sup> Henry More, Preface to *Philosophical Writings*, reprinted in *The Cambridge Platonists*, ed. Gerald Cragg, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 44. Henceforth, "Cambridge Platonists".

within each thinker's writings—concerning the relation between reason and revelation.<sup>896</sup>

What is clear enough, though, is that the Cambridge Platonists *began* to fuse what had been two separate domains of truth prior to the seventeenth century, and still in Bacon, Boyle, Descartes, Malebranche, and Leibniz—namely, that which is attainable through reason and that which is attainable through faith alone.<sup>897</sup> The efforts of the Cambridge Platonists thus constitute what John Tulloch calls “the first elaborate attempt to wed Christianity and philosophy made by any Protestant school.”<sup>898</sup> In the rest of this chapter, my aim is to present the complexity of the Cambridge Platonists' attempt to marry reason and revelation. I will be focussing on the writings of Whichcote and More, who are most explicit about this problem; yet it should be made clear at the outset that neither's position is clearly worked out or fully consistent. The purpose in presenting their views is to give the reader a sense of the problem which I take Cudworth to be solving—or at least to a greater extent than either Whichcote or More.

## B. The reconciliation of reason and revelation in Whichcote and More

In his published sermons, Whichcote often declares that the truths of revelation are within the limits of reason. “So false is it,” he preaches, “that the matter of our Faith is unaccountable; or that there is any thing unreasonable in Religion[.]”<sup>899</sup> Whichcote evinces several assurances that the teachings of the Gospels are congruent to our natural cognitive faculties; these include the moral excellence of the heathens—that is, the fact that some

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<sup>896</sup> See esp. pp. 176-7.

<sup>897</sup> Beiser, *Sovereignty*, p. 4.

<sup>898</sup> Tulloch, *Theology*, p. 14; cf. Beiser, *Sovereignty*, pp. 136-8.

<sup>899</sup> Whichcote, *Sermons*, Sermon 1, p. 10.

heathens discovered true morality to a large extent without the aid of revelation;<sup>900</sup> the sensical representation of God in the Gospels;<sup>901</sup> and the usefulness and efficacy of receiving Jesus for our happiness even in this world—that is, the world in which we are most commonly employing our natural faculties.<sup>902</sup> As for higher uses of the intellect, Whichcote elsewhere holds that the mysterious elements of Christianity (such as the Trinity) would gradually disappear upon further rational investigation.<sup>903</sup>

Yet the rational assessment of revelation is not merely an optional or superfluous exercise wherein the truths of revelation are confirmed. Rather, the employment of reason is an inherent part of the very purpose and message of revelation: “Our reason is not confounded by our religion, but awakened, excited, employed, directed, and improved.”<sup>904</sup> In fact, Cragg has argued that reason is the fundamental means for discovering truth, and revelation is actually the supplement which serves primarily as confirmation.<sup>905</sup> Cragg’s view can be supported by comments in Whichcote’s sermons which argue that reason prepares us for religion, so that, upon receiving revelation, it may say: “*I did expect it, I did believe such a thing, from the first and chiefest Good: Now, I am told it is so.*”<sup>906</sup> Moreover, the very reception of revelation depends upon a prior belief in God attainable through reason, since revelation presupposes His existence: “If there be not a natural Knowledge, that God *is*; there is no Possibility of any Faith. Men know by the Use of their Reason, that there is a God; And then when a man receives any Proposition from God’s Authority; *that, is Faith.* Natural Knowledge, you see, is antecedent and Fundamental to

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<sup>900</sup> Whichcote, Sermon 1, p. 17.

<sup>901</sup> *Ibid.*, Sermon 1, p. 25.

<sup>902</sup> *Ibid.*, Sermon 1, pp. 28, 38.

<sup>903</sup> Beiser, *Sovereignty*, p. 178, citing Whichcote Aphorisms nos. 1014, 1168.

<sup>904</sup> In Cragg, *Cambridge Platonists*, p. 45.

<sup>905</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44-5.

<sup>906</sup> Cited in C. C. Patrides, ed., *The Cambridge Platonists*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 59. Henceforth, “*The Cambridge Platonists*”.

Faith.”<sup>907</sup> For Whichcote, moral and religious knowledge is discoverable through innate principles; and it is only on this basis of innate knowledge that subsequent knowledge is possible: “[I]ndeed, had there not been a Law written in the Heart of Man; a Law without him, could be to no Purpose. For had we not Principles, that are *Concreated*; did we not know something, no Man could prove any thing. For he that knows nothing, grants nothing.”<sup>908</sup> Hence, “Religion stands upon the Grounds of the *truest Reason*: for the Apostle [Peter], . . . after he hath asserted, *proves by Reason*.”<sup>909</sup>

Furthermore, in his sermon on John 7:46 (“Never man spake like this man”) Whichcote claims that the very message of Christ is the independent use of reason, which is our true and original nature.<sup>910</sup> For God has granted us the power to understand and do what is right through our natural cognitive faculties. Revelation through Scripture teaches that, when reason is employed as the governor of the soul, we may pass from punishment to repentance and remission of sin, and thereby be restored to our natural state of goodness.

Henry More presents a very similar position to what we have seen of Whichcote’s position so far; and, as will be shown, this is only one side of both More’s and Whichcote’s thinking. In the *Brief Discourse of the true Grounds of the Certainty of Faith*, More claims that reason is the ground of revelation in the sense similar to Whichcote’s; for he argues here that the certainty that is attained through faith depends upon certainty attained through reason (as well as through sense). Hence, as Richard Popkin writes about More’s position, “faith cannot be repugnant to sense or reason or science.”<sup>911</sup>

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<sup>907</sup> Whichcote, *Sermons*, Sermon 3, p. 88.

<sup>908</sup> *Ibid.*, Sermon 1, p. 8.

<sup>909</sup> *Ibid.*, Sermon 3, p. 99; cf. Beiser, *Sovereignty*, p. 178.

<sup>910</sup> Whichcote, *Sermons*, Sermon 1.

<sup>911</sup> See Richard H. Popkin, “The Spiritualistic Cosmologies of Henry More and Anne Conway,” in *Henry More (1614-1687) Tercentenary Studies*, ed. Sarah Hutton, with biography and bibliography by Robert

Moreover, More's central thesis in his *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness* is that the entirety of Christian revelation is "rational throughout".<sup>912</sup> In this work, More aims to provide "so solid and rational an Account" of every article of faith that "no Man that has the Use of his Understanding shall be able ever to pretend any Reason against the Christian Religion."<sup>913</sup> Even the most mysterious elements of Christianity—namely the nature of the Trinity and the Incarnation—are neither self-contradictory, nor unreasonable to believe. For there are other mysterious facts which are reasonable to believe, such as the simple but mysterious fact that the will can move the body.<sup>914</sup> Ultimately, though, what More means by the thoroughgoing rationality of Christianity is its teleological essence. That is, all of the doctrines, teachings, and facts of the New Testament conform to the single purpose or idea that we may understand—namely, "*the Advancement and Triumph of the Divine Life*,"<sup>915</sup> which consists in the destruction of sin, the growth of righteousness on earth, and the achievement of eternal salvation.<sup>916</sup> Christianity is rational here not only in the sense that most of the concepts it employs can be logically strung together, but also in the sense that everything in the world can be coherently understood as belonging within this grand historical purpose. Even miracles, despite being inexplicable by the ordinary laws of nature, are thus 'rational' insofar as they are means to that same end.<sup>917</sup>

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Crocker, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990), pp. 97-114, esp. p. 107. Henceforth "More and Conway".

<sup>912</sup> Henry More, *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings*, (London: James Flesher, 1662), Preface General, p. iv., quoted in Beiser, *Sovereignty*, p. 181.

<sup>913</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>914</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>915</sup> Henry More, *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness*. (London: James Flesher, 1660), Preface, p. 4. Henceforth, *EGMG* (book, chapter, section).

<sup>916</sup> Beiser, *Sovereignty*, p. 182.

<sup>917</sup> Beiser, *Sovereignty*, p. 182.

More firmly believes that the parts of the Bible that are not readily believable ought to be interpreted rationally. In fact, the first three chapters of *Genesis*, if taken literally, would lead people to atheism insofar as it makes them think that “the whole businesse of Religion is not better than an obvious fable.”<sup>918</sup> It ought, rather, to be interpreted along the lines of the new sciences, Descartes’ in particular.<sup>919</sup> In fact, everything true in Cartesian and Platonist philosophy is to be found in a different form in Scripture.<sup>920</sup> More writes:

... [T]o prevent all contempt and cavil against the Sacredness of Christianity, as holding anything against the solid truths of approved Reason and Philosophy, I thought it necessary, and an indispensable duty of that Faithfulness I owe to the Christian Church, publicly to declare that, if any one presume that he has found such points of *Cartesianisme* or *Platonisme* as I have applied to the *Mosaick* letter to be really true upon th[rough] examination, I dare confidently pronounce to him, that if they be so, those truths were ever lodged in the Text of *Moses*, and that no Philosopher has any the least pretence to magnify himself against Religion and the Church of God, wherein such rich theories have been ever treasured up, though men have not had, for these many Ages, the leisure or opportunity of unlocking them till now. Which consideration, I think, is of main importance for stopping the mouths of Atheistical Wits, and conciliating unspeakable Honour and Reverence to Religion and the Church in those who are knowing and ingenious.<sup>921</sup>

According to this comment at least, Christianity contains nothing that is contrary to

“approved Reason and Philosophy.” An example of this congruency is to be found in the

‘Platonick’ (or Neoplatonic) Trinity and the Christian Trinity,<sup>922</sup> as was thoroughly exposed

by More’s colleague, Ralph Cudworth, in his *True Intellectual System of the Universe*.<sup>923</sup>

<sup>918</sup> Letter to Anne Conway, 1653, quoted in Popkin, “More and Conway”, p. 100.

<sup>919</sup> Alan Gabbey, “Philosophia Cartesiana Triumphata: Henry More (1646-1671),” in *Problems of Cartesianism*, eds. Thomas M. Lennon *et al.*, (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1982), pp. 171-250, p. 217 in particular.

<sup>920</sup> Popkin, “More and Conway,” pp. 105-6: “More, in the preface to *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings* [p. xii] said that he and Descartes set out from the same place. However, Descartes took the lower road of materialism, and More the high road of Platonism and spirituality. They met together at the same goal, namely the entrance to the Holy Bible. They both tried to give ‘the most approvable Philosophical Interpretation of the first three Chapters of Genesis as ever was yet offered to the World since the loss of the ancient *Judaical Cabbala*’.”

<sup>921</sup> Henry More, *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings*, Preface, p. xix, quoted in Popkin, “More and Conway,” p. 106.

<sup>922</sup> More, *EGMG*, I.iv.

<sup>923</sup> Joseph M. Levine, “Latitudinarians, neoplatonists, and the ancient wisdom,” in *Philosophy, Science and Religion in England: 1640-1700*, eds. Richard Kroll, Richard Ashcraft, and Perez Zagorin, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 100: “On the whole he was satisfied to leave the great work of erudition to his learned Cambridge friend, Ralph Cudworth. (The *Conjectura* had in fact been dedicated to Cudworth...). The work that resulted eventually, Cudworth’s *TIS* (1678), was thus the natural culmination

Thus even the most abstruse of Christian doctrines is apparently discoverable by reason alone, since the heathens discovered a close equivalent.

Such considerations in the works of both Whichcote and More may appear to render revelation largely superfluous, as an early critic of the Cambridge Platonists was quick to ascertain.<sup>924</sup> But they are sensitive to the audacity of such a claim and do not wholeheartedly espouse it. Indeed, according to Beiser, the Cambridge Platonists as a whole took this charge so seriously that accounting for revelation was the problem that most occupied them.<sup>925</sup> In his response to Anthony Tuckney, Whichcote's Puritan teacher and former head of Emmanuel College at Cambridge, Whichcote defends himself against the charge of Arminianism—i.e, that revelation is entirely superfluous—by stating that "... what God speaks transcends our rational understanding."<sup>926</sup> Yet Whichcote explains that "such 'transcendency' is suprarational and not irrational."<sup>927</sup> This is the idea that reason is taken to a higher level of understanding through revelation—that reason is illuminated by revelation. Though the ancient philosophers in particular have achieved much without revelation, "in Christ we have a 'fuller light.'"<sup>928</sup> Hence James Roberts refers to "Whichcote's *apparent* subordination of reason to revelation;"<sup>929</sup> reason is not superseded by revelation, but brought to a higher level than in its natural use. In fact, Whichcote states

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of a collaborative effort to ground the latitudinarian middle way on reason *and the prisca theologia*." Henceforth, "Ancient Wisdom".

<sup>924</sup> This is evident in Whichcote's first letter to Anthony Tuckney. See Cragg, *Cambridge Platonists*, p. 37.

<sup>925</sup> Beiser, *Sovereignty*, p. 176.

<sup>926</sup> Quoted in Roberts, *Puritanism*, p. 54. A good summary of this debate can be found in this volume, pp. 42-65. On the Cambridge Platonists in the context of various factions, including the Socinians and Arminians, see Jerome B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), chapter 18, esp. pp 194-5. Henceforth '*Autonomy*'.

<sup>927</sup> Roberts, *Puritanism*, pp. 54-5.

<sup>928</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>929</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56, italics added.

at one point that “faith is reason herself.”<sup>930</sup> Nevertheless, in some later aphorisms, Whichcote seems to maintain that the Gospel has an element of mysteriousness which reason simply cannot rise to.<sup>931</sup>

In order to elucidate the problem as much as possible, it is necessary to turn to the key distinction made by Whichcote between truths of reason and of revelation. “Things of Natural Knowledge, or of first Inscription in the Heart of Man by God,” he writes, “...are known to be true as soon as ever they are proposed.”<sup>932</sup> The reason they are known to be true is that “[t]he Truth of first Inscription is Connatural to Man, it is the Light of God’s Creation, and it flows from the Principles of which Man doth consist, in his very first Make: This is the Soul’s Complexion.”<sup>933</sup> Again, “[t]hings that are of an immutable and indispensable Nature, we have Knowledge of them by the Light of first Impression.”<sup>934</sup> Such things of immutable nature include “good Affection and submission towards God, the instances of justice and righteousness towards men, and temperance to [one]self.”<sup>935</sup> Our original state, according to Whichcote, is that of rational self-governance, and it is only because of our own self-corruption by employing reason to gratify the passions that revelation became necessary to call us back to our original state.<sup>936</sup> Hence “Truth of after Revelation is the Soul’s Cure, the Remedy for the Mind’s Ease and Relief,”<sup>937</sup> Among the

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<sup>930</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>931</sup> See Benjamin Whichcote, *Selected Notions*, (Menston: Scholar Press, 1971), pp. 16-23, where he stresses the mystery of the Gospel in a similar fashion as More.

<sup>932</sup> Whichcote, *Sermons*, Sermon 1, p. 8

<sup>933</sup> *Ibid.*, Sermon 1, p. 8.

<sup>934</sup> *Ibid.*, Sermon 1, p. 7.

<sup>935</sup> Whichcote, Sermon 1, p.15. See also a comment of Whichcote’s quoted in Beiser, *Soveriegnity*, p. 177: “The first are natural, eternal, and necessary, laid down by God in nature and the hearts of men at the Creation. Among these truths are that God exists, that we should honor him, and that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us.”

<sup>936</sup> Whichcote, *Sermons*, Sermon 1, p. 6.

<sup>937</sup> *Ibid.*, Sermon 1, p. 6.

most important truths of this second kind, which are revealed at specific points in history, are the doctrines of universal sin and redemption through Christ.<sup>938</sup>

These latter truths are not discoverable by reason alone; yet they are still congruent with reason: “The great Things of Reveal’d Truth, tho they be not of Reason’s Invention, yet they are of the prepar’d Mind readily entertain’d and receiv’d: As for Instance: Remission of Sins to them that repent and deprecate God’s Displeasure; it is the most credible Thing in the World.”<sup>939</sup> The difference between the two kinds of truth is that truths of revelation originate directly from God, while truths of first inscription originate indirectly from God through the faculty of reason which He placed in us. Hence,

[Reason] is either the *Efficient*, or the *Recipient* of all that is call’d Religion.... The Natural Knowledge of God is the Product of *Reason*: The Resolutions of his Will, for our further Direction, are proposed and communicated to *Reason*: and, in both these ways, we are *taught of God*. In the former, we are *made* to know: And in the latter, we are call’d to be made Partakers of God’s Council. By the *former*, we know what God is, his Nature, that he is: By the *latter*, what God would have us to do.<sup>940</sup>

Whichcote appears to be inconsistent here, as he has also claimed that practical principles (such justice and temperance, mentioned above) are truths of first inscription. Indeed, Whichcote himself says at one point that “Man knows what he ought to do both by reason and revelation.”<sup>941</sup> Nevertheless, the main point here is that for Whichcote, the difference between the two kinds of truth is a matter of their origin, not of their reasonableness. This is what I take the ‘suprarational’ illumination of reason to be.

As for the ambiguity concerning the degree of fusion of reason and revelation in More, he too reserves a place for truth that can only be revealed, yet still touched and

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<sup>938</sup> Beiser, *Sovereignty*, p. 177.

<sup>939</sup> Whichcote, *Sermons*, Sermon 1, p. 9.

<sup>940</sup> *Ibid.*, Sermon 2, pp. 112-3.

<sup>941</sup> Quoted in Roberts, *Puritanism*, p. 129.

integrated by reason. First, there is prophetic knowledge of future events. More dedicated *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos* (1680) to the interpretation of the books of *Daniel* and *Revelation*, which, though they required very detailed rationalization, could not have originated by reason. The state of the world at the apocalypse, for example, could never be predicted given our knowledge of causes and effects since this would be a singular event.

Second, More's position on mysteries is inconsistent. On one hand, he claims that that mysteries are only intended to invoke reverence in the uninitiated and, for the initiated, have a "Clearness and Certainty" that gives rise to "a full and free assent of Understanding."<sup>942</sup> On the other hand, More also maintained that doctrines like the Trinity and the Incarnation are inexplicable *in principle* for human intelligence.<sup>943</sup>

Finally, as Beiser argues,

The irony of More's grand tract [*EGMG*]... is that his explanation of the mystery of the Gospel ultimately rests upon a mystery itself. The whole purpose of the Gospel, on his account, is to reveal the divine life, to lay bare its possibility for man. It is in the divine life, he assures us, that 'the truest key to the Mystery of Christianity can be found.' Yet More insists that the divine life is a mystery itself, consisting in an ineffable experience of our union with the divine. The divine life cannot be known through natural reason, and it is impossible for it to be conveyed in words to the soul.<sup>944</sup>

The divine life, for More, involves the raising of reason beyond ordinary discursivity into 'divine sagacity', or illuminated reason.<sup>945</sup> Hence, for More, there are truths that reason cannot discover by itself (prophecy), truths that reason cannot even explain fully (the Trinity and incarnation), and the ultimate truth, which is a kind of life that cannot be adequately described or comprehended by ordinary reason. Though there are intimations in

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<sup>942</sup> Quoted in Beiser, *Sovereignty*, p. 181.

<sup>943</sup> More, *EGMG*, I.iv; IX.i.2-4.

<sup>944</sup> More, *EGMG*, VI.ix.5.

<sup>945</sup> Popkin, "More and Conway," p. 107. Cf. Whichcote on illumination in Roberts, *Puritanism*, pp. 76, 144.

other religious sources and through our own reason, all three are revealed to us fully only by Scripture.

It can also be noted in passing that Cudworth has a similar position as Whichcote's, distinguishing some truths that originated from revelation, but maintaining the rationality of all truth. For Cudworth, the mystery of the Trinity can actually be comprehended, insisting that there is "nothing in it (if rightly understood) that is repugnant to Reason."<sup>946</sup>

Nonetheless, it was not "first discovered merely by humane Wit and Reason."<sup>947</sup> As will be discussed further in Chapter 13, the reason there is convergence between the Christian and Platonic conceptions of the Trinity is not simply that both are ultimately rational, but that they both belong to the same tradition of ancient theology (*prisca theologia*), whose ultimate source was revelation. As for the belief in the resurrection of the dead, this may seem counter to reason, since, according to current natural science it is not possible; yet Cudworth does not believe it to be irrational or unscientific. For he draws on ancient notions of various kinds of bodies—namely, 'terrestrial', 'spiritous or airy', and 'luciform or heavenly' in order to explain how resurrection is possible.<sup>948</sup> Though he does not attempt to describe such substances, this ontology provides him grounds to assert the rationality of the doctrine of resurrection. Yet even "extraordinary phenomena", such as apparitions, miracles and prophecies, do not pose a problem for rationality, for they "either immediately prove a God and Providence, or else that there is a rank of understanding beings, invisible, superior to men, from whence a Deity may be afterwards inferred."<sup>949</sup>

Since God and his angelic ministers operate according to divine wisdom,<sup>950</sup> and that

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<sup>946</sup> Beiser, *Sovereignty*, pp. 180-1.

<sup>947</sup> More, *EGMG*, VI.ix.5.

<sup>948</sup> *TIS*, vol. 3, pp. 266-315. Cf. Henry More, *Immortality of the Soul*, (London: James Flesher, 1662), book I, chapter 8, section 7. Henceforth, "*Immortality*", (book, chapter, section).

<sup>949</sup> *TIS*, vol. 2, p. 640.

<sup>950</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 247.

wisdom is, contra Calvin, commensurable with our own power of reason, extraordinariness not does entail irrationality.

In sum, it seems that the Cambridge Platonists did believe that some truths could not have originated in human reason, but that all truths ultimately accord with reason. The problem of whether Scripture or reason is their rule of faith is, in the end, largely moot, since a decision would only need to be made between the two if there were a conflict; yet they (almost always) deny the possibility of such a conflict. If something of revelation seems irrational, the conclusion must be that rational investigation has not progressed far enough. Though a precise statement defining the Cambridge Platonists' position on the relation between reason and revelation is impossible, it is certain that reason is at least the starting point and touchstone for all knowledge; for reason must be prepared to receive and comprehend the truths which originate in revelation. Hence, without a sound faculty of reason, no truth can be comprehended, whether discovered by reason or revelation. The starting point for moral and religious knowledge is reason, for natural theology is the ground of revealed theology, which illuminates and improves reason.

### C. On the importance of epistemology for the Cambridge Platonists' project

Despite this crucial importance afforded to reason, none of the Cambridge Platonists wrote a strictly epistemological work which would detail how it is that one comes to know what can be known either through reason alone or with the aid of revelation. Whichcote, being more a preacher than a philosopher, left the epistemological matter largely obscure, insisting only that the passions of the soul must be governed by

reason in order for the latter to function properly.<sup>951</sup> More and Cudworth did make some forays into epistemological matters, but in both cases, these forays were subordinated to showing the truth of premises in metaphysical arguments: specifically, More's epistemological comments come in his treatise that sets out to establish that the soul is a distinct entity from the body and is immortal;<sup>952</sup> while Cudworth's discussion, which is the most detailed of the Cambridge Platonists', is ultimately employed to justify the existence of an eternal and unchanging set of moral ideas and principles.<sup>953</sup> As Beiser writes, "the Cambridge Platonists' ultimate defense of reason did not lie in the realm of epistemology. Rather, it rested firmly in the domain of the ethical. ... They justified reason by its practical virtues...."<sup>954</sup>

Nevertheless, a fairly coherent reconstruction of their epistemology is possible; and considering that the goal of salvation is explicit knowledge of the necessary moral and religious truths, especially in this "age so philosophical,"<sup>955</sup> it seems quite reasonable to ask how, given their epistemology, we come to have knowledge through reason. (The question as to how we are able to put that knowledge into effect through freewill is beyond the scope of this discussion.)<sup>956</sup>

The most obvious point at which to begin the reconstruction of their epistemology is to ask in what sense, if at all, the Cambridge Platonists took truth to be innate to reason. Whichcote's comments above concerning the 'connatural' truths of first inscription clearly

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<sup>951</sup> Whichcote, *Sermons*, Sermon 3, p. 111; Sermon 4, p. 145. Sermon 5 is largely about the proper governance of the soul through reason.

<sup>952</sup> More, *Immortality*, book I.

<sup>953</sup> *EIM*, books III and IV.

<sup>954</sup> Beiser, *Sovereignty*, p. 174.

<sup>955</sup> *TIS*, Preface, vol. 1, p. xlvi.

<sup>956</sup> For the Cambridge Platonists' treatment of free will, see Cudworth's *A Treatise of Freewill* in *EIM*; Henry More, *An Account of Virtue*, transl. Edward Southwell, (New York: The Facsimile Text Society, 1930), book III, chapter 1; and Whichcote, *Sermons*, Part II, Sermon 3, and *Sermons*, Part I, Sermon 5, pp. 168- 169; Sermon 3, p. 94, 130.

imply innatism of some sort; moreover, the Cambridge Platonists as a whole are typically regarded as prime targets of Locke's attack on the notion of innate principles in Book I of the *Essay*, and, indeed, it is largely as the backdrop to Locke that they maintained any place at all in the history of philosophy.<sup>957</sup>

After examining what there is of Cambridge Platonist epistemology, we will see that, despite their innatism, there is an important place afforded to the contingencies of experience—perhaps even in spite of their rationalism. Once this becomes apparent, we will be able to detect the significance of tradition for the attainment of knowledge.

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<sup>957</sup> See A. J. Rogers (1979), "Locke, Newton, and the Cambridge Platonists on Innate Ideas," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40(2): 191-205; and Robert L. Armstrong (1969), "Cambridge Platonists and Locke on Innate Ideas," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 30(2): 187-202.

## Chapter 10: Innateness and the theory of recollection in Whichcote and More

There are three key points of reference which are common to the epistemology of Whichcote, More and Cudworth—namely, that we do have some kind of innate knowledge, that the latter needs to be drawn out or awakened by certain conditions external to the mind, and that this process is similar to or a kind of recollection. In this chapter, I will be presenting the positions of Whichcote and More as a further background to Cudworth's. While the three positions are not simply interchangeable, they are so similar that it is helpful to have the more generally stated views of Whichcote and More in mind while treating Cudworth in more detail, as the former can aid in clarifying or rephrasing the latter.

### A. Whichcote's notions of acquaintance and remembrance

As was indicated at the end of the last chapter, the reconstruction of any Cambridge Platonist epistemology is not straightforward as it is, quite simply, underdeveloped—especially in Whichcote and More. In particular, it is not clear what exactly is considered innate.<sup>958</sup> Whichcote, to start, is ambivalent about the issue. On one hand, he states:

No Man is born to any actual Knowledge in the World, or to speak a Word, or understand a Notion; But all Habits and Dispositions are acquired. And therefore an Atheist shall be self-condemned, as one that never used his Reason, nor so much

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<sup>958</sup> The historical debates over the question of innateness have been quite ambiguous with regard to whether it is ideas, beliefs, or knowledge that are or are not innate. Moreover, the ambiguity of the term “innate” has itself propelled much debate that runs at cross-purposes. For a brief overview of the entanglements, see Stephen Stich, “Introduction: The Idea of Innateness,” in *Innate Ideas*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 1-22. As this volume is dedicated to connecting the history of the debate with the contemporary flare-up, based largely around Chomsky's work, it does not tend to deal with the religious claims of innateness, which include a “sense of Deity”, for example. The focus is, rather, on beliefs and propositions. In Whichcote, as will be seen momentarily, innateness is to be understood as a disposition toward certain kinds of knowledge (i.e., knowledge of God). Dominic Scott has convincingly argued that, like Descartes, Whichcote, More, and Cudworth all share a dispositionalist conception of innateness. This is one of his main arguments throughout *Recollection and Experience*.

as exercised his own Thoughts.... If a Man living in the World, or in the Church, be either an Atheist, or an Infidel; he hath been an idle Person in the World, and a Sluggard. His Understanding hath received no Culture or Care; he hath made no Improvement of himself, nor done any thing worthy of a Man.<sup>959</sup>

From this comment, it seems that all knowledge is acquired from education and the use of reason in experience. This would imply that no knowledge is innate. On the other hand, though, there is, according to Whichcote, “a natural and indelible Sence of Deity, and consequently of Religion, in the Mind of Man.”<sup>960</sup> And again: “All Understandings seek after God, and have a Sence and Feeling of God.”<sup>961</sup> Whichcote leaves unexplained what exactly this innate sense or feeling of the mind is and whether this constitutes a kind of knowledge. To render Whichcote consistent here, one could say that the mind is guided by an innate sense of truth but has no initial epistemic content.

The closest Whichcote comes to explaining the matter is to offer a vague description of some implicit anticipation of truth such that we feel a sense of recognition upon being overtly presented with it. He writes:

Truth is so near to the Soul; *so much* the very Image and Form of it; that it may be said of Truth; that as the Soul is by *Derivation* from God, so Truth by *Communication*. No sooner doth the Truth of God come to our Souls sight, but our Soul knows her, as her first and old Acquaintance: Which, tho’ they have been by some Accident unhappily parted a great while; yet having now, through the Divine Providence, happily met, they greet one another, and renew their acquaintance, as those that were first and ancient Friends.<sup>962</sup>

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<sup>959</sup> Whichcote, *Sermons*, Sermon 1, pp. 44-5.

<sup>960</sup> In Partides, *The Cambridge Platonists*, p. 59.

<sup>961</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88. Cf. p. 120: “That which is the Excellency of Mind and Understanding, is a *peculiar Faculty appropriated to God*. It is that which is its natural Vertue, to make search and inquiry after God; to be employ’d about him, to tender Homage and Observance to him.” John Smith, who is sometimes associated with the Cambridge Platonists, if not considered one, makes a similar remark: “There is a *Natural Sense* of God that lodges in the minds of the lowest and dullest sort of vulgar men, which is alwaies roving after him, catching at him, though it cannot lay any sure hold on him; which works like a *natural Instinct* antecedent to any mature knowledge, as being indeed the First principle of it. But when contentious disputes, and frothy reasonings, and contemplations informed by fleshly affections, conversant onely about the out-side of Nature, begin to rise up in mens Soules’ they may then be in some danger of depressing all those *In-bred notions* of a Deity, and to reason themselves out of their own sense, as the old *Scepticks* did....” (John Smith, *Selected Discourses* (1660), ed. C.C. Partides. (Delmar, N.Y.: Scholar’s Facsimiles & Reprints, 1979), Discourse 3, p. 50.) Henceforth, *Discourses*.

<sup>962</sup> Whichcote, *Sermons*, Sermon 1, p. 5.

The implication here is that we did once know the truth at one point in our existence.

Whichcote makes other comments to the same effect: “The Law externally given was to revive, awaken Man, after his Apostacy and Sin, and to *call him to Remembrance, Advertency, and Consideration.*”<sup>963</sup> Moreover, he refers to the myth in the *Phaedrus* when accounting for the fall of the soul and its redemption through recollection of knowledge that the soul possessed prior to embodiment.<sup>964</sup>

It is difficult to say, though, how literally to take these expressions of remembrance and re-acquaintance. Whichcote would say that our first acquaintance with the truth is that of first inscription, which is obscured by the Fall, when Man becomes “Apostatized from the Truth of first Inscription” by “prostituting” himself.<sup>965</sup> Yet Whichcote interprets the Biblical story of original sin symbolically<sup>966</sup> and claims that each man is the “Adam of his own soul,” and “in giving himself over to sensuality the candle of the Lord within burns so dim that he cannot see by it.”<sup>967</sup> It therefore seems that the kind of ‘prior’ knowledge here is more of a metaphysical priority than a temporal one—which is to say, it is our true nature despite our being initially (and for the most part) alienated from it in our lives. It does not seem likely that Whichcote means that we are actually born with such knowledge, given the quotation above about the acquisition of knowledge.

Dominic Scott has reasonably interpreted Whichcote as implying that “[w]hat we are born with is an inclination or predisposition to have that idea whatever our future experience. So in a sense we are *tabulae rasae*, but ones that favour particular

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<sup>963</sup> *Ibid.*, Sermon 1, p. 8, italics added.

<sup>964</sup> Scott, Dominic. (1990) “Platonic Recollection and Cambridge Platonism,” *Hermathena* 149: 73-97, pp. 76-7. Henceforth “Platonic”. Roberts also notes that Whichcote’s description of knowledge as an “old friend and ancient acquaintance” is reminiscent of Platonic recollection (*Puritanism*, p. 68, n.9).

<sup>965</sup> Whichcote, *Sermons*, Sermon 1, p. 6; Sermon 4, p. 142.

<sup>966</sup> See Roberts, *Puritanism*, p. 123 ff.

<sup>967</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

messages.”<sup>968</sup> It is important to add, though, that Whichcote is concerned with practical knowledge, which is to say knowledge that ends in action. For “*bare Knowledge doth not sanctifie. No Man is renew’d by his Knowledge only.*”<sup>969</sup> One form of ‘holding truth in unrighteousness’ (Romans 1:18), according to Whichcote, occurs when “knowledge doth not go forth into Act.”<sup>970</sup> Moreover, the original state of knowing by first inscription entails “... comply[ing] with those Principles of natural Light and Knowledge which God did implant in us, in the Moment of our Creation; and [being exactly] obedient to the Ducture of Reason; ...is con-natural to Man, in respect of the State of God’s Creation.”<sup>971</sup> It seems uncontroversial to claim that infants are not “obedient to the Ducture of Reason”; hence the Fall is not a temporal event for each individual. What the soul was originally acquainted with prior to the Fall, then, was not a consciousness or knowledge of ideas, but rather a mode of being—that is, rational self-governance before God. The re-acquaintance is with the truth in the sense of the truly proper way to live (as Christ did). The sense in which knowledge is innate, then, is just that, when our souls have been rationally purified, we have the sense of returning home, of being in a familiar mode of being, even though it is a new accomplishment for all humans living after the Fall. Since Whichcote interprets the Fall symbolically, we may say that truth of first inscription is not temporally first in our souls so much as deeper in our souls; it is there lying in wait to be uncovered.

## B. Actual and potential knowledge in More

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<sup>968</sup> Scott, “Platonic”, p. 80.

<sup>969</sup> Whichcote, *Sermons*, Sermon 3, p. 79.

<sup>970</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>971</sup> *Ibid.*, Sermon 1, p. 39.

It is important that, for Whichcote, the innate truths of first inscription need to be ‘awakened’; we are not—at least after the Fall—born with actual knowledge, but rather a potential or predisposition to know specific things, and with a sense of recognition upon encountering the truth. In the same vein, Henry More expressly denies that we have any innate ideas in the sense of presentations in the mind of which we are immediately conscious from the beginning of our lives. Nevertheless, there are some ideas—much like Whichcote’s truths of first inscription—which are “Connatural and essential to the soul;”<sup>972</sup> these “distinct and indelible” ideas include that of God as absolute perfection, mathematical and geometric ideas (such as equality, symmetry, and the ideas of the five regular bodies), and logical ones (such as cause, effect, whole, part, like, unlike).<sup>973</sup> What remains to be seen, then, is the sense in which these ideas are innate.

In the following passage, More expressly denies that the mind is a blank slate and affirms the existence, in some sense, of innate ideas:

[Let us] briefly to touch upon that notable point in Philosophy, *Whether the Soul of man be Abrasa Tabula, a Table-book in which nothing is writ; or Whether she have some Innate Notions and Ideas in her self.* For so it is, that she having taken first occasion of thinking from externall Objects, it hath so imposed upon some mens judgments, that they have conceited that the Soul has no Knowledge nor Notion, but what is in a *Passive* way impressed or delineated upon her from the Objects of *Sense*; they not warily enough distinguishing betwixt extrinsicall Occasions, and the adequate or principle Causes of things.<sup>974</sup>

Though knowledge may begin temporally with sense perception, the mind itself furnishes the real content of knowledge. Awareness and understanding of particular ideas is thus a product of external stimulation through the senses (at least initially) and the mind’s own

<sup>972</sup> More, Henry. *An Antidote Against Atheism*. (London: James Flesher, 1662), book I, chapter iii, section 4. Henceforth, *Antidote*, (book, chapter, section).

<sup>973</sup> *Ibid.*, I.vi.3; cf. I.vi.6. See also, *Immortality* II.2.9, where these are called secondary notions, as is also the case in *Enchiridion metaphysicum: Henry More’s Manual of Metaphysics – a Translation of the Enchiridium Metaphysicum* (1679) with an Introduction and Notes, 2 vols. transl. Alexander Jacob. (Zurich: Georg Olms Verlag Hildesheim, 1995), chapter xxv, section 7. Henceforth, *EM*, (chapter, section).

<sup>974</sup> More, *Antidote*, I.v.1.

contribution.<sup>975</sup> As the abstract ideas listed above in particular are never presented as such to the mind from perception, it is the mind itself that is the real cause and substance of these ideas.

Continuing with the same passage, More begins to explain:

But the Mind of Man more free, and better exercised in close observations of its own operations and nature, cannot but discover that there is an active and *actuell Knowledge* in a man, of which these outward Objects are rather the reminders then the first begetters or implanters. And when I say *actuell Knowledge*, I do not mean that there is a certain number of *Ideas* flaring and shining to the *Animadversive Faculty*, like so many *Torches* or *Starres* in the *Firmament* to our outward Sight, or that there are any *Figures* that take their distinct places, and are legibly writ there like the *Red Letters* or *Astronomical Characters* in an *Almanack*: but I understand thereby an active sagacity in the Soul, or quick recollection, as it were, whereby some small businesses being hinted unto her, she runs out presently into more clear and larger conceptions.<sup>976</sup>

The perception of a drawn triangle, for example, serves to awaken and ‘remind us’ of the true idea and definition of a triangle, from which further geometrical knowledge is attainable.<sup>977</sup> But More’s use of the term ‘actual knowledge’ is confusing here, because it seems that what he means is closer to ‘potential knowledge’ in that an external stimulus is necessary for the mind to ‘beget’ its knowledge. The term ‘actual’ is, I believe, being used synonymously here with ‘active’, so that we may understand his meaning by focussing on the ‘active sagacity’ of the soul. The meaning of this term can be garnered from two points: a) if the mind “runs out into more clear and larger conceptions,” then we must already have some inchoate conceptions which need development;<sup>978</sup> and b) the human mind discovers its active knowledge in “its own operations and nature”. When combined

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<sup>975</sup> In a more contemporary context, Noam Chomsky has suggested that given sensory input, ensuing beliefs may contain more information than the sensory experience itself afforded; from this it can be inferred that the mind must be contributing something of its own in this system of input (sensation) and output (belief). See Chomsky, Noam, “Linguistics and Philosophy,” in Stich, ed., *Innate Ideas*, pp. 182-198.

<sup>976</sup> More, *Antidote*, I.v.2.

<sup>977</sup> *Ibid.*, I.iv.1-2. Cf. Cudworth, *EIM*, p. 106: “[the idea of the perfect triangle] was but occasionally or accidentally invited and drawn forth from the mind, upon the sight of it [the visible triangle]....”

<sup>978</sup> Scott, *Recollection*, p. 185.

these points imply that the mind is already operating through these inchoate ideas: they are already active in our thinking, whether we identify them or not; and perception of external objects is only the occasion for making them explicitly or consciously known.<sup>979</sup> This does not mean, however, that we are immediately conscious of these latently operative ideas from birth.

According to this interpretation, the mind, which may become explicitly conscious of certain ideas upon the outward occasion of perceiving particular instances or approximations of the idea, would be innately active with such ideas, much in the way that Kant would (with much more precision) describe the categories of the understanding and the ideas of reason.<sup>980</sup> When More states that by this active sagacity, “some small businesses being hinted unto [the mind], she runs out presently into more clear and larger conceptions,” I believe he is implying that the unconscious activity becomes conscious upon occasion for reflection—i.e., the ideas being employed without explicit self-awareness of this use become clear. They become larger in the sense that the conception changes from being bound to particulars (insofar as it is unconsciously active in perceiving or considering particulars) to an abstract object of reflection, which, in virtue of being universal, is ‘larger’. His triangle example confirms this interpretation: in order to

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<sup>979</sup> My use of the term ‘conscious’ is slightly anachronistic, as the term was only being developed in the middle of the seventeenth century. In fact, Cudworth is regarded as at least among the first writers to use the term as we generally take it now. More’s use of the term ‘animadversive faculty’ (which is used in the next quotation above) seems equivalent to Cudworth’s conception of ‘consciousness’, as both seem to refer to the power of the mind to focus its attention towards objects as inner presentations or ‘ideas’. For a fuller discussion of the development of the term and its distinction from ‘conscience’, see Udo Theil, “Cudworth and Seventeenth-Century Theories of Consciousness” in *The Uses of Antiquity: The Scientific Revolution and the Classical Tradition*. ed. Stephen Gaukroger. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991): 79-99.

<sup>980</sup> Cudworth’s epistemology, as we will see shortly, confirms this interpretation, since all knowledge, he claims, is ultimately self-knowledge, and that ideas are first and foremost active principles in the mind of which we may become self-consciously aware in reflection. More pertinently to the use of the words ‘actual’ and ‘potential’, Cudworth also describes the mind as having a ‘potential omniformity’, in contrast to God who has actual omniscience (*EIM*, p. 77).

recognize a drawn triangle as a triangle, one must already have a conception of triangularity and be using it in experience; nonetheless, one may not yet have a clear and distinct conception of triangularity.<sup>981</sup> By ‘actual knowledge,’ then, More is referring here to the process of reflection upon the ideas that are ‘excited’, which is to say transformed from latently operative functions of the mind to explicit abstract objects on which the mind may then continue to operate.<sup>982</sup>

If this is correct, then for More, the mind is actively knowing when it transforms its inchoate ideas, which are presumably active already, into clear and large, or, as he puts it elsewhere, clear and distinct ideas.<sup>983</sup> This process is likened to a “quick recollection, as it were,” occasioned by perception of particulars. The latter are therefore akin to reminders, as he says, implying that we already knew the ideas but forgot them. Still, the sense in which we ‘have prior knowledge’ and the sense in which we ‘forget’ are vague. To my knowledge, More does not speculate, as Whichcote does, that this knowledge was explicit prior to the Fall. The best More claims he can do to clarify is to employ the following analogy:

Suppose a skilfull *Musician* fallen asleep in the field upon the grasse, during which time he shall not so much as dream any thing concerning his Musicall faculty, so that in one sense there is no *actuell Skill* or Notion, nor representation of any thing musicall in him; but his friend sitting by him, that cannot sing at all himself, jogs him and awakes him, and desires him to sing this or the other Song, telling him two or three words of the beginning of the Song, whereupon he presently takes it out of his mouth, and sings the whole Song upon so slight and slender intimation: So the *Mind* of Man being jogg’d and awakened by the impulses of outward Objects, is stirred up into a more full and clear conception of what was but imperfectly hinted to her from externall occasions; and this Faculty I venture to call *actuell Knowledge*, in such a sense as the sleeping Musician’s skill might

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<sup>981</sup> Cragg, *Cambridge Platonists*, p. 51.

<sup>982</sup> Hence, what More writes of logical and mathematical ideas might well apply to all innate ideas: “*Illae Notiones quae vulgo vocantur secundae (quales sunt multae tum Logicae tum Mathematicae) non sunt Modificationes ullius Re-actionis corporae sive Mechanicae, nec per sensus intrans, sed ab ipsa Mente apud seipsam, data ab externis Objectis occasione, excitantur.*” (*EM*, xxv.7, last two emphases added)

<sup>983</sup> Cragg, *Cambridge Platonists*, p. 51.

be called *actuell Skill* when he thought nothing of it.<sup>984</sup>

It is worth assessing this analogy; for not only is it the only guide we have to More's thinking on this matter, but both Whichcote and Cudworth also rely on notions of re-acquaintance, recognition, or recollection. To begin, it should be noted that while asleep, "there is no *actuell Skill* or Notion" in the musician *in one sense*; yet, in another sense, "the sleeping Musician's skill might be called *actuell Skill* when he thought nothing of it."

In order to clarify these two senses of actuality, it seems appropriate to employ Aristotle's distinction between first and second actuality from *de Anima* II.5. In making the distinction, Aristotle himself draws the analogy between possessing and employing knowledge on one hand, and being asleep and being awake on the other hand.<sup>985</sup> He then explains the distinction more fully through the example of someone with grammatical knowledge.<sup>986</sup> As a human soul, a person has the potential to have knowledge of grammar. Prior to the acquisition of language, a child would be in the state of potentiality in this regard. Yet once knowledge is acquired, it may or may not be consciously or actively employed at any given point. One may know, for example, that a predicate ought to correspond with the subject in gender and number, but one is usually not thinking about this fact. In such ordinary moments, the knowledge is considered to be in first actuality; it is in the soul as its possession, but it is not being fully activated. It is thus a further potentiality from the potentiality of the child who does not yet possess the knowledge. When that

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<sup>984</sup> More, *Antidote*, I.v.3. That innate knowledge in More seems to be either fundamentally practical (i.e., skill) or at least closely related to skill is a distinguishing point from Descartes' version of innatism, which concerns "ideas or notions that are the content of ... thoughts." (*Notes on a Certain Programme*, quoted in Stich, *Innate Ideas*, p. 3.) The knowledge that the Cambridge Platonists are interested in is fundamentally moral and religious; one of the main short-comings of their theories of innateness is that they do not specify the extent to which one must have conscious or occurrent beliefs in order to have moral-religious knowledge. I will be arguing, though, that their accounts make the most sense under the view that ideas (e.g. of God) and beliefs (e.g. concerning His goodness) must indeed be, or have been, occurrent in order to attain the kind of knowledge required for salvation.

<sup>985</sup> Aristotle, *de Anima*, 412a22-26.

<sup>986</sup> *Ibid.*, 417a20-30.

grammatical rule is being thought of or applied in a particular situation, the knowledge is now in second actuality. The differences here concern the extent to which something is consciously in the soul or not.

Returning to More, then, while asleep, the musician's knowledge is not active ("when he thought nothing of it"); such a situation corresponds to Aristotle's first actuality, which is a mixture of actuality and potentiality: the knowledge is actual in the sense that the musician has learned it and therefore knows it, but since it is not presently active, is it still in potentiality. When awakened and singing aloud, the musician's knowledge is in second actuality, which is to say, fully actualized. The sleeping musician thus 'has actual skill' in the sense of first actuality and yet 'has no actual skill' in the sense of second actuality.

To proceed, the musician in More's analogy, to whom all human minds are likened, is clearly not born with his musical knowledge of particular songs. What he is born with is an aptitude or talent for music; unlike his friend, he is predisposed to having musical skill, or has potential musical knowledge. (We might say that the friend also has the potential in virtue of being a human, but this point seems inessential to the intention of the analogy.) Next, he must have first learned the songs that he knows in order to be able to recall them upon being prompted by his friend. There is thus the disposition, the initial learning and the recollection. (The disposition is the potential, while after the initial learning, the knowledge of the songs is in first actuality when not being employed and second actuality when it is being recalled.) What, then, is the intended analogy with logical, mathematical, and, more importantly, religious and moral knowledge?

There are two serious difficulties in trying to answer this question. The first is that, in applying the analogy, we are pressed to consider the non-self-conscious use of ideas—i.e., what I called the activity of inchoate ideas—to be in first actuality, while the 'clearer

and larger' ideas that are awakened would be in second actuality. From a technical point of view, this may not be sound. Aristotle's grammarian's knowledge, for example, does not undergo any qualitative change when shifting from first to second actuality as it seems to for More, going from inchoate to clear and distinct ideas.

The second difficulty in applying the musical analogy to the other forms of knowledge is that there is a significant discrepancy between the two sides of the analogy with respect to the number of phases involved in the process of knowing. To explain, More presents knowledge in general as a two-step transition from under-developed but (sometimes) active ideas to clear and distinct ideas (which are still sometimes employed and sometimes not). This transition occurs upon occasioning by perception. This may appear to work quite easily with the musical analogy: being subject to sense perception and calling up one's innate ideas is supposed to be like being a musician that already has the musical skill and knowledge and is awakened and prompted to sing. Yet once we consider the fact that the musician must presumably have learned the songs and is only born with a musical *disposition*, we must consider three interpretive possibilities in order to clarify the analogy:

- i) Knowledge is innate in the sense of potentiality as disposition. Upon occasioning by perception, the knowledge of "connatural and essential" ideas becomes actual in the sense that the ideas become formed inchoately and get employed in experience without explicit reflection on their use or nature.
- ii) Knowledge is innate in the sense of potentiality as disposition. Upon occasioning by perception, the knowledge becomes actual in the sense of fully actualized, or clear and distinct ideas.

iii) Knowledge is innate in the sense of the inchoate use of ideas. Then upon occasioning by external perception, the knowledge becomes actual in the sense of clear and distinct ideas in reflection.

To assess these possibilities, I believe it is best to go right to the overall purpose of More's discussion, which is to indicate how it is that we have some innate knowledge of moral and religious ideas. Under the first interpretation, then, we would be born with a disposition towards true religion and morality, and this could be sufficiently brought out through education, even if we were not consciously aware of the ideational bases of our actions. That More's analogy is between religious-moral knowledge and a *skill* is significant here: we are initially taught it in a practical way, which is to say, as a way of living and as a set of norms and values which may or may not become known as clear and distinct ideas (i.e., in a theoretical way) once reason has been developed. Otherwise put, in a Christian society (such as seventeenth-century England), people may be taught the ideas pragmatically by learning how to use them before they are able to comprehend their semantic content. In general, common ideas are taught in the way that children learn language: by being socialized into a world in which those ideas are in use.<sup>987</sup> Logical notions in particular (e.g., causality) provide good examples for the kind of understanding that usually remains at the level of implicit use, it being quite difficult to arrive at clear and distinct perception of the abstract ideas themselves. Having an intuitive sense of the meaning is sufficient to be functional in the world.

This first interpretation seems to accord with Whichcote's comments above that all knowledge comes from learning, despite an innate sense or feeling of truth, and it seems that such intuitive knowledge would be sufficient for salvation in the context of straight-

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<sup>987</sup> This is how Meno, to recall, thought that virtue was taught.

forward and proper Christian education. However, this is clearly not the case in mid-seventeenth-century England; in that “age so philosophical”, what is required to safeguard the truth from all the false opinions that are circulating is explicit knowledge in the sense of rational comprehension in clear and distinct ideas. That is in fact what the Cambridge Platonists set out to do in their writings. What they believe is required in order to combat the rise of superstition, atheism and enthusiasm is a higher level of self-consciousness wherein one has clear theoretical knowledge concerning the principles of one’s actions, and not merely an intuitive understanding furnished by inculcative education (which was typical in their Calvinist climate).<sup>988</sup> What is required is that one’s attention be drawn towards those ideas that are already operative but obscurely and indistinctly—and hence detrimental to one’s own life and the lives of others—in order to fortify the truth and assure salvation.

Since the goal must be clear and distinct knowledge, the analogy must be understood under either the second or third interpretation listed above. Under the second interpretation of the analogy, the distinct moral and religious ideas would not merely be absorbed through socialization, but presented explicitly in order to be comprehended as clear and distinct ideas as well. The difference from the first interpretation here is that a level of self-consciousness would be required; whereas in the first case, one could be educated or socialized without having clear theoretical knowledge concerning the principles of one’s actions, one would have both kinds of understanding in the second interpretation. This would be equivalent to the musician when first learning songs: the disposition would immediately be actualized in a fully conscious way, after which the ideas would fall into memory (i.e., into first actuality) until later recollection.

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<sup>988</sup> Scott, “Platonic”, p. 93.

However, for the second interpretation to be the most plausible, More would not have presented the analogy as he does; he would rather have had someone teaching the musician the song, with the musician finding it inherently easy to learn, somehow familiar, catchy, etc. For the disposition must be for specific songs, not just any song at all; otherwise, on the side of moral-religious ideas, there would again be no assurance that these were true ideas being occasioned.

It therefore seems that the third interpretive option is most likely what More had in mind. First, recall that the ideas are *indelible* and *connatural*, and that the mind is not a *tabula rasa*. Moreover, his comment that upon occasioning by perception, the mind “runs out into more clear and larger conceptions” implies that the conceptions were already there in an inchoate manner. As discussed above, they would be inchoate insofar as they are operative in one’s thinking and acting, yet their content would not be known clearly and distinctly. The occasioning by perception would then be the drawing of one’s attention to the ideas that are already operative so that they might become clearly and distinctly comprehended.

More does not say whether our inchoate ideas get developed into clear and distinct ones by degree or not. However, that such development may or does occur by degree seems to be implied in the following points made by More. First, he claims that the idea of God (which is the most fundamental and important of the innate ideas) is composed “out of familiar conceptions which the Mind of man ordinarily figures it self into...”<sup>989</sup> This suggests that the complete idea is a composition of several more basic ideas of each of God’s attributes (extended to infinity), such as goodness, wisdom, power, etc.<sup>990</sup> From this

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<sup>989</sup> More, *Antidote*, I.iv.2.

<sup>990</sup> *Ibid.*, I.iv.1; cf. More, *Immortality*, I.iv.2.

it may be inferred that substantive ideas may be developed in degrees insofar as attributes are compounded. Second, his claim that there is “no Nation under the scope of Heaven that does not doe Divine worship to something or other, and in it to God, as they conceive”<sup>991</sup> implies that other peoples have incomplete ideas of the same God. For example, citing the Iliad (III.277), he refers to the Greek worship of “*the Sun that hears and sees all things*” and claims that “this is very near the true Notion of a *God*.”<sup>992</sup> That is, they had a conception of God that included some but not all of His attributes. Finally, he concludes his discussion of other nations’ worship by claiming that “these poor barbarous Souls had once the true knowledge of *God* and of his *Worship*, and by some hidden Providence may be recover’d into it again...”<sup>993</sup> While it is noteworthy that he attributes prior knowledge that was lost in these nations, for now what is more significant is the fact that they may improve on their inchoate conceptions of God.

Given these points, it can be inferred that at each point in the development of the true idea of God, there would be some understanding of that idea, but not a complete one. To speculate for a moment, the most basic level of comprehension—the starting point, if you will—might be little more than a feeling or sense of divinity without much conceptual content whatsoever. (This speculation would render More’s thinking here consistent with Whichcote’s “natural and indelible Sence of Deity”.) The conceptual content would then get developed, so that the initial sense or feeling is comprehended (though not destroyed or overcome) through various attributions. The aim of such development for More would be that the inchoate idea not get misdirected into enthusiasm or superstition (which leads to atheism). Thus it would seem that for More, all humans immediately have some ideas at a

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<sup>991</sup> More, *Antidote*, I.1x.5

<sup>992</sup> *Ibid.*, I.1x.8

<sup>993</sup> *Ibid.*, I.x.10.

basic level of comprehension, and the degree to which we have complete theoretical knowledge of these ideas, clearly and distinctly, depends on culture and education.<sup>994</sup>

Now, if it is granted that development of ideas would generally occur in degrees, the role of the prompting or ‘reminding’ becomes quite important, and the question must be asked what sort of prompt or occasion suffices for the further development of an idea, and what sort suffices for the knowledge that is necessary for salvation. Here again, the question of the place of revelation becomes highly significant; and here too there seems to be an ambivalence to More’s position on whether Scripture is necessary for the prompting of the true moral and religious ideas.

On one hand, the fact that even the most rigorous philosophy—which consists largely of explicating ideas—is considered a “road to Scripture”<sup>995</sup> suggests that ideas are fully developed only upon the reception of revelation. This would make the prompting by the non-musician in the analogy equivalent to the reading or hearing of Scripture. Indeed, More’s description of the prompting by perception sounds much like Whichcote’s comment that Scripture awakens, excites, and improves reason. Moreover, that the prompt is a reminder for More hearkens back to Whichcote’s claim that Scripture calls us back to our original state. Yet, whereas in Whichcote this state is metaphysically but not temporally prior (for he does not interpret the story of Adam and Eve literally), it seems that such a state is also historically prior in More; for his claim that other nations did originally have true conceptions of God and of proper worship suggests that the loss or ‘forgetfulness’ of

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<sup>994</sup> As will be shown in the following chapters, Cudworth more clearly espouses a similar theory and, as Mackinnon has pointed out in her notes to More’s writings, Cudworth works this out in Book 4 of his *True Intellectual System*. See *Philosophical Writings of Henry More*, ed. Flora Isabel MacKinnon. (New York: AMS Press, 1969), p. 300.

<sup>995</sup> In Popkin, “More and Conway,” p. 105.

the true ideas actually occurred in time. Moreover, it seems to follow that entire nations inherit the result of that loss and may be redeemed by “some hidden Providence”.

On the other hand, More’s example of a drawn triangle occasioning the mind to discover its own general idea of triangularity suggests two things: a) that the perception be of an example or manifestation of the general idea; and, more pertinently, b) that the perception can be of an imperfect example or manifestation. Indeed, there would likely be no perfect instantiation of the idea in the sensuous realm at all. Hence, it can be inferred that the perception of, say, imperfectly just and pious actions or people—which is to say, of immorality and impiety—could prompt the discovery of the true moral and religious ideas within. The fact that the Cambridge Platonists read, taught and praised so many heathens supports the supposition that perception of imperfection in the world (i.e., a negative prompt) may suffice as occasioning for proper knowledge.

But this leads again into the problem of the superfluity of Scripture: if imperfect perceptions can awaken truth, why does the truth need to be as correctly represented as possible (as it is in Scripture)? Revelation would perhaps constitute a particularly powerful occasion for minds to discover the truth within, but it would not be the singularly necessary condition.

The solution to this problem that I offer is that all perception, including that of Scripture, is imperfect. Scripture is perfect insofar as it is the best representation of truth; but *qua* representation, it is imperfect, signifying the perfect, which is a mode of life or spirit—that is, the life of illuminated reason. Scripture would thus be necessary to awaken one’s own reason to the fullest degree, which is to say, to understand the real spirit of the text and to bring that to life again in one’s own soul. In Whichcote’s words, Scripture is “inwardly received, so as to dye and colour the Soul: so as to settle a Temper and

Constitution: and so it is restorative to our Nature. . . . By the Spirit of the Gospel we are transformed into another Nature, Life, and Temper.”<sup>996</sup> Moreover, “The *first* Motion of Religion is to understand what is true of God: And the *second* is to express it in our Lives, and to copy it out in our Works. The *Former* is our Wisdom: and the *Latter* is our Goodness. In these Two consist the Health and Pulchritude of our Minds.”<sup>997</sup>

This proposed solution fits with More’s musician analogy quite well. It is important to note that both the musician and the friend are already familiar with the song; the song already must therefore exist in the world as something in public circulation (or at least in common between the two men) in order for that same song to be excited through the imperfect prompting. The latter is represented in the way the song is repeated by the friend to the musician (i.e., merely telling him two or three words). The musician is able to actualize the song fully, as it ought to be, while the friend can only represent it in the wrong form. This seems analogous to an improper method of drawing out the moral-religious ideas, such as the inculcative method typical of Calvinist education, in which Scripture is taught without the free use of reason to interpret and judge.<sup>998</sup> That is, not being able to sing the song is analogous to not being able to understand Scripture in the right spirit—i.e., through one’s own reasoning which is then able to put the real meaning into action, for just as the full musical knowledge is a skill as well as knowledge of certain words, full moral-religious knowledge is likewise both the knowledge of principles and the practical capacity to act accordingly.

The reason why any ordinary moral or religious perception does not suffice, then, is that the prompting must be more specifically directed. For example, the mind may reflect

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<sup>996</sup> Whichcote, *Sermons*, Sermon 2, p. 55.

<sup>997</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>998</sup> Cf. Scott, “Platonic”, pp. 92-3; and, on Puritan restrictions, see Roberts, *Puritanism*, chapter 3.

on its sense of fear and awe and move increasingly towards the idea of God as mere punisher, which is the basis of one form of superstition.<sup>999</sup> Recall that Whichcote says that reason is not only awakened and excited by revelation, but directed and improved. What is required for full actualization of knowledge in the musician is that the very object of knowledge be used to direct his attention to recalling the right song (even if presented in an imperfect form).

In sum, the interpretation I offer of More's analogy is that innate ideas are latently operative, and become fully actualized by degree upon prompting by external perception. This prompting must be directed specifically, otherwise some perception may call up an inaccurate, or even different idea. For specific prompting to occur, there must be an instantiation or representation of the idea already in the world to be perceived, so that when one encounters it, one's still inchoate idea, developed thus far through education, becomes completed, which is to say fully comprehended and transformed into life. This condition is provided by Scripture. In Whichcote's words, "Christ denotes as, [*in one sense,*] a Person engaged for us, in a way we well understand, and give account of; *so*, a Nature in us, which we very well *feel*, and can *express*."<sup>1000</sup>

### C. Recollection as metaphor

As Dominic Scott has discussed, this theory of drawing out innate knowledge resembles Plato's theory of recollection. Scott rightfully claims that the essential point in both Plato and the Cambridge Platonists is their interest in the kind of education that turns

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<sup>999</sup> See Smith, *Discourses*, Discourse 2; and More, *Antidote*, I.i.1.

<sup>1000</sup> Whichcote, *Sermons*, Sermon 4, p. 161.

the student inward and draws out what is implicit.<sup>1001</sup> Cudworth, for example, explicitly alludes to the famous passage in the *Theaetetus* where Socrates compares himself to a midwife,<sup>1002</sup> and praises “the maieutic and obstetricious teaching”.<sup>1003</sup> Where Plato and the Cambridge Platonists seem to diverge, though, is on whether recollection is literally occurring or not.

One point of similarity that is worth noting, and which Scott does not, is the fact that a very specific kind of prompting or reminding is necessary for the actualization of both the musician’s knowledge in More’s analogy and the slave’s knowledge in Plato’s *Meno*. The mere presentation of the triangle to the slave does not suffice for the excitation of the knowledge of the Pythagorean theorem; it is only through Socrates’ very specific questions that he comes to know the theorem; and the direction of Socrates’ questioning, and hence the direction of the slave’s reasoning, presupposes Socrates’ own prior knowledge of the theorem. Clearly he knows it, for he has to make a case for him not merely inculcating the theorem.<sup>1004</sup> Hence, the slave’s actualization of knowledge depends on knowledge having already been actualized in another mind; it must be explicit in the world in order for it to be drawn out of him. Indeed, this seems to be the real condition that makes the slave’s knowledge possible, as opposed to the soul’s supposed prior existence and knowledge. The postulates of the soul’s pre-existence, its prior knowledge, and its recollection of that knowledge in embodied life are unnecessary so long as one has a sound faculty of reason and there is prior knowledge in someone else—i.e., an existing tradition. (The existence of a tradition, as More himself points out, implies an original inventor and

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<sup>1001</sup> Scott, “Platonic”, p. 93.

<sup>1002</sup> *Theaetetus*, 149a-151d.

<sup>1003</sup> *EIM*, p. 114.

<sup>1004</sup> *Meno*, 84c-d.

subsequent learners;<sup>1005</sup> this original ‘invention’ (which ought to be understood according to the Latin roots as ‘coming upon’) constitutes the initial revelation, which would probably mean the prompting of innate ideas by God, in whom all knowledge resides eternally.)

Tying the comparisons together, the song in More’s analogy, the Pythagorean theorem in the *Meno*, and the content of revelation all need to be already in existence in the world in order for some living carrier—i.e., the non-musical friend, the ignorant Socrates, and the educator (such as these Platonists working at Cambridge)—to be able to prompt one’s ideas to become explicit. By replacing the soul’s supposed pre-existent knowledge with revealed tradition as the condition of prior knowledge to prompt the actualization of innate ideas, the Cambridge Platonists are able to accept Plato’s premise of innate knowledge, but reject the theory of recollection.<sup>1006</sup>

When More says that active sagacity, upon occasioning by perception, is a “quick recollection, *as it were*,” it is clear that he is self-consciously using the term ‘recollection’ as a metaphor. Scott defends this interpretation quite cogently by showing that More (and the rest of the Cambridge Platonists) do not believe in the conditions that would be necessary for literal recollection to be occurring. Recollection requires that there be, in the same individual mind, actual consciousness of ideas, then forgetting, then remembering.<sup>1007</sup> But the initial actual consciousness does not occur upon birth, as More’s comment about the innate ideas not being “like so many *Torches* or *Starres* in the *Firmament* to our outward Sight”<sup>1008</sup> clearly indicates. If recollection is to be taken literally, the initial awareness would have to have been prior to birth, as it is in Plato’s accounts of the theory.

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<sup>1005</sup> More, *Antidote*, I.x.6

<sup>1006</sup> Cf. Scott, *Recollection*, 186.

<sup>1007</sup> Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), I.iv.21; II.x.2. Henceforth ‘*Essay*’.

<sup>1008</sup> More, *Antidote*, I.v.2

Thus if one were to deny the pre-existence of the soul altogether, there could be no recollection. Cudworth denies just this, for example, and follows Christian orthodoxy by claiming that God creates souls perpetually.<sup>1009</sup> Whichcote never gives any definitive indication one way or the other.<sup>1010</sup> More, however, does believe in the pre-existence of the soul.<sup>1011</sup> Moreover, he affirms another condition of literal recollection, namely the belief that the soul had actual knowledge prior to embodiment.<sup>1012</sup> Nevertheless, this does not imply that knowledge is actually a form of recollection for More.

First, despite the soul's knowledge prior to birth, there is no need for recollection to be the only route to knowledge. As Scott writes:

Both now and before its incarnation, the soul has access to these truths by the divine light which accounts for its active sagacity. Recollection is unnecessary because the faculty by which the soul knew before is still intact. So what emerges from the apparent paradox of More denying recollection but espousing pre-existence is that, for him, pre-existence is quite irrelevant to epistemology.<sup>1013</sup>

A second, more refutative point against the theory of recollection (in comments on *Anthroposophia Magica*) is that we do not perceive any recollection in the actualization of knowledge.<sup>1014</sup> More clearly presupposes that, if there is any recollection, there must be awareness that one is remembering; yet there is no such awareness in ordinary knowing.<sup>1015</sup>

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<sup>1009</sup> *TIS*, vol. 1, p. 79; Scott, "Platonic", p. 87.

<sup>1010</sup> Scott, "Platonic", p. 87.

<sup>1011</sup> See More's *Lux orientalis, or, An enquiry into the opinion of the Eastern sages concerning the pre-existence of souls, and the Discourse of truth*. (London: Collins and Lounds, 1682); cf. Popkin, "More and Conway", p. 103.

<sup>1012</sup> Scott, "Platonic", p. 89.

<sup>1013</sup> Scott, "Platonic", p. 89.

<sup>1014</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1015</sup> Scott denies this implied premise. By using an example of knowing one's way around a location that was familiar from childhood without realizing that one is remembering, he claims that awareness of remembering is not necessary to be remembering ("Platonic", p. 89). I do not think Scott is correct here, as it seems that knowing one's way around a place is an experience which is precisely characterized as involving a sense of repetition, and therefore of remembering. The question comes down to what it means to perceive recollection going on—that is, whether a sense of familiarity suffices as 'perception' or whether one must have a clear idea of the operation of one's own mind. Either way, though, the important point for now is not whether More sufficiently refutes the theory of recollection; it's that he clearly does not espouse it.

Scott's evidence that the Cambridge Platonists reject the theory of recollection is straightforwardly convincing. However, what Scott does not consider is whether there may actually be recollection occurring in the actualization of knowledge, but in an agent that is other than the individual soul. Such an hypothesis will quite likely sound rather odd; yet there are textual reasons to believe that this is what at least Cudworth actually had in mind without saying so explicitly. Though there would be no recollection going on within each individual mind—hence there is no subjective experience of recollection, as More points out—the actualization of knowledge in each individual would constitute Man's progressive recollection of its forgotten knowledge.

More's hope that other nations might, by some hidden Providence, recover their original knowledge seems to suggest that nations as a whole have a significant history, and taken as whole, each (or at least some) initially has knowledge, loses it, then possibly regains it. This would constitute recollection in the collective entity of the nation if one were to regard it as a whole and continuous entity. However, he still only speaks of the "poor barbarous souls" in those nations, and not the nations as a whole; as well, he explicitly holds a metaphysics of substance individualism which would rule out the possibility of there being any collective human agent: "Every Substance is of itself an individual substance, and universals but a logical notion arising from our comparing of like nature together."<sup>1016</sup> Humans are presumably alike in essential and inessential ways: in virtue of, say, having the faculty of reason, and, say, being of a certain nationality. Hence, it is clear that the hypothesis of collective recollection does not square with More's metaphysics.

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<sup>1016</sup> More, *EGMG*, IX.ii.5.

Yet, as will be seen in chapters that follow, Cudworth's metaphysics does allow for collective entities that are not merely logical notions, but real existents. Moreover, that humanity as a whole constitutes a collective entity is, as I will be showing, an underlying notion in his writings, and it sets his ontology and his method apart from the other Cambridge Platonists' on one hand, and from his opponents' (such as Hobbes and Descartes) on the other. One way to express this difference is that for More, there is a singular idea that runs through history—namely, the spread of the Gospel; that is, the Word is the constant which grounds history, taken as the variable actualization of the Word in particular individuals. In Cudworth, the Word, which exists eternally in the mind of God, has a correlate which exists in the world in addition to (and through) individual souls. This is the Church as a metaphysical entity, with whom God is in union—both eternally and in the temporal world.

My thesis for the next four chapters is that recollection is still an operative notion in Cudworth's thinking, and, I believe, in More's to some extent; but that it depends on the link of a tradition of revealed knowledge: it is with respect to the entire history of humankind that the complete drawing out of an individual's innate knowledge constitutes and contributes to a recollection of what was formerly known and forgotten; and Scripture stands as the ultimate basis of this history. To adumbrate the whole trajectory, knowledge appears in the world through revelation, then it is forgotten for the most part—which is to say, it is known inchoately by most, if not all individuals, until, given certain historical conditions, the knowledge that has been kept alive yet mostly dormant through tradition is retrieved on an explicit, philosophical level.

## Chapter 11: Cudworth's epistemology and ontology of ideas

### A. Cudworth's project as a whole and the place of the *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*

Cudworth's epistemology is chiefly developed in books III and IV of the *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, the main purpose of which is to establish that moral truths are real and unchanging ideas which have their constant basis in the mind of God. There are two ways to understand the meaning of this undertaking of Cudworth's—one is to set out the bases for the soteriological solution (as discussed in Chapter 9, §A); the other is to continue with his project, begun in the *True Intellectual System*, of a basic ontology.

Speaking from the soteriological perspective, Cudworth's major works as a whole constitute an elaborate attempt to prove a simple theological point: that God will execute divine justice on Judgment Day, and that we can ensure our salvation by living a virtuous life governed by reason. Indeed, this may serve as a general expression of the position common to all of the Cambridge Platonists.<sup>1017</sup> To this end, Cudworth sought to establish the following necessary premises: i) that a rational God exists; ii) that moral absolutes exist and are discoverable through reason; iii) that humans have the power to choose to live according to this discovery, and iv) that divine judgment is based on this choice. While *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* was intended to contain this entire proof, only the first premise was dealt with—albeit exhaustively—in the work that was actually published under this title in 1678. The rest was left unpublished in his lifetime.

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<sup>1017</sup> See Beiser, *Sovereignty*, pp. 136-8.

The main purpose of *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* (1731) is to establish the second premise; more specifically, it is to show that there are eternal moral ideas which are somehow innate in the human mind, and which are ‘copies’ of the ideas present in the divine Mind. These ideas thus serve as the common element in which human action and divine judgment correspond: it is the same eternal law which binds the agent and the judge. On the side of divine judgment, he must refute voluntarism (Descartes’ in particular), by which God may act according to arbitrary will. On the side of human action, Cudworth must refute conventionalism (Hobbes’ in particular), according to which there is no moral law prior to human contracts or convention. In short, he must show that there is an objective and rational order of things that is subject neither to human nor divine will.

Yet what we also see in Cudworth’s works is how the innatist epistemology fits into a larger ontological project and serves to explicate the nature of real existents: ideas, which are the common link among God, World and Man, have various modes of existence; and human knowledge is the mode in which God’s emanations in the world come to fruition. The process of drawing out the ideas which are latent in our minds is thus not only soteriologically significant, as it is in Whichcote in particular, but also ontologically significant. The latter significance is what makes Cudworth so interested in intellectual history, and it is in this light that his philological method, which nearly all commentators have either ignored or scorned, can best be understood. Over the next four chapters, it will become clearer why and how history is relevant to knowledge—or, rather, how knowledge is relevant to history.

## B. On the subjective and objective nature of ideas

In order to refute Hobbes' conventionalism, Cudworth presents a positive theory of moral realism, whereby notions of right and wrong are unchanging intelligible entities that do not depend on human reason or will for their existence. Very roughly, his argument begins with the distinction between 'sense' and 'knowledge', and his claim that knowledge is, most generally, an awareness of that which is common among different perceptions. Such awareness cannot arise from any of the things perceived, nor from the perceptions themselves; it must therefore arise from some inherent power of the mind. This power is the activity of innate ideas, through which our perceptions become meaningful. Cudworth continues by trying to show that these ideas are not merely in our minds, but constitute the reality of the objects, despite their being only modifications of mind. Finally, he argues that ideas—including moral ones—are eternally and immutably existent in the mind of God, which is the basis for all other reality.

There is thus a correspondence theory of truth at work here, according to which immutable ideas constitute both the metaphysical principle of things and the means by which we comprehend them—that is, with respect to human minds, ideas have objective and subjective existence. As we will see, both are grounded in God's mind: the objective existence of ideas is based on their being thought in God's mind, while the subjective existence is based on a duplication of God's power of thinking that is granted to humans.<sup>1018</sup>

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<sup>1018</sup> The notion of duplication has an interesting and ambiguous place in Cudworth's thinking. For Cudworth's use of the term with respect to the levels of consciousness, see Vili Lähteenmäki (forthcoming), "Cudworth on Consciousness (*British Journal for the History of Philosophy*). Lähteenmäki's analysis seems accurate to me; however, I would point out that he has not given any explanation as to what is being duplicated in the first place, hence why the term 'duplicated' is used at all. My suggestion is that the general power of the mind, originally in God's mind, has been duplicated in humans; moreover, the essences of things are duplications of particular ideas in God's mind. Hence within the duplicated individual mind—which Lähteenmäki rightly relates to consciousness in general—there occurs a further duplication of the objectively existing ideas of things through perception, which prompts innate

To proceed in more detail now, the argument begins with a claim that the denial of immutable moral ideas or entities (as in Hobbes, for example) is based on the denial of any fixed essences. This, in turn, would follow from the Heraclitean view that all things are in motion.<sup>1019</sup> Under this latter supposition, knowledge a) would be the same as perception; b) would always be relative to the perceiver, and c) would never be the same (due to the change occurring in the object).

Against epistemological relativism (i.e., b)) Cudworth cites Sextus Empiricus' point that these very 'Protagorean' claims—that all things are in motion and that knowledge is relative—are absolute judgments, and are not meant to be taken as true only relative to whomever is making the claim.<sup>1020</sup> If that were so, then the denial of these claims would be equally true for anyone who denied it. There must therefore be some power in us that is capable of making absolute judgments, since the senses themselves cannot do this, either with regard to their own respective objects or the objects of the other sense modalities. What remains to be shown is how the existence of a separate power of judgment implies fixed essences in the world and innate ideas in the mind. Cudworth continues to delineate a distinct sphere of mind by denying the equivalence of knowledge and sense (i.e., sense perception, including inner and outer sensation). He begins by examining sense.

In much the same fashion as Descartes' *Passions of the Soul* and Henry More's

*Enchiridion Ethicum*, Cudworth describes sense as having two components.<sup>1021</sup> The first is dispositions. Hence the actualization of particular ideas in human minds is a subjective re-duplication of ideas. From the subjective standpoint, actualization of particular ideas entails awareness of what was already within the soul in potentiality; hence this re-duplication occurs as self-consciousness for and in the individual mind. This is why, I believe, Cudworth calls self-consciousness a 'reduplication'.

<sup>1019</sup> *EIM*, pp. 29-34.

<sup>1020</sup> *Ibid.*, p 44.

<sup>1021</sup> Descartes, René. *The Passions of the Soul*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. transl. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Part I, esp. section 23 (p. 337); More, *Account of Virtue*, I.6-7. Passmore has put forward the view that "Cartesian influence penetrates every nook and cranny of Cudworth's epistemology." See J. A. Passmore, *Cudworth: An Interpretation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), p. 11. Henceforth

the impression on the body (caused by local motion of atoms), which is carried by the animal spirits via the nerves to the brain;<sup>1022</sup> the second is “a cogitation, recognition, or vital perception and consciousness of these motions or passions of the body,”<sup>1023</sup> which occurs in the soul. When the body suffers a passion, what appears immediately to the soul is not the changes in the nerves, spirits, or brain themselves, but rather sensible, or ‘phantastic’ qualities such as colour and heat. Yet according to atomism (which Cudworth endorses), the only properties of matter are shape, size, location, and motion;<sup>1024</sup> hence, those sensible qualities such as light and heat do not properly belong to the material things which caused the bodily passion.<sup>1025</sup> These ‘phantasms’, therefore, “must needs arise partly from some inward vital energy of the soul itself.”<sup>1026</sup> That is to say, both sensation (( That i ) and the sensible idea (s§) “are certain middle things begotten betwixt the agent and the patient, and resulting from the activity of the object without and the passion of the mind within...”<sup>1027</sup>

Knowledge differs from sense in that it grasps the identity of objects over time. There are two ways in which this is true. First, whereas in sense perception, one is aware only of the partial and changing qualities of objects, in knowing, one is aware of the unity or coherence of the various qualities as attributes of the same individual substance. In other words, perception can only provide hints or indications of what a thing *is*, which is identified solely by the intellect or understanding. Reminiscent of Descartes’ discussion of the wax in *Meditation II*, Cudworth writes:

Sense is but a slight and superficial perception of the outside and accidentals of a corporeal substance, it doth not penetrate into the profundity or inward

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“Cudworth”.

<sup>1022</sup> *EIM*, pp. 66-7.

<sup>1023</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>1024</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>1025</sup> Though Cudworth never employs these terms, it is very clear that this is the same distinction that Locke makes between primary and secondary qualities.

<sup>1026</sup> *EIM*, p. 51.

<sup>1027</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

essence of it. For a body may be changed as to all the several senses, and remain really the same that it was before. Wherefore, though men are commonly said to know things when they see and feel them, yet in truth by their bodily senses they perceive nothing but their outsides and external induments.<sup>1028</sup>

The entirety of an individual object can never be perceived at once; and in order to link several perceptions together, one must be employing a conception of the thing that is appearing in each perception. Hence “to know or understand,” in Cudworth’s terms, “is actively to comprehend a thing by some abstract, free, and universal reasonings (*rationes*).”<sup>1029</sup>

The second way in which knowing is the grasping of the identity of objects is when the term ‘objects’ refers not to the things perceived, but to the sensible qualities themselves (i.e., ()). Citing Plato’s *Theaetetus*, Cudworth explains that the identity of each quality, along with its difference from and likeness to others, cannot be sensed, but only known through ‘notions’, ‘conceptions’, or ‘ideas’ inherent in the mind.<sup>1030</sup> Hence in all recognition of distinct sensuous properties, the perception occurs along with the activity of notions through which we know or judge that the thing has this specific property as opposed to others.

In general, then, knowing in relation to sensible objects occurs through ideas or conceptions in the mind. Cudworth explains this in Stoic terms:

[W]hen foreign, strange, and adventitious forms are exhibited to the mind by sense, the soul cannot otherwise know or understand them, but by something domestic of its own, some active anticipation or prolepsis within itself, that occasionally reviving and meeting with it, makes it know it or take acquaintance with it.<sup>1031</sup>

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<sup>1028</sup> *EIM*, pp. 58-9.

<sup>1029</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>1030</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>1031</sup> *EIM*, p. 74. In her introduction to *EIM*, Hutton points out that the term ‘prolepsis’ is one of several Stoic terms and concepts employed by Cudworth, including ‘*koinnai ennoiai*’, and ‘*to hegemonikon*’ (pp. xix-xx). For Stoic and earlier uses of the term ‘prolepsis’ (in Epicurus), see Scott, *Recollection*, chapter 8 and “Interim Conclusions”. John Smith also refers to the Stoics explicitly when using the term ‘prolepses’ to speak of innate anticipations (*Selected Discourses*, Discourse 1, p.1)

Knowledge is thus a kind of circular motion wherein ideas actively provide the context in which sense perceptions become intelligible or meaningful, then the perceptions ‘invite’ awareness or consciousness of those ideas.<sup>1032</sup> That is, the mind “displays its own innate vigour from within”<sup>1033</sup> by making possible distinct perceptions, which are attributed to objects, and which invite judgment concerning those objects. In other words, all knowledge is actually self-knowledge—“nothing but the mind’s being conscious of some intelligible idea within itself.”<sup>1034</sup>

What has been shown so far is that the mind has its own “cognoscitive power” that is distinct from sense perception, but leads to knowledge of sensible things when in combination with it. Yet Cudworth, here following Aristotle and Plotinus, claims that there is another form of perception that is entirely distinct from sense perception. He writes:

[T]here are many objects of our mind, which we can neither see, hear, feel, smell nor taste, and which did never enter into it by any sense; and therefore we can have no sensible pictures or ideas of them, drawn by the pencil of that inward limner or painter which borrows all his colours from sense, which we call fancy. And if we reflect on our own cogitations of these things, we shall sensibly perceive that they are not fantastical, but noematical. As for example, justice, equity, duty and obligation, cogitation, opinion, intellection, volition, memory, verity, falsity, cause, effect, genus, species, nullity, contingency, possibility, impossibility, and innumerable more such there are that will occur to any one that shall turn over the vocabularies of any language.... And there are many whole propositions likewise, in which there is not any one word or notion that we can have any genuine phantasm of, much less any fancy reach to an apprehension of the necessity of the connection of the terms. As for example, *Nothing can be and not be at the same time*....<sup>1035</sup>

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<sup>1032</sup> *EIM*, p. 77.

<sup>1033</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>1034</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76. I do not think this generalization holds given what Cudworth has argued so far. From the fact that the mind must be active in all perception, which I grant, it does not follow that the objects of knowledge are actually the ideas being employed. As will be mentioned again, Cudworth does not allow any distinction between basic categories of understanding and ideas that are derived from experience, even though it seems from the argument above that he is relying on only the most formal of ideas. Though obtaining empirical ideas may require the use of categories (which I can accept as being innate in a Kantian sense), the variety of the objects of knowledge is not thereby accounted for, nor would it be by vaguely supposing that the categories combine differently in each empirical case.

<sup>1035</sup> *EIM*, pp. 79-80.

While such intelligible objects, or *noemata*, (i.e., ideas of justice, truth, cause, possibility, etc.) have no sensuous properties themselves, the power of imagination or fancy nevertheless often supplies “spurious and counterfeit, or verbal and nominal phantasms” to accompany the abstract thought.<sup>1036</sup> That is, we supply either some abstract image, or an image of an example, or simply the image or sound of the word itself. This is due to the strong habit of the power of fancy in “the vulgar, that are little accustomed to abstract cogitation.”<sup>1037</sup> That whatever imagination might supply is spurious is important because the point is that the mind employs ideas which have nothing fundamentally to do with sense, despite their being regularly applied in the world of sense. The proposition that nothing can be and not be at the same time, for example, is a purely metaphysical notion as a whole, as are each of its terms. Hence, not only is the mind actively involved in all perception, but its ideas may be employed beyond perception. For Cudworth, this is a clear demonstration that, at the least, there is something other than matter in the world that is encountered in and as thought.

Yet even if it is granted that mind is a distinct substance from matter, and that human intelligence actively employs ideas in cognizing the significance of things, there is nothing in Cudworth’s argument thus far which proves that the mind’s ideas are or refer to real and unchanging intelligible entities. Against nominalism, then, what Cudworth must therefore show—and this is the crux of the entire argument—is that ideas referring to both sensible and the intelligible entities, including moral ones, have objective reality. To do so, Cudworth first establishes that purposive ideas constitute the real essence of things, then argues that they are unchanging and grounded in the mind of God.

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<sup>1036</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>1037</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

Cudworth's argument moves from the nature of human artefacts to that of the rest of the world, which is understood as divine artefact. He argues that human artefacts are more than merely atoms and that their specific purposes can neither be reduced to the fundamental properties of matter nor disregarded altogether. In fact, as he puts it, an artificial thing has "more of entity in it because it partakes of art or intellectuality."<sup>1038</sup> A clock, to use his example, may be regarded abstractly as a conglomeration of atoms configured a certain way. Yet it is not distinguished from other objects merely by its shape and size. It is what it is, rather, in virtue of its having a co-ordination of parts, or a "relative conspiracy" for the sake of a unified purpose, namely, telling the time.<sup>1039</sup> If we do not understand that this object is meant to serve that purpose, and that this purpose is meaningful only in a larger context of human life, then we do not comprehend what that object actually is.

The knowledge of the identity and purposiveness of things occurs through *noemata*, or ideas which pertain to relations between things. A materialist would think that since the sensible objects themselves are the only real things there are, these relational ideas must somehow be non-real. For Cudworth, the denial of the reality of these relations is absurd, since it would be tantamount to the denial of all meaning in human life:

...that these relations [of means and end, cause and effect, etc.] ... are not ... mere notions or figments of the mind, without any fundamental reality in the things themselves without us corresponding to them, appears from hence because art and wisdom are the most real things which beget real effects of the greatest moment and consequence in nature and human life of any thing, and yet are conversant about nothing else but only the relations, proportions, aptitudes of things to one another, and to certain ends.<sup>1040</sup>

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<sup>1038</sup> *EIM*, p. 92.

<sup>1039</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>1040</sup> *EIM*, p. 87.

Ignoring the words “in nature” for a moment, his point is that intentions and purposiveness in general are what is most real to us, and yet they are entirely dependent on our noematic ideas. It is to say that the world of human meaning is our primary reality.

If one were to suppose that there were no reality to our purposive ideas and intentions due to this dependence on noematic ideas, then:

it would be indifferent whatever a man did in order to any end or effect. And all men (as Protagoras held) would be really alike wise and skilful. Then there would be no other extrinsical causality of any effect but that of efficiency, force, or power, which, in corporeal things, is nothing else but local motion. And no such thing as the causality of skill and art (that is commonly called the exemplary cause) distinct from force, power, and blind impetuosity. Nay, then virtue, justice, honesty must of necessity be figments also, because moral good and evil are [relational] things, and, which is more yet, external convenience and inconvenience, utility and inutility themselves, be nothing else but fancies also.<sup>1041</sup>

While one might dispute the reality of moral good and evil or justice, it is indeed difficult to deny the reality of the relation of means and end in general. Since such relations make artificial things significant, and since this significance is never perceived directly by sense, but is rather contained in the noematic or relational ideas that are in our minds,<sup>1042</sup> the truest meaning, and hence reality, of artefacts lies in the specific ways in which they instantiate and combine noematic ideas. In this way, things “partake of art or intellectuality”.

Cudworth continues his argument by moving from the ideas as constitutive of the reality of the objects to those ideas insofar as they must be in the minds of the designer and the perceiver:

... [N]o man that is in his wits will say that a stately and royal palace hath therefore less reality, entity, and substantiality in it than a heap of rubbish confusedly cast together, because forsooth the idea of it partly consists of logical notions, which are thought to be mere imaginary things, whereas the whole is all solid matter without this notional form. For this logical form (which is the passive stamp or print of intellectuality in it, the first archetypes contained in the idea or skill of the architect, and thence introduced into the rude matter, successively with much pains and labour) is the only thing that distinguishes it from mere dirt and rubbish, and gives

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<sup>1041</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87-8.

<sup>1042</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86, 91.

it the essence of an house or palace. And it hath therefore the more of entity in it because it partakes of art or intellectuality. But the eye or sense of a brute, though it have as much passively impressed upon it from without as the soul of man hath, when it looks upon the most royal and magnificent palace, if it should see all the inside also as well as the outside, could not comprehend from thence the formal idea and nature of an house or palace, which nothing but an active intellectual principle can reach unto.<sup>1043</sup>

The *knowing* subject, as opposed to the merely perceiving subject (i.e., the brute), calls up the same purposive idea that the architect or builder employed in “introducing it into rude matter”. The brute may participate in intellectuality insofar as the activity of ideas is necessary for consciousness of even sensuous qualities (as discussed above). However, it is the ability to identify things as this or that thing with this or that purpose and in relation to other things which distinguishes our minds from brutes’. This identification of the thing’s essence is also an identification, in another sense, with its creator in virtue of sharing the same power of understanding. Insofar as ideas are effective in the material world by the bestowal of purposiveness therein, the material thing is a medium for the communication of minds. As was discussed above, the perceiver knows his own active ideas in the comprehension of the thing’s essence, making all knowledge a kind of self-knowledge; as can now be seen, all knowledge also implies a recognition of another similar mind.

There are still two major steps that Cudworth must take at this point, the first of which is to apply this same kind of teleological thinking to natural things. Without doing so, the entire world of human meaning could still be said to exist, yet only contingently or relatively to human society and language. The consequence would be conventionalism: that nothing concerning human relations—and especially justice—is so by nature, but only by convention (i.e., Hobbes’ position). The second step, which I will come to shortly, is the characterization of the nature of ideas as modifications of mind.

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<sup>1043</sup> *EIM*, p. 92.

The first step begins with the bold statement that there is no essential difference between artificial and natural things:

For there is a nature in all artificial things and again, an artifice in all compounded things. Plants and animals being nothing else but artificial mechanisms, the latter of which especially are contrived with infinitely more wit, variety, and curiosity than any mechanisms or self-movers (*automata*) that were ever yet produced by human art.<sup>1044</sup>

Naturally occurring things—or at least living things—make sense to us insofar as they are organized by the relations of part and whole, cause and effect. Since sense perception is only aware of the colours, figures, and odours of the animal, its being a whole entity, “collected into one mechanical self-mover (*automaton*), consisting of many organical parts fitly proportioned together, all harmoniously conspiring to one end”<sup>1045</sup>—this awareness of the whole is possible only through the idea of the creature and through the relational ideas. Thus, the recognition of the unity of the creature is essentially the same as that of any other organized thing. Indeed, any sign of organization of parts indicates prior intelligence. After discussing the co-ordinated motion of the stars and planets, Cudworth writes that “[t]he same is to be affirmed of that huge and vast *automaton*, which some will have to be an animal likewise, the visible world or material universe, the world, commonly called *cosmos* or *mundus*, from the beauty of it.”<sup>1046</sup>

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<sup>1044</sup> *EIM*, p. 93.

<sup>1045</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>1046</sup> *EIM*, p. 94. Cf. *Timaeus* 30b, 34b. Cudworth’s argument here is a standard argument from design, which I do find cogent, since the appearance of design in the natural world may be explained as a result of chance given the theory of natural selection. Cudworth’s claim that there is art in all of nature clearly presupposes that there is divine intelligence; hence his argument here is not a proof of God’s existence at all. Though he does quite not intend to prove God’s existence here (he attempts to do so throughout *TIS*), this objection does, I believe, cripple his overall aim of proving that there is an immutable morality, since the latter depends on the existence of God. Assessment of all of this theological arguments is beyond the scope of this work.

Next it must be shown how the idea of the natural thing constitutes its real essence. He argues that the relations are not merely involved in our understanding, but also in the actual functioning of the thing:

the strength and ability of corporeal things themselves depend upon the mutual relations (*scheses*) and proportions of one thing to another. And this all men will be sensible of as something. And the truth hereof evidently appears from the mechanical powers. Nay the health and strength of the body of animals arises from the configuration of the organical parts and the fit contemperation of humours and insensible parts with one another.<sup>1047</sup>

Since all that exists materially is atoms, and sense does not reveal the whole, the purposiveness, and the proportionality, then unless we are to deny that the animal is actually a unified being which has these properties, then we must affirm that its organizing or unitive principle—i.e., its essence—is the idea. Since sense cannot perceive this principle, it must be intelligible; and yet it hard to deny its efficacy in regulating the life of the animal itself.

A crucial difficulty remains in understanding how the idea *actually* constitutes the thing's essence in the object itself. Cudworth's explanation leaves this difficulty intact, for he mostly says what this relation between purposive idea and material is *not*. To begin, the essence is not contained in the object in some occult way, as though the essence were some airy thing immersed in the atoms, and imprinted on the understanding mind from without.<sup>1048</sup> Nor are these "essences of things ... dead things, like so many statues, images, or pictures hung up somewhere by themselves alone in a world," as some have thought Plato to have asserted.<sup>1049</sup> Both of these views would once again make knowledge a kind of passive perception;<sup>1050</sup> whereas for Cudworth, it is the mind actively knowing its own

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<sup>1047</sup> *EIM*, p. 89.

<sup>1048</sup> *EIM*, pp. 124-5.

<sup>1049</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>1050</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125; cf. p. 76, citing Plotinus, *Ennead* V.5.1.26.

contents. As Aristotle “frequently asserts, ... [i]n abstracted things that which understands and that which is understood are the same.”<sup>1051</sup> This is because “...[t]hese intelligible ideas or essences of things [are] those forms by which we understand all things.”<sup>1052</sup> That is, “... the primary and immediate objects of intellection and knowledge, are not things existing without the mind, but ideas of the mind itself actively exerted, that is the intelligible reasons (*rationes*) of things.”<sup>1053</sup> The problem is that the idea is a modification of mind and is therefore distinct from the matter; yet it somehow constitutes the reality of the matter.<sup>1054</sup> As the following quotation makes clear, the essential idea is not outside of mind in general:

For as hard and soft, hot and cold, and the like corporeal qualities are but several modifications of matter, so the several objective ideas of the mind in scientific speculation are but several modifications of the mind knowing. Wherefore individual things existing without the soul, are but the secondary objects of knowledge and intellection, which the mind understands not by looking out from itself as sense doth, but by reflecting inwardly upon itself and comprehending them under those intelligible ideas or reasonings (*rationes*) of its own, which it produces from within itself.<sup>1055</sup>

Stated more simply, the essence “exist[s] nowhere but in the mind itself.”<sup>1056</sup> Yet Cudworth is not presenting a theory of subjective idealism. What the examples of the clock, the palace and the animal are meant to show is that there is a transference of the same idea from the mind of the designer to the mind of the perceiver via the material object; which is to say, the object is an appearance or instance of the idea in the sensuous world, whose atoms are manipulated according to a purpose.<sup>1057</sup> For an intelligent being, this purpose is

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<sup>1051</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76. See *de Anima* 430a3-6.

<sup>1052</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>1053</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>1054</sup> Armstrong has noted that Cudworth maintains that the idea is both the essence of the external object and a modification of mind, but simply emphasizes the activity of mind in his account. Armstrong likewise does not see much of a way of clarifying Cudworth’s exact position, suggesting that it is simply inchoate. See Robert L. Armstrong (1969), “Cambridge Platonists and Locke on Innate Ideas,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 30(2): 187-202, esp. p. 188.

<sup>1055</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 76-7.

<sup>1056</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>1057</sup> Since, as mentioned in note 1045, the conflation of natural and artificial objects is highly objectionable, Cudworth’s argument is ultimately only an assertion that we ought to view nature as being designed. Without proof of design, the reality of the human world of meaning may still be entirely conventional, as it

still perceptible, but only because we share the same ideational powers as the creator. As should be obvious, the creator of nature is God. Hence, in comprehending the essence of a natural being,

[the mind] plainly perceives this accurate contrivance [i.e., the animal] to be but a passive print or stamp of some active and living art or skill upon it. Wherefore the ideas of art and skill are upon this occasion naturally exerted from it. Neither does it [the mind] rest in considering of art and skill abstractedly, but because these are modes of an existent cogitative being, it thinks presently of some particular intelligent being, the artificer or author of this curious fabric, and looking further into it, finds his name also engraven in legible characters upon the same, whereupon he forthwith pronounces the sound of it.<sup>1058</sup>

Since ideas are “modes of an existent cogitative being,” or “modifications of intellect,” as he puts it elsewhere,<sup>1059</sup> natural purposiveness implies God as the author of natural things and as the intellectual substance in which the ideas of all things are originally thought. Incidentally, if we add to this the idea of goodness or benevolence, which is invited in us upon considering “how all things in this great mundane machine or animal ... are contrived, not only for the beauty of the whole, but also for the good of every part in it, that is endued with life and sense...[,]”<sup>1060</sup> then we see how reason alone can attain an adequate idea of God without the aid of revelation.

Though the heart of the problem of the interaction of substances has still been eschewed, this is as far as Cudworth goes in his explanation. Though his notion of ‘Plastick Nature’ as an intermediate principle seems to be pertinent here, as he criticizes the Cartesian system (and its problem of the interaction of substances) on its omission of such a principle,<sup>1061</sup> Cudworth does not explicitly raise this issue in *EIM*. This might be

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would be in the Hobbesian position. In other words, I do not think Cudworth successfully refutes conventionalism.

<sup>1058</sup> *EIM*, p. 95.

<sup>1059</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 76, 129.

<sup>1060</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>1061</sup> *TIS*, vol. 1, p. 275. See Lähteenmäki, “Cudworth on Consciousness,” section II for a fuller treatment of Cudworth’s principle of ‘Plastick Nature’ and its bearing on Cartesian mechanism.

forgivable, since the problem is fairly distant from his main purpose, which is to defend moral realism. We must therefore leave this shortcoming behind.<sup>1062</sup>

The final step in the overall argument still remains, though, which is to show that the ideas or essences of things are immutable. Cudworth's argument here is that in order to have knowledge, the mind must be able to fix itself upon something that is unchanging.<sup>1063</sup> For if there were nothing constant, we would not be able to say anything about the object with certainty, since the same proposition that is true now would be false later and vice versa. Clearly, Cudworth is presupposing that knowledge exists and consists in absolute judgments. But considering the context of the argument—namely the refutation of the denial of essences by recourse to a Heraclitean ontology, where everything changes, and, consequently, a relativist epistemology—all he needs to do is show that the relativist position itself consists of an absolute judgment (concerning knowledge); hence the reality of knowledge as absolute judgment is also being presupposed even by his opponents. Granting the existence of knowledge, then, there must be a fixed object of knowledge. Since human minds are created and are therefore not eternal, the only truly stable idea must be a modification of the mind of God.

His claim about the immutability of ideas is dubious, though, for it seems to entail that the idea of every tiny gadget is eternal: a) there is no fundamental difference between natural and artificial things; b) the unitive idea of a thing's purpose is its essence; c) knowledge is the knowledge of essences; d) all knowledge is of unchanging objects; therefore, e) the essence of all artificial things is unchanging or eternal. While it may seem almost like a *reductio ad absurdum* to reach the conclusion that God has always had an idea

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<sup>1062</sup> I say this in the interest of understanding the entirety of Cudworth's perspective before comparing it with Plato's. As a philosophical system, Cudworth's position is severely lacking in its inability to explain the how Plastick Nature actually moves matter.

<sup>1063</sup> *EIM*, p. 122.

of an iPod, for example, my guess is that Cudworth would have bitten the bullet here and indeed affirmed that God has foreknowledge of everything. Cudworth does not address the issue, though. As is often the case throughout his argument, the examples he reverts to when asserting immutability are geometrical or logical—not material; yet it is not clear that the two are sufficiently analogous. Consider the following:

Nay, though all the material world were quite swept away, and also all particular created minds annihilated together with it, yet there is no doubt but the intelligible natures or essences of all geometrical figures, and the necessary verities belonging to them, would notwithstanding remain safe and sound. Wherefore these things had a being also before the material world and all particular intellects were created. For it is not at all conceivable that . . . these things were afterward arbitrarily made and brought into being out of an antecedent nothing or non-entity, so that the being of them bore some certain date, and had a youngness in them, and so by the same reason might wax old, and decay again.<sup>1064</sup>

While his point may stand with regard to geometrical figures, it seems unlikely that ideas of specific human artefacts would “remain safe and sound” if all created minds were destroyed. One way to render Cudworth’s position consistent would be to suppose that the ideas of material things are syntheses of unchanging relational ideas (such as unity, difference, whole, part, extension, existence, etc.) just as much as geometrical entities are syntheses of such ideas. What Cudworth does not consider is that while those basic ideas (or what we may call ‘categories’) might be immutable, the peculiarities of their combination in ideas of substantial things might be contingent and mutable. This seems to me to be a case of over-extension: though it may be granted that the idea of a triangle is immutable, it is much less clear what other ideas are immutable as well.

But in the end, what is most important for Cudworth is that abstract entities, such as geometrical ones, have fixed and eternal essences; for he considers moral ideas to be equally abstract. Recall that his list of ideas that have no adequately corresponding images

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<sup>1064</sup> *EIM*, p. 127.

(i.e., *noemata*) included not only ‘possibility’, ‘cause’, ‘verity’, and ‘cogitation’, but ‘justice’, ‘equity’, ‘virtue’, ‘duty’, and ‘obligation’.<sup>1065</sup>

The result of this long argument, is that morality—which is not actually defined or characterized in this book<sup>1066</sup>—exists by nature, which is to say, eternally and immutably in the mind of God, and secondarily or ‘ectypally’ in the mind of humans as their proper end; and that justice is not a contingent result of convention, but rather the application of eternal and immutable morality in the political sphere. In terms of the epistemology taken alone, the conclusion is that knowledge is the consciousness of unchanging, intelligible essences, in which we come to know the activity of our own minds and communicate cognitively with other particular minds, including and especially the divine Mind.

### C. Summation of the modes of existence of ideas and the problem of transition

A significant part of Cudworth’s metaphysics and epistemology may now be loosely systematized by interpolating the various modes of existence of ideas. We begin with his belief that the eternal ideas thought in the divine mind constitute the fundamental ground of both existence and cognition. From here, four ontological modes of an idea’s existence are distinguished. First, to repeat, ideas are originally and eternally in the mind of

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<sup>1065</sup> *EIM*, p. 80.

<sup>1066</sup> On this point, see Eugene Austin, *The Ethics of the Cambridge Platonists*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania (dissertation), 1935), p. 28: “If Cudworth had lived long enough, and if he had overcome his habit of procrastination enough to have edited the mass of manuscripts which he left behind, we might have today some detailed account of the moral *noemata*, immutable and eternal, which were to have been at the apex of his system. We are sure that he had such a work in mind; for he protested so vigorously, when he heard that More was writing an ethical work, that More delayed the publication of the *Enchiridion Ethicum* for many years in deference to Cudworth’s projected work. The latter never appeared, however, and we are fortunate in that we can turn to the *Enchiridion Ethicum* for an examination of a series of *noemata* which most certainly are parallel to what Cudworth’s would have been.” Henceforth, ‘*Ethics*’.

God; this is the ‘archetypal’ mode, and is the basis of all existence. In the moral realm specifically, it is the basis of divine judgment.

Second, the ideas are unconsciously in the world as the governing principles or essences of things; this is the ‘ectypal’ mode of the idea’s existence, which is multiplied indefinitely in every being of the same kind.<sup>1067</sup> One difficulty that arises here is in accounting for the ideas of material qualities. For on one hand, they exist “betwixt the perceiver and the perceived” and it is not clear what this means, as has been discussed; on the other hand, qualities such as hard and cold, soft and hard are claimed to be modifications of matter.<sup>1068</sup> Given the rest of his argument, I believe that the latter statement is intended as a simplification in contrast to the essential ideas of things, which are pure modifications of mind rather than some sort of mixture. If this is correct, then sensible qualities would either be modifications of God’s mind, or, what is more probable, modifications of human minds.

The third mode of the idea’s existence is a particular way in which the human mind is capable of synthesizing and translating corporeal motion into sense, consciousness, or impressions of the soul. Such ideas may or may not refer necessarily to the material world; if so, then they are ‘fantastic’; if not, they are ‘noematic’. Either way, the idea in this subjective mode is a means by which the mind is able to compare these impressions and understand the world in ordinary experience. This mode is how the term ‘concept’ is usually understood from a subjective point of view (e.g., in Kant). The first two modes—i.e., the archetypal content of God’s mind and the ectypal appearances in the natural world

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<sup>1067</sup> *TIS*, vol. 1, p. 238.

<sup>1068</sup> *EIM*, p. 76.

—constitute the bases for the duplication of ideas in this third subjective mode of understanding.

The fourth mode, then, is in human self-consciousness, when we are aware of an idea and reflect on it (as opposed to merely using it without being self-reflective). In this final mode of explicitness, the idea is fully duplicated in a self-conscious subject other than God; what was before only an implicit bond between God and creation is here, through the ministry of ideas, recognized by a part of that creation.

In short, ideas are the content of the divine mind, and through ‘duplications’, they come to exist as the essences of things in the world and as implicit conceptions in animal and human minds. In the latter, ideas may also become explicit at some point, thereby bringing the human being into an intersubjective relationship with God.

The process of human knowing thus has an ontological function: the duplication and actualization of ideas in human minds constitutes an increase in the fullness of being, a fruition, multiplication and emanation of the modifications of God’s mind within the created world. As copies of the divine mind, human minds are like mirrors which reflect the eternal within a limited horizon of space and time. The mind is brought to reflect not merely white light, but a variety of colours and shapes through the presence of the material or sensuous realm, which acts as a catalyst to deliver what is latent in the soul into the lucidity of consciousness.

If Cudworth’s epistemology is to be of any use in the general project of the Cambridge Platonists of establishing reason as the rule of faith, then it must be able to explain at least the modal transformation that occurs within human minds (if not the transitions between the archetypal and ectypal modes as well). Since moral ideas serve as the very foundation upon which Cudworth’s whole system rests in guaranteeing the

correspondence between divine judgment and human action, it is reasonable—indeed, necessary—to ask how such ideas emerge from potential existence (in the actuality of God’s mind or perhaps ectypally in the world) to actual and explicit existence in human minds, so that they can become the guiding principles in life. For, as will be shown in the following chapter, they are not simply given to us innately as such. Oddly, Cudworth himself is not much concerned with this problem. However, his writings taken together do indicate a rough response and suggest that the question was significant for him, though perhaps not deemed an appropriately philosophical one, as it concerns the secondary, historical matter of how humans come to know the truth rather than the primary, philosophical matter of the truth itself. The following two chapters are an attempt to fill in or reconstruct this response on Cudworth’s behalf, given what has been explicated thus far.

## Chapter 12: The function of anticipation in Cudworth's epistemology

### A. On anticipation and the sense of recognition

As has been discussed in Chapter 11, Cudworth sets out to show that moral ideas are innate and therefore the basis—and not the result—of contracts. That is, contracts are possible only because we already have a sense of what ought to be the case. To undermine the Hobbesian position, he attacks its epistemological starting point—i.e., empiricism; Cudworth wants to indicate that the mind brings its own content, in some form, to experience. Once this *a priori* arena is acknowledged, he can proceed to determine that content and show that it has objective validity. As was discussed in Chapter 11, the content is, at the least, the logical and relational (or 'schetical') notions, which are employed in perception and all uses of the understanding, and which also constitute the objective essences of things.

Crucial to his epistemological argument in support of this thesis is the claim that knowledge occurs through anticipations native to the mind:

[W]hen foreign, strange, and adventitious forms are exhibited to the mind by sense, the soul cannot otherwise know or understand them, but by something domestic of its own, some active anticipation or prolepsis within itself, that occasionally reviving and meeting with it, makes it know it or take acquaintance with it.<sup>1069</sup>

His argument, to repeat, is that the properties of material things are insufficient to produce ideas of sensible qualities (i.e., 'phantasms') in us, and that the mind must therefore contribute something of its own to that production. "Things," he writes, "are never

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<sup>1069</sup> *EIM*, p. 74.

perceived merely by their own force and activity upon the percipient, but by the innate force, power, and ability of that which perceives.”<sup>1070</sup>

Cudworth illustrates his point by comparing the reflection of an image of a watch in a mirror and the perception of it in an eye. While both may suffer material impressions, the eye is “conscious or perceptive of what it suffered, but the mirror not.”<sup>1071</sup> Beyond mere perception, though, which occurs in other animals,<sup>1072</sup> the human mind has the capacity to “penetrate into the profundity or inward essence of [corporeal substances].”<sup>1073</sup> By this he means understanding that a thing is the same thing throughout its changes, and that the thing is what it is in virtue of being organized and purposive. “To know or understand,” as Cudworth begins to explain, “is actively to comprehend a thing by some abstract, free, and universal reasonings (*rationes*).”<sup>1074</sup> The mind employs ‘notions,’ ‘ideas,’ ‘abstract reasonings’ (which terms are used synonymously) to understand the nature of the thing.

Returning to his consideration of the image of the clock, he writes:

But now the mind or intellect being superadded to this sentient eye and exerting its active and more comprehensive power upon all that which was reflected from the mirror, and passively perceived by the sentient eye as it doth actually and intellectually comprehend the same things over again which sense had perceived before in another manner . . . , so it proceeds further, and compares all the several parts of this ingenious machine or self-mover one with another, . . . . Whereupon the intellect besides figure, colour, magnitude, and motions raises and excites with itself the intelligible ideas of cause, effect, means, end, priority and posteriority, equality and inequality, order and proportion, symmetry and asymmetry, aptitude and inaptitude, sign and thing signified, whole and part, in a manner all the logical and relative notions that are.<sup>1075</sup>

The ideas that are employed in understanding the nature and purpose of objects—i.e., *noemata*—are never perceptible in material things and therefore cannot arise from material

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<sup>1070</sup> *EIM*, p. 84.

<sup>1071</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>1072</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92. Cf. *TIS*, vol. 1, p. 202; vol. 3, p. 467.

<sup>1073</sup> *EIM*, p. 58.

<sup>1074</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>1075</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

things; they are the native means of the mind to extend itself into the world through comprehension. But since it comprehends the nature of things only through its own ideas, “the essence of nothing is reached...but by the mind’s looking inward into itself.”<sup>1076</sup> This is, to repeat, how Cudworth explains Aristotle’s claim that the knower and the known are the same, and it is why Cudworth believes that all knowledge is a form of self-knowledge.<sup>1077</sup>

In a nearly identical statement as that of More’s critique of empiricism, in which he argues that it fails to distinguish the difference between “extrinsicall Occasions, and the adequate or principle Causes of things,”<sup>1078</sup> Cudworth claims that the real cause of understanding is our innate ideas:

But that which imposes upon men’s judgments here, so as to make them think, that these [ideas] are all passive impressions made upon the soul by the objects of sense, is nothing else but this. Because the notions both of those relative ideas, and also of those other immaterial things (as virtue, wisdom, the soul, God) are most commonly excited and awakened occasionally from the appulse of outward objects knocking at the doors of our senses. And these men not distinguishing betwixt the outward occasion or invitation of those cogitations, and the immediate active or productive cause of them, impute them therefore all alike, as well these intelligible, as these other sensible ideas, or phantasms, to the efficiency or activity of the outward objects upon us.<sup>1079</sup>

At the doors to the external world, the mind greets the objects of perception with its own inner anticipations. At their meeting, there arises a concordance of the anticipatory idea and the idea that constitutes the thing’s essence, and this concordance impacts us as the sense of truth. For the mind has its own criterion of truth, which “enable[s] it to know

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<sup>1076</sup> *EIM*, p. 59.

<sup>1077</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76, referring to *de Anima* 431a.

<sup>1078</sup> More, *Antidote*, I.v.1.

<sup>1079</sup> *EIM*, p. 84. Likewise, Kant begins the *Critique of Pure Reason* with a similar point, including the notion that perception prompts cognition: “But even though all our cognition starts *with* experience, that does not mean that all of it arises *from* experience. For it might well be that even our experiential cognition is composite, consisting of what we receive through impressions and what our own cognitive power supplies from itself (sense impressions merely prompting it to do so).” (transl. Werner S. Pluhar, “Introduction” in 1787 edition: p. B1.)

when it hath found that which it has sought.”<sup>1080</sup> The result is a sense of familiarity with what is discovered. Thus Cudworth describes knowledge metaphorically as a recognition of an old friend in a crowd of unfamiliar faces—a recognition which is the result of having a prior anticipation of the form of that friend:

When in a great throng or crowd of people, a man looking round about, meets with innumerable strange faces that he never saw before in all his life and at last chances to espy the face of one old friend or acquaintance, which he had not seen or thought of many years before, he would be said in this case to have known that one, and only that one face in all that company, because he had no inward previous or anticipated form of any other face, that he looked upon in his mind. But as soon as ever he beheld that one face, immediately there revived and started forth a former anticipated form or idea of it treasured up in his mind, that, as it were taking acquaintance with that newly received form, made him know it or remember it.<sup>1081</sup>

Such recognition of “newly received forms” is also akin to the sense of sympathy that a listener to music has with the composer of the music, a sympathy through which both the particularity of the listener’s own soul is revealed as well as the universality of its contents:

[A]rtists ... have many inward anticipations of skill and art in their minds, which being awakened by those passive impressions of the same skill or art in the outward objects that strike upon their sense, there arises immediately an inward grateful sense and sympathy from the correspondence and analogy that is betwixt them, art and skill in the mind of the musical hearer, finding something akin (((((((() to itself in those harmonious airs, some footsteps and resemblance of itself gratefully closing with them.<sup>1082</sup>

The experience of music as described here is a sort of communion of souls, wherein the sensuous elements draw out the listener’s anticipations into explicit self-awareness; the listener thereby comes to know what was latent within his own soul and feels this as sympathy with the composer (and perhaps the players, though Cudworth does not mention this).<sup>1083</sup> According to Cudworth, this is the situation we find ourselves in whenever we

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<sup>1080</sup> *EIM*, p. 84.

<sup>1081</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74

<sup>1082</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 98-9.

<sup>1083</sup> Noam Chomsky points out that, for Cudworth, such enhanced perception in understanding art and music requires an acquired skill, which Chomsky takes to be an “initial ‘activation’ of [a] latent structure” or “a

have any meaningful perception—though the latter is so often mundane that we do not have the emotional response as in musical perception. Yet in all perception, we are in communion with the creators of what we perceive, whether we recognize this fact or not, and whether the creator is human or divine.

With respect to the ultimate artist, the perception of the beauty and purposiveness of the world, from the minute to the cosmological, is likened to grasping the meaning of a divine book:

But now, in the room of [an] artificial book in volumes, let us substitute the book of nature, the whole visible and material universe, printed all over with the passive characters and impressions of divine wisdom and goodness, but legible only to an intellectual eye. For to the sense both of man and brute there appears nothing else in it but as in the other, so many inky scrawls, *i.e.* nothing but figures and colours. But the mind or intellect, which hath an inward and active participation of the same divine wisdom that made it, and being printed all over with the same archetypal seal, upon occasion of those sensible delineations represented to it, and taking notice of whatsoever is cognate to it, exerting its own inward activity from thence, will not have only a wonderful scene and large prospect of other thoughts laid open before it, and variety of knowledge, logical, mathematical, metaphysical, moral displayed, but also clearly read the divine wisdom and goodness in every page of this great volume, as it were written in large and legible characters.<sup>1084</sup>

Like a listener to music, the reader of the world must be active in order to penetrate to the essential content of the work. The sensuous merely serves as the occasion or the invitation for the mind to exert its own anticipatory force. Yet since the essence of the natural world is a modification of God's mind,<sup>1085</sup> the concordance, or the "grateful sense and sympathy"

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store of latent principles brought to the interpretation of the date of sense." See Chomsky, Noam, "Cartesian Linguistics: Acquisition and Use of Language," in Stich, ed. *Innate Ideas*, pp. 94-5.

<sup>1084</sup> *EIM*, p. 100. This cannot be taken as an accurate statement of what occurs in general, since atheists do not "clearly read the divine wisdom and goodness in every page of this great volume." I believe Cudworth is trying to be descriptive here, since he is evincing the cognitive faculties in order to support his argument that essences are intelligible and real; however, the passage is highly normative in the sense that Cudworth thinks that one *ought* to regard the world in this manner. Hence, this description is only a possibility for knowers, not a necessity. As evidence, then, his point is weak support at best.

<sup>1085</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

of comprehension occurs with a sense of recognition of the ideas latent in one's own soul and of one's likeness to the divine intelligence in virtue of that bestowal.<sup>1086</sup>

There are thus two aspects to this dynamic of forces between the external world as invitation or prompting and the internal intellectual power: one aspect is the extension of the mind outward, which is ultimately an extension towards God, since the essences of all things are in God's mind, and since the beauty of the whole universe reflects God's wisdom. The second aspect is the internal direction: the mind is prompted to discover and explicate its own anticipations, to make these "archetypal seals" clear and explicit for itself. Upon recognizing the discursive, gradual and incomplete nature of our own understanding, the following reflection may occur:

Now because everything that is imperfect must needs depend upon something that is perfect in the same kind, our particular imperfect understandings which do not always actually contain the *rationes* of things and their verities in them, which are many times ignorant, doubting, erring, and slowly proceed by discourse and ratiocination from one thing to another, must needs be derivative participations of a perfect, infinite, and eternal intellect, in which is the *rationes* of all things, and all universal verities are always actually comprehended.<sup>1087</sup>

Hence, perception ultimately leads from anticipation to God in both the outward and inward directions. Moreover, the human mind, as an imperfect image of God, comes to *be* like god in an approximate way by coming to have ideas cumulatively in time.<sup>1088</sup>

B. The tension between Cudworth's critique of empiricism and the place of contingency in the actualization of knowledge

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<sup>1086</sup> Henry More's discussions of "intellectual sensitivity" and the "boniform faculty" make the same point (e.g., *Account of Virtue*, I.2; I.5; II.2, 9; III.9.14-16.)

<sup>1087</sup> *EIM*, p. 130. Again, I say "may occur" because it is not simply a natural inference, as Cudworth appears to present it.

<sup>1088</sup> Cf. *TIS*, vol. 3, p. 65: "Here therefore is there a knowledge before the world and all sensible things, that was archetypal and paradigmatical to the same. Of which one perfect mind and knowledge all other imperfect minds (being derived from it) have a certain participation; where they are enabled to frame intelligible ideas, not only of whatsoever doth actually exist, but also of such things as never were, nor will be, but are only possible, or objects of divine power."

i) The ‘pre-Kantian’ reading of Cudworth’s innatism

In the statement above, Cudworth has just claimed that “our particular imperfect understandings ... do not always actually contain the *rationes* of things and their verities in them.” Considering that the term ‘*rationes*’ is used interchangeably with ‘ideas’, Cudworth is stating that the human mind is essentially characterized—in contradistinction to God—as having innate ideas only in a potential way. This is why “discourse and ratiocination from one thing to another” are required by us in order to arrive at actual knowledge.

Indeed, Cudworth gives some further indications that human knowledge is cumulative and gradually acquired. He suggests that our ideas of substantial things are synthesized out of relational or ‘schetical’ ideas, where the comprehensive idea of the whole object is given content through the consideration of parts according to the relational ideas that the intellect already employs.<sup>1089</sup> Furthermore, he claims that “all understandings are ... printed all over at once with the seeds of universal knowledge.”<sup>1090</sup> This expression —“the seeds of universal knowledge”—suggests that the innate ideas must be developed and expanded: the ideas that are innate would have to germinate in the represented world of phantasms in order to actually comprehend all things. Though Cudworth does not explicitly say so, we may reasonably put these two points together and suppose that logical or relational ideas allow for the synthesis of new substantial ideas given sensory input, thereby ‘growing’ into a system of understanding.

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<sup>1089</sup> E.g., *EIM*, p. 77.

<sup>1090</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

The next passage is even clearer in its claim that actual ideas of things are not innate, but rather some kind of undifferentiated potential for actual ideas:

[the human mind is] ... a kind of notional or representative world, as it were a diaphanous and crystalline sphere, in which the ideas and images of all things existing in the real universe may be reflected or represented. For as the mind of God, which is the archetypal intellect, is that whereby he always actually comprehends himself, and his own fecundity, or the extent of his own infinite goodness and power—that is the possibility of all things—so all created intellects being certain ectypal models, or derivative compendiums of the same. Although *they have not the actual ideas of all things*, much less are the images or sculptures of all the several species of existent things fixed and ungraven in a dead manner upon them, yet they have them all virtually and potentially comprehended in that one cognoscitive power (*vix cognitrix*) of the soul, which is a potential omniformity whereby it is enabled as occasion serves and outward objects invite, gradually and successively to unfold and display itself in a vital manner, by framing intelligible ideas or conceptions within itself of whatsoever hath any entity or cogitability. As the spermatic or plastic power doth virtually contain within itself, the forms of all several organical parts of animals, and displays them gradually and successively, framing an eye here and an ear there.<sup>1091</sup>

To understand this key passage, a quick digression on the ‘spermatic or plastic power’ is appropriate first. In *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, Cudworth introduces the term ‘plastic nature’, which is the principle of life that organizes matter without consciousness, according to the wisdom of the divine art. It is the teleological and vital principle in the natural world, which Cudworth also refers to as the ‘spermatic principle’, since it is the principle by which species are perpetuated. More explicitly, it is

a certain lower life than the animal, which acts regularly and artificially, according to the direction of mind and understanding, reason and wisdom, for ends, or in order to good, though itself do not know the reason of what it does, nor is master of that wisdom according to which it acts, but only a servant to it, and drudging executioner of the same; it operating fatally and sympathetically, according to laws and commands prescribed to it by perfect intellect, and impressed upon it; and which is either a lower faculty of some conscious soul, or else an inferior kind of life or soul by itself; but essentially depending upon a higher intellect.<sup>1092</sup>

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<sup>1091</sup> *EIM*, p. 77, italics added. He is referring here to his concept of ‘plastic nature’, which is the principle of life which organizes matter without consciousness. See *TIS*, I.3.xxxv.6 for a quick summation of this notion. Once again, Cudworth does not take seriously the possibility that the appearance of purpose and order in the natural world is not guided by intelligence, and therefore does not have an adequate argument to support the existence of plastic nature.

<sup>1092</sup> *TIS*, vol.1, p. 271.

As a teleological power, it functions in particular creatures as the adaptive (and hence, ‘plastic’) force. Returning to the previous passage, then, the *vix cognitrix*, or the power of the human mind to comprehend things, is analogously adaptive to the world by forming ideas that are adequate to what it encounters. The ideas through which humans have knowledge are not simply ‘placed’ there by God as part of our nature. What is innate, according to this passage, is not conscious awareness of any particular ideas, but rather the power to conceive in general, the *vix cognitrix*, which moulds itself to the external world by penetrating to the essence of perceived objects (and thus to God and to self-knowledge) in a gradual manner. Hence, the mind begins as “potential omniformity” and proceeds towards being a “derivative compendium” of the entire system of ideas, which is eternally comprehended by or in the divine mind.<sup>1093</sup>

It seems, then, that for new ideas to become active, there must already be other ones active within the mind from which the new idea is derived. It would follow, then, that there must be *at least* one innate idea that is originally active in the mind, and from which all others are derived. Though Cudworth by no means goes through any deduction of the plurality of ideas from a fundamental one (as, say, Fichte would from the concept of ‘I’),<sup>1094</sup> it seems likely on his account that the innate power and vigour of the mind to comprehend and anticipate experience is based on—or even equivalent to—a general idea or basic set of ideas. But Cudworth does not even distinguish between what Kant would later call

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<sup>1093</sup> Henry More gives a similar description of the divine mind, which he also calls “Logos, or the Universal Stable Reason”: “For what is the divine wisdom, but that steady comprehension of the *Ideas* of all things, with their mutual respects one to another, congruities and incongruities, dependences and independences, which respects do necessarily arise from the natures of the *Ideas* themselves, both which the divine Intellect looks through at once, discerning thus the order and coherence of all things.” (*Conjectura cabbalistica: or, a conjectural essay of interpreting the minde of Moses, according to a threefold cabbala: viz. literal, philosophical, mystical, or, divinely moral.* (London: James Flesher, 1653), Preface.)

<sup>1094</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte. *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy*, transl. Daniel Breazeale, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

transcendental categories and empirical concepts, let alone delve into the psychological details concerning the acquisition of ideas in experience.

ii) Evidence of a bolder version of innatism

The interpretation I have been offering so far of Cudworth's innatism is roughly a pre-Kantian reading, whereby logical and relational ideas are inherent and necessary functions of the intellect which serve as the basis for the acquisition of other ideas in experience given sense perception. Yet there is reason to believe that this interpretation is either wrong or problematic. For in two later passages, he seems to claim that what is innate is not merely the potential for knowledge, but actual ideas. (In Kantian terms, this amounts to a collapse of the distinction between pure and empirical concepts of the understanding.) In the first relevant passage, Cudworth notes that: "men could not possibly confer and discourse together in that manner as they do, presently perceiving one another's meaning, and having the very same conceptions of things in their minds, if all did not partake of one and the same intellect."<sup>1095</sup> He seems to be claiming here that mutual understanding—which presumably occurs regularly—depends on both sides having the same actual ideas of things, and that this sameness is derived from the fact that the ideas of things are immutable modifications of God's mind which are manifest in particular objects and imprinted by God on human minds. The audacity of such a claim may be mitigated, though, when we consider how the passage continues: "Neither could one so readily teach, and another learn, 'if there were not the same ectypal stamps of things in the mind both of

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<sup>1095</sup> *EIM*, p. 131.

the teacher and the learner.”<sup>1096</sup> This point differs from his inference from mutual understanding in that the case of learning involves a movement from potential to actual knowledge. What is in common between the learner and the teacher could not be the same actual ideas, for then there would be nothing to be learned; rather, they share the same anticipatory ideas, which happen to be already actualized in the case of the teacher and being actualized in the learner. More reasonably, then, this passage still suggests that what is innate is not merely a set of logical ideas, but anticipatory ideas of all things.

The second passage also seems to suggest this. He claims that:

... [A]ll understandings are not only constantly furnished with forms and ideas to conceive all things by, and thereby enabled to understand all the clear conceptions of one another, being printed all over at once with the seeds of universal knowledge, but also have exactly the same ideas of the same things. Whereas if these things were impressed upon our souls from the matter without, all men would not be readily furnished with the ideas to conceive all things by at every time, it being merely casual and contingent what things occur to men’s several senses.<sup>1097</sup>

That all understandings “also have exactly the same ideas of the same things” and are “readily furnished with the ideas to conceive all things by at every time” certainly makes it seem that the actual ideas of all things are innate. This would mean that the entire system of ideas is already contained in every human mind. Yet he could not mean that all humans always have the actual ideas of all things, for that would simply make us equivalent to God in terms of knowledge, and I cannot see how this conclusion could be acceptable to Cudworth. Hence, my suggestion is that the common ideas here are anticipations of substantial things, and not just the logical ideas from which these are constructed. This is still a much stronger claim than my original interpretation.

Drawing the conclusion that Cudworth is simply inconsistent here would not be unreasonable; for in regard to other topics—e.g., the problem of free will—Cudworth

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<sup>1096</sup> *EIM*, p. 131.

<sup>1097</sup> *Ibid.*

clearly struggled to find a consistent position, causing him to rewrite a treatise three times and still not finding the result satisfactory enough for publication.<sup>1098</sup> It is therefore quite possible that Cudworth felt that he had demonstrated his basic point about the innate power of the mind enough so as to be able to move on to completing his larger philosophical goal, and did not care to work out the details. These inconsistencies are part of what contribute to his justified reputation as a second-rate philosopher.

The other possibility is that Cudworth is only speaking loosely here. However, it is difficult to say when he is or is not speaking loosely. I would prefer to take all claims seriously and conclude that there are two viable interpretations of his position. These are, in fact, the same possibilities that I offered in Chapter 10 regarding More's position—that is, either that the disposition for knowledge is innate or that the specific ideas are innate but inchoate. Though Cudworth frames the problem in a much more developed theory, I do not think he actually gets much further than More does in his brief comments.

Nevertheless, there is an upshot here, for both interpretations imply a significant point for Cudworth's overall view. Under the first interpretation, we would all have the same ideas of things because we share the set of basic logical ideas and end up having the same substantive ideas of things due to the fact that the essences of the things themselves are real and immutable. Yet mutual understanding presupposes that we have formed enough ideas—and this requires prompting or invitation from experience. Under the second interpretation, we would all (in some way) have not only the same set of logical ideas, but the set of virtual ideas which serve as anticipation of experience; yet even if this were somehow the case, actual knowledge would still require that prompting from

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<sup>1098</sup> Stephen Darwall has attempted to provide a reasonably coherent reconstruction of Cudworth's theory of freewill based on his published works and unpublished manuscripts. See Stephen Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought': 1640-1740*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), chapter 5. Henceforth, 'Moralists'.

experience for the mind to go inwards and think through its latent anticipations. That is to say, no matter what, there must be occasions in experience for whatever is innate to be drawn out into explicit knowledge.

In itself, this does not seem to be problematic. However, it evidently poses as a threat for Cudworth; and both the reasons why it's a problem and the ramifications of its being a problem are significant in understanding the thought of Cudworth as a whole. The problem stems from his attempt to refute empiricism. Aside from the major argument (detailed in Chapter 11) which shows that the knowledge consists of the mind "displaying its own active vigour" rather than being a depository of passively received impressions from the external world, Cudworth has a second, short argument to refute empiricism based on the fact of mutual understanding which can be gleaned from one of the quotations above. He claims that "all understandings are...enabled to understand the clear conceptions of one another" due to the fact that they are all innately furnished with ideas; if empiricism were true—i.e., if ideas were "impressed upon our souls from the matter without," then it would be a matter of mere chance whether there could be enough overlap in experience in order for mutual understanding to obtain.<sup>1099</sup> Here is a reconstruction of what I take to be the underlying argument:

- i) If mutual understanding regularly occurs, then the parties involved must share the same ideas.
- ii) There is indeed regular mutual understanding.
- iii) Considering that this is so widespread, it cannot be a matter of contingency that has led people to have the same ideas.
- iv) According to empiricism, the ideas people have depends entirely on the

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<sup>1099</sup> *EIM*, p. 131.

contingencies of experience—that is, on what their senses happen to have encountered.

v) Therefore, the ideas are innate and not derived from experience.

Point i) could be challenged on the grounds that communication may be occurring with only similar, but not the same ideas. Point iii) could be responded to by giving an account of common language acquisition and education in particular societies which shows that widespread mutual understanding can indeed be derived from the contingencies of experience if people have similar experiences. Point iv) could be challenged by pointing out that ideas can be derived through reflection in empiricist accounts (such as Locke's), and not just through sense perception. So this argument is far from being clearly sound.

My point here, however, is not to refute Cudworth. Indeed, it would be unfair to Cudworth to render this passing comment as a whole-hearted attempt to refute empiricism. Rather, my point is simply to show that that Cudworth wants the possibility of human knowledge (and hence our mutual understanding) to be grounded in something more secure than the vagaries of experience. Indeed, the entire Cambridge Platonists' enterprise of establishing reason as the rule of faith is intended to guarantee the possibility for all humans to use their own mental resources to discover truth and merit salvation.

This is why Cudworth stresses the activity of the mind itself in attaining knowledge.

To illustrate, he writes:

...the mind first reflect[s] upon itself and its own ideas, virtually contained in its own omniform cognoscitive power, and thence descending downward, comprehends individual things under them. So that knowledge doth not begin in individuals, but ends in them. And therefore they are but the secondary objects of intellection, the soul taking its first rise from within itself, and so by its own inward cognoscitive power comprehending things without it.<sup>1100</sup>

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<sup>1100</sup> *EIM*, p. 114.

This highly rationalistic passage suggests that the cognoscitive power has the ability to reflect on itself without external stimulation in order to arrive at knowledge. For what is emphasized here is the “first rise” coming from the soul itself and the objects of reflection already being internal to the mind. What is left out of this passage is the external occasion which draws the mind into reflection.

In another passage, he explicitly addresses the problem of being too dependent on the external occasion and forgetting that the mind is the real cause of all true knowledge. He praises Socrates’ “aporetical and obstetricious method” by which knowledge “was not to be poured into the soul like liquor, but rather to be invited and gently drawn forth from it; nor the mind so much to be filled therewith from without, like a vessel, as to be kindled and awakened.”<sup>1101</sup> True knowledge cannot be attained through “that dictating and dogmatical way of teaching used by the sophisters of that age[;]” instead, it is by the mind “ruminating and revolving within itself as it were to conceive within itself, to bring forth out of its own womb.”<sup>1102</sup> Nevertheless, there is no denying that this method only works once there has been a sufficient development of a system of ideas (i.e., ordinary thought), and that, according to Cudworth’s account, this development rests on the external prompting. Furthermore, the encounter with a Socratic questioner is itself a form of external prompting.

Cudworth does recognize that there is a natural tension in regard to this need for external prompting by noting how tempting it can be to give oneself over to the invitation itself, in the belief that it can replace one’s own active exertion. The problem in doing so is that “over-much reading and hearing of other men’s discourses, though learned and

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<sup>1101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1102</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. Scott’s discussion of maieutics in “Platonic Recollection and Cambridge Platonism”. As discussed in Chapter 2, Scott argues that this contrast is meant as a critique of the contemporary manner of education, namely Puritan (i.e., Calvinist) inculcation.

elaborate, doth not only distract the mind, but also debilitates the intellectual powers, and makes the mind passive and sluggish, by calling it too much outwards.”<sup>1103</sup>

iii) The supplementary necessity of external occasioning

Despite the universality of the potential for the same set of actual ideas, and despite the fact that people ordinarily understand each other, the anticipatory power of the mind may or may not develop into partially actualized ideas and requires certain external conditions for the ideas to which it is predisposed to be properly or fully actualized. This is the case whether the innate ideas are a basic logical set or the already expanded set of anticipatory ideas of all things.

Yet Cudworth says very little about the external condition and at times seems to pass right over it. His vision seems to be like that of a chemical reaction which requires a catalyst: the essential elements are the ones that undergo chemical change by the end of the reaction; yet the reaction can never take place unless in the presence of the catalyst, which gets left out of the equation (though noted in small writing).<sup>1104</sup> The catalyst here is the material world through which ideas are transferred, the material condition for the purely spiritual meeting of the human and the divine mind. Cudworth clearly regards the external condition as a supplement to the real causes insofar as he sustains his focus on the three metaphysical pillars: God’s mind, the essences of the world, and innate power the mind—all interrelated through the metaphysics of archetypal and ectypal ideas.

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<sup>1103</sup> *EIM*, p. 78.

<sup>1104</sup> Similarly, Stich comments that Plato’s non-dispositionalist model of innateness (based on the *Meno*) considers Socratic questioning to be like a catalyst. Likewise, experience serves as a catalyst for the discovery of necessary truths in Leibniz. See Stich, *Innate Ideas*, p. 14.

The real problem with the need to acknowledge the necessity of the external prompting is, I believe, that it renders our actual knowledge dependent on the contingencies of experience just as much as in empiricism, even if experience is not taken to be the true *cause* of knowledge. But so long as Cudworth maintains a difference between God and man—and his fundamental belief in Judgment Day makes no sense without this—he must address the supplementary role of the external world in some way. Merely distinguishing, as More also does, between the true cause of knowledge and the “extrinsicall occasion” does not entail that the latter is unnecessary. Since philosophy deals with fundamental causes, and moreover, with the eternal and unchanging, the role of the supplement is excluded from Cudworth’s overtly philosophical work. That’s not to say, though, that it goes unaddressed. Rather, it gets expressed rather obliquely through the mass of his philological work, for which he is so often criticized and so little tolerated these days.<sup>1105</sup> Given its epistemological significance, it is to the latter that we will now turn.

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<sup>1105</sup> John Muirhead, to take one example of many, calls Cudworth’s history of philosophy “accidental” as opposed to the “essential” work of philosophy proper. See John H. Muirhead, *The Platonic Tradition in Anglo-Saxon Philosophy*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1931), p. 35.

## Chapter 13: Intellectual history and the actualization of knowledge

### A. Natural anticipation and the *vix cognitrix* as the basic conditions for development of knowledge

The nature of the gradual unfolding of the mind's cognitive scope is unclear in Cudworth. One thing that can be said is that the requirement of the invitation or prompting from perception makes that unfolding largely dependent on the contingencies of experience. This is a crucial point given Cudworth's overall intentions, for if salvation is determined by discoveries of reason, which operates through the activity of ideas, and if ideas become actual only upon invitation, then Cudworth's entire vindication of reason (as against Calvinists) becomes reduced to another form of pre-destination, or worse yet, to blind chance: despite our free will, it is not within our power to determine what we meet in experience and when. Thus, as Whichcote argued against Tuckney, it is hardly the fault of the pagans that Christ had not yet appeared in the world.<sup>1106</sup>

It may be objected here that Cudworth only claimed that "the notions both of those relative ideas, and also of those other immaterial things (as virtue, wisdom, the soul, God) are *most commonly* excited and awakened occasionally from the appulse of outward objects knocking at the doors of our senses."<sup>1107</sup> Perhaps, then, those crucial ideas may arise in us in some other way, making the outward occasion unnecessary. In response, it should first be noted that Cudworth's qualification of "most commonly" is probably referring to cases wherein ideas are discovered through analysis of another already explicit idea. The case he

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<sup>1106</sup> Cragg, *Cambridge Platonists*, p. 44.

<sup>1107</sup> *EIM*, p. 84, italics added.

describes is the analysis of the idea of the triangle into the ideas of object, substance, extension, line, existence, etc.<sup>1108</sup> From the perception of a triangle, we are led into our own idea of the triangle, which in turn is composed of other, more abstract ideas. This movement of prompting and reflection serves to clarify the latter ideas—which is to say, to draw them out of their implicit use in the perception of the triangle and into explicit self-consciousness. Still, without the initial perception of the triangle, no subsequent reflection would take place. Hence it remains that the outward occasion is necessary.

A second possible case wherein ideas are not necessarily invited from perception would be when ideas are synthesized from others, as is the case with the idea of God.<sup>1109</sup> Upon consideration of the “great mundane machine or animal”, one combines the ideas of “art, wisdom and knowledge” with the ideas of “goodness, benignity, and morality” and attributes them to a single being as the architect of the world. Yet for those elemental ideas to be combined, they must have arisen from some occasioning; or at least there must be some outward stimulation in order for there to be ideational material to analyze or synthesize. Hence, though the occasioning or invitation is unnecessary at every moment in thinking—i.e., since reflection on given ideas is possible—there still must be some degree of prompting from perception to initiate the process. One must, in this case, have perceived many aspects of the world in order to synthesize an idea of it as a whole (*totum*). The question that remains outstanding is how much prompting is required to make the key religious and moral ideas explicitly known, the answer to which may in turn be contingent on the intellectual capacities of the individual thinker.

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<sup>1108</sup> *EIM*, pp. 103-7.

<sup>1109</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96-7.

Cudworth does not directly explain how the mind is gradually unfolded into actual knowledge, nor does he provide any generalization concerning the kinds or degrees of prompting that suffice for the drawing out of ideas.<sup>1110</sup> Instead, he indicates as a matter of fact what have sufficed as conditions for knowledge in the past. In other words, beyond the internal conditions for moral and religious knowledge—namely, a natural anticipation of the idea of God and the *vix cognitrix*—Cudworth has a rough outline of the external conditions that have sufficed for the actualization of knowledge. Specifically, he describes a providentially-governed world history wherein the sufficient prompting or awakening of reason becomes possible at certain times, and wherein the possibility of knowledge that is completely sufficient for salvation and attainable through reason occurs in his own times.

To adumbrate this account, the gradual unfolding of the mind's virtual knowledge occurs through education as the drawing-forth and directing of natural intellectual tendencies beyond the ordinary acquisition of commonly-circulating ideas. But this extension requires that others before have been educated, and so on. What is therefore required is an initiation of the educational tradition; and this initiation occurs as divine revelation. For the natural inclination towards true religion and morality to be developed into truth, this truth must appear in the world as the guide for the development and differentiation of ideas (of, say, matter, spirit, morality, justice, etc.) into a coherent, monotheistic system. This is a bumpy process and by no means linearly progressive. In fact, part of the development includes monstrosities, which do still develop the system, but only in parts and one-sidedly, and thus erroneously. By living in a highly philosophical

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<sup>1110</sup> This is a major shortcoming considering that such an account is given by empiricists, such as Locke in Book II of the *Essay*.

age, with the whole history of thought behind him, Cudworth is able to collect all of it together and reconcile the religious traditions with the philosophical in one system.

The starting point for the process of gaining knowledge must be the innate potential for knowledge, the *vix cognitrix* that essentially characterizes the human mind; and the end point is knowledge of ‘the true intellectual system of the universe’, which is summed up as follows: “that there is an omnipotent understanding Being presiding over all; that this God hath an essential goodness and justice; and that men have such a liberty or power over their actions as may render them accountable.”<sup>1111</sup> He calls it the ‘true’ system to distinguish it from the false systems, which are atheistic, and ‘intellectual’ in order to distinguish it from the “vulgarly so called ‘Systems of the World’ (that is, the visible and corporeal world), the Ptolmeic, Tychonic, and Copernican....”<sup>1112</sup> What comes in between the potential and the actual knowledge is the gradual and swerving education of humankind.

To begin with the most basic condition that is necessary for the educational tradition to commence, Cudworth claims that, at least with respect to the idea of the Supreme Being (which, if properly understood, contains all other fundamental moral and religious ideas), “the generality of mankind in all ages have had a prolepsis or anticipation in their minds concerning the real and actual existence of such a being....”<sup>1113</sup> Indeed, a great part of his *True Intellectual System* is dedicated to what he calls “an historical deduction”<sup>1114</sup> which shows that even polytheism contains the true notion of a single God, though in obscure ways; moreover, he claims to demonstrate that “the doctrine of the

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<sup>1111</sup> *TIS*, Preface, vol. 1, p. xxxv.

<sup>1112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1113</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 509.

<sup>1114</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 463.

greatest Pagan polytheists, as well before Christianity as after it, was always the same, that besides their many gods, there was one supreme, omnipotent and only unmade Deity.”<sup>1115</sup>

Hence, in former times, everyone shared at least a common anticipation or inchoate idea of religion insofar as they believed in their own religious systems; and there were a select few who penetrated to the essence of their mythology and discovered the true idea of God therein. Though the natural anticipation may not be internal to the human mind, strictly speaking, since only the *generality* of mankind have it, its embodiment in a religious system counts as the external condition in the world which contains enough truth to send the mind inward. That is, given the power of reason and the content of mythology, one is able to move towards the true ideas of religion. Though this point can be expressed succinctly, it should be noted that this analysis of mythological systems is a massive undertaking on part of Cudworth, the details of which I simply cannot enter into here. This ought to be noted because it is one of the reasons why Cudworth was actually read for a couple of centuries—i.e., as a philological record of ancient religion—and it is one of the reasons why so few can stand to read him now.

This undertaking belongs within *The True Intellectual System* because it serves as one of the arguments against atheism, which is the overall purpose of the work. Specifically, it is a defence of the innatist theory of religious knowledge from the objection from polytheism—namely, that not everyone is innately monotheistic. It is essentially a response to the kind of argument that Locke makes against innatism when he argues that if ideas are innate, there should be consensus about them; yet there is no such consensus.<sup>1116</sup> Cudworth’s position is that there actually is consensus, but that this consensus is only

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<sup>1115</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 463.

<sup>1116</sup> Locke, *Essay*, I.ii.4.

implicit in the shared systems of thought and belief. This can be demonstrated through an analysis of the systems, which corresponds to what the wisest of the pagans themselves understood of their own systems and turned into philosophical positions, all of which partially express the truth.

#### B. On Moses as the origin of the complete system of knowledge

Given the demonstration of the general anticipation of the true idea of God, Cudworth proceeds to correct these ancient philosophical positions and to mitigate the spread of all derivative theories which are either implicitly or explicitly atheistic. Following Vossius' taxonomy (in his translation of Maimonides' treatise on idolatry, published in 1641),<sup>1117</sup> Cudworth categorizes these positions by metaphysical claims and by the kinds of arguments they employ; his aim is to refute them all. In grouping philosophers from various periods together, he shows that no philosophical position is essentially new: all are revivals of ancient positions.

Cudworth's point, however, is not simply that theories re-appear in history, for he constructs a genealogy of systems and traces philological lines of influence. To see the basic form of this construction, we must turn to its focal point, which is the figure of Moses, to whom God revealed the whole of the true intellectual system, including all of the other parts which buttress or complete it—in particular, the true natural philosophy (i.e., atomistic physiology) and metaphysics (or 'pneumatology' or 'theology'), both of which, if understood properly, lead to the notion of spiritual substance, and hence God and the rest of

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<sup>1117</sup> Richard Popkin, *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), p. 334. Henceforth, "*Third Force*".

the fundamental tenets of the system. According to Cudworth, the Mosaic system was inherited directly by the rabbinic tradition through oral tradition or Cabbala—“a kind of secret and mysticall Divinity remaining in part among [the Jews].”<sup>1118</sup> Cudworth, it should be noted, was the first Cambridge professor of Hebrew, and, along with Henry More, he studied the Jewish philosophical and mystical tradition (e.g., Maimonides, Leo Hebraeus, the Zohar).<sup>1119</sup> As will be seen in more detail shortly, the same Mosaic system was also inherited more indirectly by the Greeks through the Egyptians and then through Pythagoras.<sup>1120</sup> What occurred in Greek philosophy, according to Cudworth, is a split of the two sides: some ‘atheized’ the physiology (Democritus and Leucippus), rendering the system “mangled and dismembered”; while others, more drawn to the spiritual side, neglected the physiology but developed the metaphysics (i.e., Plato and Aristotle).<sup>1121</sup> The true intellectual system has been inherited in modern times—and in Descartes in particular—in its divided state, out of which it may finally be resuscitated completely in order to secure the grounds for salvation through reason.

The details of this intellectual history are as follows. In *EIM*, Cudworth claims that atomism, which, properly understood, implies a separate intellectual substance, was part of a larger philosophical system whose founder was Moses. As evidence, Cudworth cites Strabo and Sextus Empiricus, who in turn report that Posidonius the Stoic “affirmed this atomical philosophy to have been ancients than the times of the Trojan war, and first to

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<sup>1118</sup> Ralph Cudworth, *The Union of Christ and the Church, in a Shadow*, (London: Richard Bishop, 1642), p. 6. Henceforth, ‘*Union*’.

<sup>1119</sup> See Cudworth’s *Union of Christ and the Church* and More’s *Kaballah denudata* of 1679 for explicit discussions of Jewish writings. Cf. David Katz, “Henry More and the Jews,” in *Henry More (1614-1687) Tercentenary Studies*, pp. 173-188.

<sup>1120</sup> *EIM*, pp. 38-43; *TIS*, vol. 1, p. 20. The belief that Moses was the originator of philosophical traditions was supposedly widely held in the early and mid-seventeenth century. See Levine, “Ancient Wisdom”, p. 86. A clear example can be found in More, *Account of Virtue*, pp. 267-8; and the Epistle Dedicatory (to Ralph Cudworth) of his *Conjectura Cabbalistica*.

<sup>1121</sup> *TIS*, vol. 1, p. 91.

have been brought into Greece out of Phoenicia.”<sup>1122</sup> In particular, this natural philosophy was invented and transmitted to Greece by a Phoenician named Moschus, or (according to Iamblichus’ *Life of Pythagoras*), Mochus. “And what can be more certain,” asks Cudworth rhetorically, “that both Mochus and Moschus the Phoenician and philosopher was no other than Moses, the Jewish lawgiver, as Arcerius rightly guesses.... Wherefore according to the ancient tradition, Moschus or Moses the Phoenician being the first author of the atomical philosophy, it ought to be called neither Epicurian nor Democritical, but Moschical or Mosaical.”<sup>1123</sup> The story, which was widely believed in the early and mid-seventeenth century,<sup>1124</sup> was that Pythagoras either had a Jewish father or was educated by Moses or perhaps by Ezekiel.<sup>1125</sup> Alternatively, he may have travelled to Egypt, where he was educated by priests familiar with the Mosaic teachings. Whatever the case may be, it was through Pythagoras that the Mosaic philosophy was transmitted to Plato and beyond.<sup>1126</sup> Though Cudworth only mentions the transmission of natural philosophy here and not moral philosophy, it is plausible to infer that Pythagoras, the first moral philosopher, according to Aristotle,<sup>1127</sup> learned this somehow from Moses as well. Henry More certainly seemed to think that everyone agreed on this matter.<sup>1128</sup> Even if this is not

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<sup>1122</sup> *EIM*, p. 38.

<sup>1123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>1124</sup> Levine, “Ancient Wisdom”, p. 86; Tulloch, *Theology*, p. 352.

<sup>1125</sup> Schneewind, *Autonomy*, pp. 538-9.

<sup>1126</sup> The story about Pythagoras and the Jews was refuted and dismissed after Stäudlin’s work (1822). See Schneewind, *Autonomy*, p. 542. What is important for my purposes is not whether this genealogy is accurate, but rather the reason why Cudworth thought it was necessary to include it.

<sup>1127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 538.

<sup>1128</sup> “Now that *Pythagoras* drew his Knowledgeg [*sic*] from the *Hebrew* Fountains, is what all Writers, Sacred and Prophane, do testifie and aver. That *Plato* took from him the principal part of the Knowledge, touching *God*, the *Soul’s Immortality*, and the *Conduct of Life and Good Manners*, has been doubted by no Man. And that it went from him, into the Schools of *Aristotle*, and so deriv’d and diffus’d, almost into the whole World, is in like manner attested by all. / Wherefore, as the *Virtue*, and *Wisdom*, and *Excellency*, of so many of the Old *Heathens*, does not a little illustrate the *Power* and *Benignity* of the *Divine Providence*, and the extent of his *Gifts*: So can these Men, in no degree, either obscure, or derogate from, the *Glory* of the *Church*. For they, as we said, did but borrow their precious Things, either from the *Church* of *God*, or from the *Divine Logos* or *WORD*. That *Word* which the old *Church* (I mean that of the *Jews*) did worship when it shined from the *Tabernacle*: and which the *New Church* (I mean that of the *Christians*) still adores in the

inferred, though, the Mosaic philosophy consisted of much more than just atomism: as will now be shown, it encompassed a ‘pneumatology’ (i.e., doctrine of soul or spirit) along with cosmogony and perhaps a triadic conception of God.

The reference to Moses in *EIM* is actually a restatement of a long discussion concerning the history of atomism in the *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, where Cudworth is trying to show that atomism is not inherently atheistic, as it is presented by Democritus, Epicurus and, more recently, Hobbes. In the first chapter of that tome, Cudworth claims that the ‘Ancient Moschical philosophy’ was an integration of two parts, namely atomical physiology and theology or ‘pneumatology’ (i.e., a theory of spiritual substance).<sup>1129</sup> After Pythagoras, the two sides of this whole were severed: Democritus, Leucippus and Protagoras adopted the atomism without the theology, thereby ‘atheizing’ it, while Plato and his followers adopted the theology but mostly neglected the physiology. As compared to the first group of corrupters, who retained merely “the dead carcass or skeleton” of the Mosaic philosophy,<sup>1130</sup>

Plato’s mutilation and interpolation of the old Moschical philosophy was a great deal more excusable, when he took the theology and metaphysics of it, the whole doctrine of incorporeals, and abandoned the atomical or mechanical way of physiologizing. Which in all probability he did, partly because those forementioned Atheists having so much abused that philosophy, adapting it as it were to themselves, he thereupon began to entertain a jealousy and suspicion of it; and partly, because he was not of himself so inclinable to physiology as theology...; which some think to be the reason why he did not attend to the Pythagoric system of the corporeal world, till late in his old age. His genius was such, that he was naturally more addicted to ideas than to atoms, to formal and final than to material causes.<sup>1131</sup>

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Human Nature of the *Messias*, as in the glorious Temple of its Residence.” (Henry More, *An Account of Virtue*, pp. 267-8.)

<sup>1129</sup> *TIS*, vol. 1, p. 91.

<sup>1130</sup> *EIM*, p. 91.

<sup>1131</sup> *EIM*, p. 93.

Cudworth notes that, in the *Timaeus*, Plato did “play and toy sometimes a little with atoms and mechanism,”<sup>1132</sup> but that this was an imitation and a poor one at that.

Beyond Plato and the Hellenistic schools, the theory of atomism was forgotten but has been revived in Cudworth’s times:

It was before observed, that there were two several forms of atomical philosophy; first, the most ancient and genuine, that was religious, called Moschical (or if you will Mosaical) and Pythagorical; secondly, the adulterated atheistic atomology, called Leucippean or Democritical. Now accordingly, there have been in this latter age of ours two several successive resurrections or restitutions of these two atomologies. For Renatus Cartesius first revived and restored the atomic philosophy, agreeably, for the most part, to that ancient Moschical and Pythagoric form; acknowledging besides extended substance and corporeal atoms, another cogitative incorporeal substance, and joining metaphysics or theology, together with physiology, to make up one entire system of philosophy, ... deviating from that primitive Moschical atomology, in rejecting all plastic nature, it derives the whole system of the corporeal universe from the necessary motion of matter, only divided into particles insensibly small, and turned round in a vortex, without the guidance or direction of any understanding nature....[Y]et it gives no account of all that, which is the grandest of all phenomena, the *ἀτακτικὴ*, ‘the orderly regularity and harmony of the mundane system[,]’ ... banishing all final and mental causality quite out of the world, and acknowledging no other philosophic causes beside material and mechanical.<sup>1133</sup>

Most noteworthy in this passage is that Descartes revived the Mosaic system almost in its totality, combining the atomistic physiology with ‘metaphysics or theology’; Descartes only erred in neglecting the connection between corporeal and incorporeal substance through the principle of “plastic nature”, which is a living force in all living creatures which operates atoms according to mechanical laws, but is governed by God’s intelligence.

Continuing with the second recent resurrection of atomology, he now writes of Hobbes:

But shortly after this Cartesian restitution of the primitive atomology, ... we have had our Leucippus and Democritus too, who also revived and brought again upon the stage that other atheistic atomology, that makes *τὸ ἀνόητον*, ‘senseless and lifeless atoms to be the only principles of all things in the universe:’ thereby necessarily excluding, besides incorporeal substance and immortality of

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<sup>1132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>1133</sup> *TIS*, vol. 1, p. 275.

souls, a deity and natural morality; as also making all actions and events materially and mechanically necessary.<sup>1134</sup>

At other times, Hobbes is likened to Protagoras, for the latter is at root a combination of Heraclitean metaphysics ('all things are in motion' being translated into 'all is matter in motion') and ethical relativism.<sup>1135</sup> What is remarkable about these claims regarding the modern philosophers is that their own assertions that they are novel are false; Cudworth aims to show that they belong within a long history of thought, which is to say, the history of the content of the divine mind becoming known (and corrupted) in the world. Indeed, Cudworth translates Descartes' work as "Meditations on Old Philosophy" to stress the point that the fundamentals were known in ancient times.<sup>1136</sup>

The main principle of the Mosaic metaphysics is found in the Cabbalistic dictum that "[col] *ma sheyesh lamitah yesh lo shoresh lemalah*, i.e., ... every thing which is below hath some ROOT above."<sup>1137</sup> The nature of incorporeal substance is not actually clarified by Cudworth; his point is simply that Pythagoreanism and Platonism are versions or explications of the original Mosaic position.

One key point in the Mosaic metaphysics is its account of creation, which was also passed over to the Greeks:

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<sup>1134</sup> *TIS*, vol. 1, p. 276. Spinoza too has his precursors in the tradition of hylozoism, initiated by Strato (*TIS*, Preface, xl).

<sup>1135</sup> *EIM*, pp. 29-34.

<sup>1136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24. It is interesting to note that Descartes himself, when expounding his natural philosophy only, admits the ancient origin of his theory: "I should also like it to be noted that in attempting to explain the general nature of material things I have not employed any principle which was not accepted by Aristotle and all other philosophers of every age. So this philosophy is not new, but the oldest and most common of all." (*Principles of Philosophy*, Part IV, section 200. CSM vol. 2, p. 286.) This view does not extend to the philosophy of emotions, though: "The defects of the sciences we have from the ancients are nowhere more apparent than in their writings on the passions.... That is why I shall be obliged to write just as if I were considering a topic that no one had dealt with before me." (*The Passions of the Soul*, Part I, section 1. CSM vol.2, p. 328.) Generally speaking, all received opinions in the sciences and the philosophy they are based on have been too widely and thoroughly disputed to be trusted on their own grounds (*Discourse on Method*, Part I, CSM vol. 2, p. 115). Hence there is no contradiction in Descartes' novelty and his note about the ancient origins of his natural theory.

<sup>1137</sup> *Union*, p. 6.

...it was a most ancient, and in a manner universally received tradition amongst the Pagans, as had been often intimated, that the cosmogonia or generation of the world took its first beginning from a chaos (the divine Cosmogonists agreeing herein with the atheistic ones); this tradition having been delivered down from Orpheus and Linus (amongst the Greeks) by Hesiod and Homer, and others; acknowledged by Epicharmus; and embraced by Thales, Anaxagoras, Plato, and other philosophers, who were Theists; the antiquity whereof was thus declared by Euripides.... Neither can it reasonably be doubted, but that it was originally Mosaical, and indeed at first a divine revelation, since no man could otherwise pretend to know what was done before mankind had any being.<sup>1138</sup>

Considering that “Homer’s Theogonia, as well as Hesiod’s, was one and the same thing with the Cosmogonia; his generation of gods the same with the generation or creation of the world,” Cudworth concludes that “both of them..., in all probability, [were] derived from the Mosaic Cabala, or tradition.”<sup>1139</sup> As has been mentioned, the Greek religious systems were also ultimately monotheistic.<sup>1140</sup>

In fact, even the paradoxical (but correct) notion of the Trinity was almost fully discovered in Pagan theology. Seeds of the Trinitarian notion of God can be found, according to Cudworth, in Samothracian writings, the Chaldaic oracles, Zoroastrianism, the Mithraic mysteries, Orpheus, the Egyptian Hermes, the Pythagoreans, Parmenides, Plato and later Platonists (especially Plotinus).<sup>1141</sup> Cudworth tries to affirm that this is both evidence of the natural anticipation of the true notion of God (in the case of those who came before Moses and only had the slightest development of the idea), and evidence of a supernatural origin of the tradition in the more developed post-Mosaic theologies. Towards the latter point, he claims that since:

[i]t be no way probable, that such a trinity of divine hypostases should have sprung from Humane wit, we may reasonably assent to what Proclus affirmeth, that it was at first a theology of divine tradition or revelation (*theoparadotos theologia*): as having been first imparted to the Hebrews, and from them communicated to other Nations. Nevertheless, as this divine cabbala was but little understood by

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<sup>1138</sup> *TIS*, vol. 1, pp. 398-9.

<sup>1139</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 622.

<sup>1140</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 340.

<sup>1141</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 508-12, 598-602; vol. 2, pp. 148-52, 311-480.

these pagans so was it by many of them depraved and adulterated.<sup>1142</sup>

Still, it was understood enough (by Plotinus in particular) that the entertaining of the doctrine of a trinity of divine hypostases in the pagan world constitutes evidence of “a wonderfull providence of almighty God,” which served, “as it were to prepare the way for the reception of it amongst the learned” in the Christian world.<sup>1143</sup>

As for moral philosophy, the project that Cudworth himself is undertaking in *EIM* is precisely to move from the Mosaic metaphysics to the proof of moral realism. (I.e., God is indeed bound by (his own) rationality (i.e., ‘wisdom’); our ideas are derivatives of his; we have the power of freewill; therefore what we ought to do, given the revelation of the true life in Christ, is objectively real and available to us cognitively.) Furthermore, Cudworth had intended to write a treatise on ethics, but Henry More’s supposedly sufficed as a representative of Cudworth’s position as well, making the latter’s work superfluous;<sup>1144</sup> and in More’s ethical treatise, he does explicitly claim that pagan ethical wisdom also sprung from the ancient Jewish cabbala.<sup>1145</sup> Indeed, More claimed that his general philosophy was a “restitution of that ancient and venerable wisdom” of Moses and his Egyptian and Greek successors.<sup>1146</sup> More preferred, though, to leave most of the philological work to his colleague, Cudworth.<sup>1147</sup> More agrees with Cudworth on the main lines of transmission of the Mosaic tradition, including Moses, Pythagoras, Sidonius, Democritus and Descartes.<sup>1148</sup>

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<sup>1142</sup> *TIS*, vol. 2, p. 313.

<sup>1143</sup> *Ibid.* Henry More likewise writes: “[I]t is plainly shown here, that [the Trinity] is from *Moses* originally, not from *Pythagoras*, or *Plato*. And seeing that *Christ* is nothing but *Moses* unveiled, I think it was a special act of Providence that this hidden *Cabbala* came so seasonably to the knowledge of the *Gentiles*, that it might before-hand fit them for the easier entertainment of the whole Mystery of Christianity, when in the fulness of time it should be more clearly revealed unto the world.” (*Conjectura cabbalistica*, Epistle Dedicatory).

<sup>1144</sup> Austin, *Ethics*, p. 28.

<sup>1145</sup> More, *Account of Virtue*, pp. 267-8.

<sup>1146</sup> Quoted in Levine, “Ancient Wisdom”, p. 96.

<sup>1147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>1148</sup> Hutton, Sarah. “Edward Stillingfleet, Henry More, and the decline of *Moses Atticus*: a note on seventeenth-century Anglican apologetics,” in *Philosophy, science, and religion in England 1640-1700*. ed.

In the Preface to *Conjectura cabbalistica*, More writes that "...the grand mysteries therein [i.e., Christianity] contained are most-what the same that those two eximious philosophers *Pythagoras* and *Plato* brought out of *Egypt*, and the parts of Asia into *Europe*. And it is generally acknowledged by *Christians*, that they both had their Philosophy from *Moses*." As for the Trinity in particular, his Epistle Dedicatory to Cudworth, who had already been appointed the first Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge, emphasizes a point that Cudworth is not quite as strict in affirming:

...I having so plainly therein [my present *Cabbalistical Enterprise*] vindicated the holy Mystery of the *Trinity* from being (as a very bold Sect would have it) a meer *Pagan* invention. For it is plainly shown here, that it is from *Moses* originally, not from *Pythagoras*, or *Plato*. And seeing that *Christ* is nothing but *Moses* unveiled, I think it was a special act of Providence that this hidden *Cabbala* came so seasonably to the knowledge of the *Gentiles*, that it might before-hand fit them for the easier entertainment of the whole Mystery of Christianity, when in the fulness of time it should be more clearly revealed unto the world.

More's comments here are relevant insofar as they converge with Cudworth's Mosaic genealogy, and, in the case of moral philosophy, they speak on Cudworth's behalf.

Thus far in the reconstruction of Cudworth's genealogy, we have the natural anticipation of religion that is found universally, as is evidenced by the implicit monotheism of all polytheistic systems. Among the pagans prior to Moses, there were minor revelations of the true idea of God and the wisest of the pagans did, through the power of reason aided by these revelations, discover the true idea in approximate ways. To Moses, though, was revealed the entirety of the true system, which became the basis of all subsequent philosophical traditions in the West, and hence a major force in determining the content of commonly held ideas, however adulterated they would become.

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Kroll, *et al.*, pp. 69-70: "More's *Defence of the Philosophick Cabbala* was published with his *Conjectura cabbalistica* in 1653 and considerably elaborated in his *An Appendix to the Philosophick Cabbala* printed in his *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings* in 1662. Here More incorporates an ancient philosophy of nature along with the ancient theology as a *scientia perennis* deriving from and discernible in the text of Genesis (which is attributed to Moses as its author)." The list of the thinkers in the tradition is given by Hutton on p. 73 and is derived from the *Appendix*. Henceforth, "Moses Atticus".

C. The epistemological significance of the *prisca theologia* and Moses as its pivotal figure

This philological aspect of both Cudworth's and More's writings have understandably been treated marginally by scholars, as the theory of transmission itself was thoroughly refuted by Stäudlin and not taken seriously since then.<sup>1149</sup> Sarah Hutton is one of a few who have taken note. The significance she sees in this attribution of a philosophical cabbala or tradition to Moses is that it aids in the Cambridge Platonist project of reconciling philosophy and theology, which is to say, of demonstrating the rationality of Christianity.<sup>1150</sup> That is, the early forms of abstract rationality, developed in Ancient Greece, were a development out of revelation. Moreover, the adoption of the belief in the *prisca theologia*, or ancient theology, was a particular way of explicating the Renaissance notion of *philosophia perennis*, which was first construed by Ficino.<sup>1151</sup> This notion of *philosophia perennis*—i.e., that truth is singular and recurs in philosophical systems throughout history<sup>1152</sup>—serves to refute modern claims to novelty,<sup>1153</sup> being eternal and immutable, the truth has never failed to appear in some form or another in human thought. Human reason is, to repeat, the rule of faith in virtue of the fact that it has access to or

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<sup>1149</sup> Austin, for example, calls this an “unfortunate strain” in their thinking and describes it as “unpleasant to the modern mind.” (*Ethics*, pp. 51, 52). This specific refutation is mentioned in Schneewind, *Autonomy*, p. 542. Hutton also notes that “[a] decade after the publication of *TIS*, Cudworth’s erudition met its match in Richard Bentley, who neatly exposed Cudworth’s lack of historical and philological rigour in his *Epistola ad Millium* of 1691.” (*EIM*, Introduction, p. xiv, n.16)

<sup>1150</sup> Sarah Hutton, “Moses Atticus,” pp. 69-70. Cf. More, *EGMG*, p. 483.

<sup>1151</sup> Hutton, Introduction to *EIM*, pp. xvii-xviii.

<sup>1152</sup> See Passmore, *Cudworth*, p. 13.

<sup>1153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13; cf. Sarah Hutton’s Introduction to *EIM*, p. xviii.

partakes of one and the same truth; no particular sect has special access to divine truth merely by conscience or inspiration.

Similarly, Joseph Levine stresses how the explication of the *prisca theologia* serves latitudinarian purposes:

If, unfortunately, this whole large enterprise, this heroic attempt to marry reason and tradition, philosophy and scholarship, into a consistent whole, now seems a little pointless and its massive scholarship tedious at best and usually wrong, it remains that that great labor once seemed absolutely essential to the latitudinarian cause and the best strategy that could be used to justify it. Indeed, of all the arguments that the moderates then employed, it was probably the hardest to answer in its own time, and it took a long while before critical learning became competent enough to dismiss it altogether.<sup>1154</sup>

Revealing the *prisca theologia* was intended, according to Levine, to show the fundamental unity of all systems of thought, a point which stood at the basis for the latitudinarian insistence on tolerance.

Hutton's and Levine's views are very reasonable, and I do not disagree with any of their main points. However, what neither has drawn attention to is the significance of the *prisca theologia* for their epistemology. As we have seen, Cudworth's account of knowledge (as well as what little there is of More's (see Chapter 10)) requires that there be some kind of anticipation of what is recognized as true and that this anticipation is not fully given to us innately. It must rather be developed gradually and cumulatively. The belief in the *prisca theologia*, and especially its beginning in Moses, serves not only the purposes mentioned above, but to show that the development and explication of ideas is always already oriented properly given the foundation of knowledge in divine revelation. Though there has obviously been much error in the history of thought, it is never altogether outside of the truth, from which the thinking began. That is why Cudworth's philosophical method in the *True Intellectual System* is one of correction. He identifies how true premises (such

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<sup>1154</sup> Levine, "Ancient Wisdom," pp. 100-1.

as *ex nihilo nihil*) have been misinterpreted then built upon. But the truth is always implied in false opinions and systems. This applies equally well to mythical systems. Hence Cudworth goes to great lengths to show that they contain the truth in its most fundamental form. That the initially revealed truth is always implicit throughout the wanderings of thought is crucial for Cudworth's epistemology because, despite the error that a thinker or a people might be in, they are, on some deeper level, already familiar with the truth *so that they might recognize it* when it is presented properly—that is, when the occasion arises for the truth to be awakened from within. As for the figure of Moses in particular, he marks the moment when humanity as a whole is enabled later to discover within itself the complete moral idea. He is the pivotal point in the epistemic preparation of the world for complete self-knowledge.

The Mosaic revelation is the focal point of the genealogy because it marks the possibility of future prompting or invitation of the true religious and moral ideas, and it does so in both available ways. To explain, the true system must be drawn out of the soul's potential knowledge by some external occasion, which can come in two forms: either through intellectual means or perceptual means. The first is typified by the 'obstetricious method', by which given ideas are extended into further knowledge by someone who is at least knowledgeable enough in this matter to know how to direct the process. This means of development of ideas requires that that educator has been similarly initiated as well. As the beginning of the philosophical tradition amongst both the Pagans and the Jews, the Mosaic revelation makes this method of education possible insofar as the complete system stands as the ground and orientation for future education. Moreover, as these traditions have at least some impact on the commonly circulating ideas, they determine the manner in which the *vix cognitrix* is developed in common education to form anticipatory ideas.

The other way that knowledge can be drawn out of the soul is by an invitation in perception. With regard to the moral ideas, to the essential goodness and justice of God, human liberty, and the reality of God as love *in the human world*, Christ is the ultimate appearance in the world that triggers the natural anticipation and hence recognition of the proper mode of being; for direct witnesses, the prompting was through perception, while for all others, prompting occurs in the imagination (which is, like sense perception, a form of *phantasia*)<sup>1155</sup> via Scripture. Moses is relevant here too because, as the Jewish lawgiver, he established the form of life into which Christ appeared and could be recognized as the fulfillment of God's will. As Henry More puts it, Christ is "Moses unveiled."<sup>1156</sup> That is to say, through the Mosaic system of law, the worldly conditions were set for the initial recognition of Christ as the true embodiment of morality and piety, and thus for the tradition of prompting in the re-telling of his story. Indeed, the very idea of a christ or messiah is that it is anticipated: that is, the idea is already in people's minds (through publicly-known prophecies), though they have yet to have actual knowledge of its manifestation in the world. But there is a place set up for that appearance specifically within the Jewish world, which was constitutionally determined by Moses.

In conclusion, the *vix cognitrix* is the internal and formal condition for the possibility of knowledge, while the natural anticipation of the idea of God, evinced by the implicit consensus of all religions, serves as the material condition. The efficient condition—that is, the prompting or invitation itself—is the engagement with the philosophical

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<sup>1155</sup> *EIM*, p. 69.

<sup>1156</sup> More, *Conjectura cabbalistica*, Epistle Dedicatory (to Ralph Cudworth).

tradition or with Christian Scripture, both of which ultimately rest on the revelation of the true intellectual system by God to Moses.

## Chapter 14: The collective entity as the subject of history

### A. On the nature of collective entities in general

It was mentioned in Chapter 11 that, for Cudworth, entities derive their wholeness from the idea which unifies the parts in a co-ordinated and purposive way. He is explicit in arguing that wholeness is not a product of local and material continuity. He writes:

There are many other such ideas of the mind, of certain wholes (*totums*) made up of several corporeal parts, which, though sometimes locally discontinued, yet are joined together by relations (*scheses*) and habitudes to one another (founded in some actions of them as they are cogitative beings) and by order all conspiring into one thing, which [ideas], though they are altogether imperceptible by sense and therefore were never stamped or impressed upon the mind from the objects without, yet notwithstanding are not mere figments or beings of reason (*entia rationis*), but things of the greatest reality, founded in certain actions of thinking and cogitative beings....<sup>1157</sup>

Several points ought to be noted here. The wholeness of such entities consists in relations that are not perceivable by sense. However, their unity is not merely an abstract concept, or *ens rationis*. Though it arises only out of intellectual beings, it is established and maintained through purposive *action*, and results in “relations and habitudes”. What Cudworth is speaking of here is living community; and this is what is “of the greatest reality”.

The example Cudworth uses is that of a commonwealth, for its unity is not fundamentally tied to land (i.e., materially based or sensible), but is rather contained in the very idea of that commonwealth insofar as it serves as the basis of collective action and organization. “A polity or commonwealth,” he explains,

...is a company of many united together by consent or contract under one government, to be regulated by some certain laws as it were by one will for the

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<sup>1157</sup> *EIM*, p. 91. Note that Henry More does take them to be “but...logical notion[s].” (*EGMG*, IX.2.5)

good of the whole, where though the eye may see the particular persons (or at least their outsides) that are the respective members thereof, yet it can neither see the bond which unites them together, which is nothing but relation, nor comprehend the whole (*totum*) that is made up of them, that is a polity or commonwealth, according to the formal nature of it, which is an idea that proceeds merely from the unitive power and activity of the mind itself.<sup>1158</sup>

The whole of the polity consists of a kind of mutual understanding (“consent or contract”) and common will to act co-operatively (through the government as the representative).<sup>1159</sup>

Though the polity is the only example Cudworth uses in *EIM*, I see no reason to exclude the Church as another collective entity of this sort, for it likewise consists of a “company of many united together” by a common will, understanding, way of life and purpose.

Cudworth does describe the nature of the Church as a single collective entity in a sermon entitled “The Union of Christ and the Church, in a Shadow.” As we will see, the Church is not just another example of a collective entity, along with the commonwealth, but rather the superlative one. Whereas the idea of the commonwealth is eternal insofar as all ideas are modifications of God’s mind, the *actual existence* of the Church is also eternal, unlike any commonwealth; for the Church is fundamentally a single earthly institution, and not merely a generic idea of several churches, as the idea of a commonwealth is with respect to existing commonwealths.

The Church is actually more fundamental than the individuals who comprise it. The purpose of what follows is to elucidate what this means and explain how it is significant in the context of Cudworth’s later works and in the broader context of the Cambridge

Platonist attempt to vindicate reason as the rule of faith. What I hope to show is that, for

Cudworth, the Church is the actual subject of history and that individual minds are only

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<sup>1158</sup> *EIM*, pp. 90-1.

<sup>1159</sup> It may be granted that a commonwealth is indeed an entity that is not knowable merely through its parts. However, it may easily be objected that all particular commonwealths exist merely by convention and that the general idea of a commonwealth arose contingently as a reaction to previous political forms. This is a strong objection to Cudworth’s position because he assumes that the general idea, like all ideas, must have eternal existence in the mind of God and are *independent* of human convention.

moments of its existence; moreover, the epistemic history of this *totum* marks a general schema of revelation, forgetfulness, then recollection through philosophy.<sup>1160</sup> Though, as discussed in Chapter 10, there is no literal recollection going on in individual souls in any of the Cambridge Platonists, that notion is operative in at least Cudworth's thinking and it explains much of his project as a philological scholar.

## B. The Church as a spiritual entity

Cudworth's sermon to Lincolne's Inne occurred nearly forty years prior to the publication of the *True Intellectual System* of 1678. The content of this sermon is much more mystical than his later, quite rational work, and it resembles the approach of Henry More, who was always interested in the metaphysics of Jewish Cabbalah and retained a mystical element in his thinking and writing. The sermon, entitled *The Union of Christ and the Church, in a Shadow* (1642), is an attempt to show that the marriage union between 'man and wife' is an image of the eternal union between God and His servants and is therefore a holy institution. Natural lust is redeemed insofar it is properly contained within the union of marriage, which, if properly understood and fulfilled, copies divine love on a

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<sup>1160</sup> Passmore relates Cudworth's concept of system to the notion of humanity as a *totum* by claiming that "[t]he notion of 'system' is, of course, fundamental to Cudworth's whole philosophy; it is as belonging to a system that things display their generality. Just as the parts of the watch are what they are through their participation in that particular system, so, Cudworth argues, individuals are what they are only through their participation in the system of rational beings. 'There is a certain universality of being whereby a man cannot apprehend himself as a being standing by itself, cut off, separated, and disjoined from all other beings, whose good, being private, is, as it were, opposite to the good of all other beings, but looks upon himself as a member lovingly united to the whole system of all intellectual beings, as one animal, or as concerned in the good and welfare of all besides himself.... There is ... a principle of common sympathy in everyone, that makes everyone to have another being besides his own private selfish particularity, whereby he rises above it, and is in a manner all, as parents and children seen to make up a *totum*.' [manuscript 4983, p. 83]" (Passmore, *Cudworth*, pp. 71-2) While the quotation Passmore uses to make his point strongly supports my exposition of the nature of the collective entity in Cudworth, I do not think Passmore is right to conflate the two senses of the term 'system' being used by Cudworth. The true intellectual system is a system of doctrines, while the 'system of intellectual beings' is an ontological and historical entity—one whose aim it is to know the former system.

lower level—i.e., exclusively rather than universally. The notion of a divine marriage between God and Israel or God and humanity has a long history, beginning in the Jewish prophets (e.g., Isaiah lxii, Hosea, Jeremiah ii, Ezekiel xvi.8) and continuing through Philo, the Apostles, Origen, Medieval mystics (e.g., Leo Hebraeus) and Maimonides.<sup>1161</sup> The Song of Songs, for example, has often been interpreted allegorically to be describing the relation between God and the Children of Israel.<sup>1162</sup> Moreover, in the book of Hosea, the parallel between human marriage and a marriage between God and the Jews is explicit. Cudworth is therefore by no means new in expounding this notion; I am interested in it, rather, insofar as it has bearing on his later, less mystical thinking. My claim is that the notion of the Church that is constructed in the sermon remains conceptually central in Cudworth's thinking, yet not explicitly, for its mysteriousness runs counter to his later attempts at expounding the Christian religion in as rational a way as possible. Nonetheless, as will be discussed later in this chapter, his predominant interest in philology indicates the continuing centrality of the notion.

Cudworth's method in the *Union* is syncretic, attempting to reconcile passages of the Old and New Testament with Cabbalistic and Platonic concepts. It is at times a fairly messy affair, since Cudworth is trying to square a multitude of notions from various metaphors and languages. For example, he takes two of the ten Cabbalistic *sephiroth* (i.e., *tipheret* and *malcut*) and their union to be equivalent to the male and female divisions of the *androgon* in Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium*. His endeavour does not result in a

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<sup>1161</sup> Cohen, A. *The Five Megilloth*. (London: The Soncino Press, 1980), p. xi; Gerhard Gietmann, "Canticle of Canticles" *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 3. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), 16 Jul. 2009 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03302a.htm>>

<sup>1162</sup> Ginsburg, C. D., transl. *Song of Songs*. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans and Roberts, 1857), pp. 12-20.

perfectly coherent position as a whole; rather, it derives its cogency from a barrage of impressions and associations. His main point, however, can be stated quite clearly:

But that he [St. Paul in Ephesians 5:22-33] makes one [the union of Christ and the Church] to be a *Reall Type* of the other [the union of Man and Wife by Marriage], and the other an *Archetypall Copy*, according to which, that was limmed and drawn out. As the Platonists use to say, concerning spirituall and materiall things, t † , That materiall things are but Ectypall Resemblances and Imitations of spiritual things, which were the First, Primitive, and Archetypall Beings.<sup>1163</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 11, Cudworth continued to employ the metaphysics of archetype and ectype throughout his life; and here he affirms the general Platonic statement that the material world is a copy and image (*mimema*) of the intelligible archetype. In Cabbalistic terms, “[*col*] *ma sheyesh lamitah yesh lo shoresh lemalah*, i.e., ... every thing which is below hath some ROOT above.”<sup>1164</sup> Thus the earthly union between man and wife is modeled on a heavenly union.

Cudworth draws freely on various concepts and metaphors from the Cabbalistic and Platonic traditions. Since he does not systematize them, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to interpolate a single theory concerning these unions, the creation of man, the emanations of God, etc. which renders all references consistent with one another. In order to characterize the Church, then, I can only piece together the main ideas without accounting for all the details. After all, Cudworth himself claims that the idea of a mystical union is not merely a metaphor, but a mystery (as it is written in *Ephesians*).<sup>1165</sup>

The first point to note is simply that the Church is a singular earthly institution of the faithful and exists in a relationship with Christ, wherein “the Church adorn[s] her self as a Spouse, by the holinesse and integrity, and good works of the Saints, that so she may

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<sup>1163</sup> *Union*, p. 3.

<sup>1164</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>1165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

please her Husband, and Christ send[s] down the Influence of his Spirit again into the Church.”<sup>1166</sup> The Church is sustained on earth by the faith and works of those who are graciously infused with the spirit of universal love. Indeed, the Church *is* this spirit of love in action in the world. While it was established explicitly as an institution by the Apostles, it had already existed in the world in lesser degrees in the Jewish religion and in particular pagan individuals’ piety and righteousness. All particular churches are partial—and partially corrupted—manifestations of this singular ideal institution.

The second crucial fact about the Church is that it had or has existence prior to the existence of the world and humanity. There is an eternal idea of the Church, which is, like all ideas, a modification of God’s mind. Beyond the fact that this would logically follow given Cudworth’s later position on the nature of ideas, this can also be inferred directly from the following points within the *Union*: First, Christ is an eternal idea in God’s mind, for the Messiah or Christ was “absolutely and primarily intended in the creation of the world;”<sup>1167</sup> moreover, “God ever intended Christ in the World, upon the supposition of mans Fall, which he at least foreknew.”<sup>1168</sup> Having knowledge of the Fall prior to creation, God also knew of the necessity of a saviour. Second, the idea of the Church is implicit in the very idea of Christ: “...the Church did as it were lie hid in Christ from all Eternity, and was Seminally contained in him...”<sup>1169</sup> So if Christ is eternally conceived by God, and the Church is in Christ from all eternity, then the Church is also eternally conceived in the divine mind.

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<sup>1166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>1167</sup> *Union*, p. 30.

<sup>1168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>1169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

As for its actualization in the world, Cudworth claims that “[a]s soon as man was created, the Church did then flow out of Christ.”<sup>1170</sup> This is one of the emanations of God into creation. God is love, and is duplicated in various forms of love upon differentiation of the universe. When Man is created, there is already and immediately a union of love between God and Man prior to the fall. Man in his pure state, or *Adam ha’elion* (Adam superior), is thus considered “a Type of Christ”<sup>1171</sup>—which is to say, an image of the second person of God (the Son). Linking these two points together, the creation of Man is also the inception of the Church insofar as the latter is an extension of the divine love into the human world. Hence, Cudworth writes: “...the Church is nothing else but *Christus explicatus*, Christ dilated and explicated...”<sup>1172</sup>

When Woman is created, another form of love appears between Man and Woman and this love bears the further seal of the divine love. Cudworth continues: “And as *Adam* was then a Type of Christ, so might *Eve* also be of the Church...”<sup>1173</sup> The emanation of God continues insofar as Eve is brought forth out of Adam, and this very duplication is the image of the primal differentiation of God into a relation of love (i.e., the mystical union). The union between Adam and Eve is thus the worldly image or copy of the eternal union between Christ and the Church.<sup>1174</sup> Upon their fall from original grace, the marriage of husband and wife is a more distant ectype of the original union of God with Himself (as

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<sup>1170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>1171</sup> *Union*, p. 31.

<sup>1172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>1173</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>1174</sup> When combined with various interpretations of Cabbalistic concepts, the messiness of the categories reveals the difficulty in describing the mystery of the union in logical terms. For example, Cudworth writes: “Here we see, Tipheret is also called Col, or *Universitas*, which name may very well agree to Christ also, in whom were conceived the *Idaea’s* [*sic*] of the whole World, and by whom the Worlds were made; and Malcuth, or Cheneseth Israel, is called not only Callah *Sponsa*, but also Bath *Filia*, which may very well agree to the Church likewise, which is not only the Spouse of Christ, but also his Daughter, flowing out from him, as *Eve* that was made out of *Adams* side, and afterward united to him, was his Wife, his Sister, and his Daughter: of which more anon.” (*Union*, p. 12)

Son), of God with humanity in its pure state, and of Adam and Eve in their purity. Yet the return to the higher forms of union is possible after the Fall through Christ and the reception of his spirit. Hence, human marriage will be abolished once the “marriage of the Lamb” is consummated.<sup>1175</sup>

Drawing on the etymology of the Hebrew for Eve (*Chavvah*), which is related to the word for ‘life’, Cudworth explains: “...neither was [Eve] so called without a Mystery, for the Church indeed is the True *Chavvah*, the *mother of all living*, of all those which live the Life of Grace here, and of glory hereafter.”<sup>1176</sup> The Church itself somehow brings forth the individuals who belong to it—i.e., those who live the life of grace, which is to say, those whom the spirit of Christ’s love animates. To shed light on this paradoxical idea, consider the statement above concerning the reciprocal relationship between the saints, who uphold the Church, and Christ, who sends his influence down and into it. The existence of the Church on earth is fundamentally a co-operative result of divine and human action; but as its inception is coeval with the creation of man, it is established by God alone. In claiming that the Church comes into worldly existence upon the creation of Man, and that upon the union of Man and Woman, the Church extends itself into the future of all generations, Cudworth is claiming that the spirit of love is the source of human life and dwells within all humans regardless of their knowledge of it or ability to manifest it fully.<sup>1177</sup>

So long as humans exist, the Church has its worldly existence in the kind and degree of worship they display as love. Even if no humans recognize this as their essence, and therefore cannot recognize the continuity of this spirit in the world—i.e., the Church—it still appears in derivative or lower forms, such as marriage. The Church finds its first

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<sup>1175</sup> *Union*, p. 35, referring to *Revelation* 21.

<sup>1176</sup> *Union*, p. 31.

<sup>1177</sup> Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, transl. David F. Swenson, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), pp. 7-14.

explicit existence in the world in the Mosaic revelation and law. While the essence of the Church is not fully recognized therein, the Jewish religion does speak of it and anticipates its complete manifestation in the Messiah. Once Christ appears, the Church is established explicitly as an institution by the Apostles, and despite a long history of factions, it remains a single institution insofar as the true spirit of religion spans across all factions.

To reiterate, the Church has eternal existence as a divine idea, and its appearance in the world is co-terminal with the history of humanity. The constant is the spirit of love, which first characterizes God and then appears in various manifestations in the created world, and in particular, the marriage union.

I conceive God having framed that excellent Plot of the Gospel, and therein contrived the Mystically union between Christ and the Church, delighted to draw some Shadowings and Adumbrations of it here below, and set the Seale of that Truth upon these Materiall things, that so it might print the same stamp and Idea, though upon baser matter; and thence arose the institution of Man and Wife here below: although indeed Christ and the Church be *Sponsus & Sponsa Archetypi*, and this Man and Wife which we speak of are but *Sponsus & Sponsa Ectypi*.<sup>1178</sup>

Given the basic characterization of the Church thus far, I want to turn to the notions of archetypes and ectypes as they are employed in this context. Cudworth clearly regards Christ and the Church as the relational archetypes of husband and wife, the ectypal relation. Yet there are significant difficulties in trying to understand these relations according to his later usage of the archetype-ectype schema, which is to say, that of original and copy (*mimema*). In other cases, such as the idea of a triangle, the archetype is the eternal idea as a modification of God's mind, and the ectype is some worldly copy or image of it, whether this be conceived as a human idea of the essence of the triangle, or the sensible image of a triangle itself, the "ectypall Resemblance" of an intellectual reality.<sup>1179</sup> That is, it seems

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<sup>1178</sup> *Union*, p. 4.

<sup>1179</sup> Cudworth appears to be similar to Malebranche on the difference between divine idea and human idea; but similar to Arnauld with regard to what Alison Simmons calls "intrinsic intentionality". See Section 3 of "Sensation in a Malebranchian Mind," in *Topics in Early Modern Philosophy of Mind*. ed. Jon Miller. (Dordrecht: Springer Verlag, 2009).

that, in his later thinking, the archetype is purely intellectual, and anything worldly is considered ectypal. The problem in applying this schema to the mystical union and the marriage union is that the archetypal relation is not purely intellectual, but has temporal existence in the world as well. The division between heavenly-archetype and worldly-ectype does not neatly apply when it comes to the fundamental relation between Christ and the Church. For both are original and archetypal ideas, and yet both appear in the sensuous world as they are, not as copies. That is, embodiment is not the same as material instantiation (of a purely intellectual idea). This is clear in the case of Christ: Christ is not simply a temporal, finite manifestation of the eternal idea of Christ which God has; the living Christ himself is eternal. The same applies to the Church: it is itself an eternal, yet also temporal entity.

A second way to describe the difficulty in applying the archetype-ectype schema rigidly is that in the case of the Church and its ectype (i.e., wives), both are perceptible in the world; in fact, an individual person may belong to both: a faithful wife and devotee of Christ's. Furthermore, a man may be the ectype of Christ as a loving and 'influential' husband, while being a faithful servant of Christ's—which is to say, a member of the Church. The categories are fluid here. In the case of a triangle, by contrast, a thing is *either idea or image*; no image can participate in being part of the archetype's existence. Yet in the case of the Church, the ectype actively contributes to the existence of the archetype; the archetype depends in some way on the existence of the ectype.

The difference between the nature of the Church as archetype and the idea of the triangle as archetype is obliquely indicated in Cudworth's translation of the Greek term *ta noeta*. In the fundamental Platonist thesis which Cudworth mentioned above—that *ta*

*aistheta tōn noetōn mimemata*<sup>1180</sup>—Cudworth translates the term *ta noeta* as “spiritual things”, and not “intelligible things” (as he does elsewhere).<sup>1181</sup> Though Cudworth does not make his reasons for doing so explicit, I offer the following explanation, which hinges on a difference between intellectual and spiritual objects. I take the idea of a triangle to be an intellectual object, having no temporal existence in itself. Only its ectypal appearances participate in temporality. A spiritual object is a non-material entity (e.g., soul, “plastic nature”) which, like intelligible objects, is still only knowable through the mind and never perceived as such through sense perception. Yet it is living, and therefore exists in the world as itself. It should be understood as being similar in concept to a *daimon* in Plato, or at least *Eros*: it is itself a divine entity which appears in many instances in the material world. It is not merely a subjective state of the individual soul; rather, it has substantial existence itself and possesses, inseminates or inhabits the soul.

If the Church were a purely intellectual entity, like the essence of a triangle, then its ectypes would be particular churches in the world. However, this is not the case. While it may be true that the several churches are all churches insofar as they have the same essence (which is to say, the relation of particular to universal applies, as it does with all other things, including the generic idea of the commonwealth and particular commonwealths in the world), Cudworth is clear that there really is only one Church and that this takes time to become actual and organized.<sup>1182</sup> The ectype of the Church is not these particular churches or even the individuals who are ‘wed to Christ’; rather, the ectypes are women insofar as they are united by marriage to men. For it is the marriage union that bears the stamp (i.e., is the ectypal copy) of the mystical union of Christ and the Church. Moreover, the devotion

<sup>1180</sup> Cf. Plato, *Parmenides* 132d, where it is claimed that Forms are the paradigms of things in nature, and the latter are considered “likenesses” (*homoiomata*).

<sup>1181</sup> E.g., *TIS*, vol. 3, p. 64.

<sup>1182</sup> *Union*, pp. 31-35.

of a wife to her husband is the equivalent of the devotion of a Christian to Christ, but one that is based on and redeems natural sentiments.

In being devoted to Christ, one is not personally married to Christ; rather, one becomes a sustaining member of a community of people who have imbibed the same spirit of love. In an unpublished manuscript, Cudworth writes:

There is a certain universality of being whereby a man cannot apprehend himself as a being standing by itself, cut off, separated, and disjoined from all other beings, whose good, being private, is, as it were, opposite to the good of all other beings, but looks upon himself as a member lovingly united to the whole system of all intellectual beings, as one animal, or as concerned in the good and welfare of all besides himself.... There is ... a principle of common sympathy in everyone, that makes everyone to have another being besides his own private selfish particularity, whereby he rises above it, and is in a manner all, as parents and children seem to make up a *totum*.<sup>1183</sup>

The whole of humanity is here likened to a single animal or family. But this is a spiritual union, for its parts are “lovingly united to the whole system of all intellectual beings.” As a member, one participates in the amplification and explication of the spirit of love into the world, a spirit which is prior and superior to any particular individual in whom it may be embodied. The spread of this spirit is, according to another of Cudworth’s sermons, the purpose of the Gospel:

There is a *caro* and a *spiritus*, a flesh and a spirit, a body and a soul in all the writings of the Scriptures. It is but the flesh and body of divine truths that is printed upon paper; which many moths of books and libraries do only feed upon; many walking skeletons of knowledge, that bury and entomb truths in the living sepulchers of their souls, do only converse with.... But there is a soul and spirit of divine truths that could never yet be congealed into ink, that could never be blotted upon paper; which, by a secret traduction and conveyance, passeth from one soul into another, being able to dwell or lodge nowhere but in a spiritual being, in a living thing, because itself is nothing but life and spirit.... Words are nothing but the dead resemblances and pictures of those truths which live and breathe in actions; and ‘the kingdom of God (as the apostle speaketh) consisteth not in word’ [I Cor. 4:20], but in life and power.<sup>1184</sup>

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<sup>1183</sup> Manuscript 4983, p. 83, quoted in Passmore, *Cudworth*, pp. 71-2.

<sup>1184</sup> In Cragg, *Cambridge Platonists*, pp. 389-90.

Reminiscent of the speech of Agathon in Plato's *Symposium*, in which Eros is said to pass from gentle soul to gentle soul,<sup>1185</sup> Cudworth notes that the living spirit comes to possess and animate souls in a continuous tradition; for the individual soul, this results in a "truly free disposition of spirit" in which one loves only what God loves and thus manifests "the life of God in himself".<sup>1186</sup>

### C. On the relation between spirit and knowledge

The latter quotations are taken from Cudworth's 1647 address to the House of Commons about the condition of the Church. His main point in this sermon is that:

...if we desire a true reformation, as we seem to do, let us begin here in reforming our hearts and lives, in keeping of Christ's commandments. All outward forms and models of reformation, though they be never so good in their kind, yet they are of little worth to us without this inward reformation of the heart.... We must be reformed within, with a spirit of fire and a spirit of burning, to purge us from the dross and corruption of our hearts and refine us as gold and silver, and then we shall be reformed truly, and not before. When this once comes to pass, then shall Christ be set upon his throne indeed, then, 'the glory of the Lord shall overflow the land'; then we shall be a people acceptable unto him, and as mount Sion, which he dearly loved.<sup>1187</sup>

Cudworth's aim is to bring the Church in England back to Christ. He is not concerned with ecclesiastical disputes here; the Church is the single entity, that is the company and tradition of souls who have the spirit and life of Christ within, the collective spouse of Christ.

One of the most interesting aspects to this address is that, despite Cudworth being criticized as a "dry as dust scholar",<sup>1188</sup> his starting point and ending point are emphatic declarations that the life of the true spirit is independent of theoretical

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<sup>1185</sup> *Symposium*, 195e.

<sup>1186</sup> Cragg, *Cambridge Platonists*, p. 405; cf. p. 406.

<sup>1187</sup> Reprinted in Cragg, *Cambridge Platonists*, p. 407.

<sup>1188</sup> Cassirer, *Renaissance*, p. 166.

knowledge; it is, rather, a matter of purifying the heart, loving what God loves, and willing what God wills. This is what it means to have the spirit of divine love dwell in us, and this is the true mark of a Christian. Generally speaking, knowledge does not have to be fully developed in order for the spirit of love to be fully actualized. By these comments alone, one might take Cudworth to be a misologist—and not a philologist. Yet this is not only incongruent with the rest of his life’s work as a philosopher and philologist; for in the written dedication of the sermon (made after the actual address), he explicitly asks the House of Commons for the support of the sciences. This ambivalent position with respect to knowledge deserves attention, especially considering the weight I have given to Cudworth’s rationalism. What I will show is that, for Cudworth, the spirit has become increasingly dependent on knowledge, and must reckon with the force of the intellect in modern times.

Near the beginning of his address, Cudworth argues that:

[i]nk and paper can never make us Christians, can never beget a new nature, a living principle in us; can never form Christ, or any true notions of spiritual things, in our hearts. The Gospel, that new law which Christ delivered to the world, it is not merely a dead letter without us, but a quickening spirit within us. Cold theorems and maxims, dry and jejune disputes, lean syllogistical reasonings could never yet of themselves beget the least glimpse of true heavenly light, the least sap of saving knowledge in any heart. All this is but the groping of the poor dark spirit of man after truth, to find it out with his own endeavors, and feel it with his own cold and benumbed hands. Words and syllables, which are but dead things, cannot possibly convey the living notions of heavenly truths to us. The secret mysteries of a divine life, of a new nature, of Christ formed in our hearts, they cannot be written or spoken, language and expressions cannot reach them; neither can they be ever truly understood, except the soul itself be kindled from within and awakened into the life of them. A painter that would draw a rose, though he may flourish some likeness of it in figure and color, yet he can never paint the scent and fragrancy; or if he would draw a flame, he cannot put a constant heat into his colours....<sup>1189</sup>

One might think that the *True Intellectual System* is a massive compendium of “dry and jejune disputes” and “lean syllogistical reasonings”. That enormous work is an attempt to

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<sup>1189</sup> Cragg, *Cambridge Platonists*, pp. 374-5.

dispute all known arguments and positions which tend toward atheism; and yet, Cudworth preaches that “[i]t is not wrangling disputes and syllogistical reasonings that are the mighty pillars that underprop truth in the world.”<sup>1190</sup> Cudworth has just claimed that the use of reason in the search for truth is a purely human effort; whereas the reception of the teaching of the Gospel is a co-operation with and adaptation to God. Truth is fundamentally a way of living, a godly disposition and transformation of desire—not the possession of certain ideas or arguments. The latter is a secondary, epistemological sense of truth, which is secondary insofar as it can be attained through human work without God’s grace, and therefore without it having its intended effect on character and action. What, then, is Cudworth’s attitude towards the pursuit of theoretical truth, considering its lower rank and yet his life’s vocation?

Relative to other worldly desires, theoretical knowledge is indeed an esteemed thing for Cudworth; but it is not the ultimate achievement:

Knowledge indeed is a thing far more excellent than riches, outward pleasures, worldly dignities, or anything else in the world besides holiness and the conformity of our wills to the will of God; but yet our happiness consisteth not in it, but in a certain divine temper and constitution of soul, which is far above it. / But it is a piece of that corruption that runneth through human nature, that we naturally prize truth more than goodness, knowledge more than holiness. We think it a great thing to be fluttering up to heaven with our wings of knowledge and speculations, whereas the highest mystery of a divine life here, and of perfect happiness hereafter, consisteth in nothing but mere obedience to the divine will. Happiness is nothing but that inward sweet delight that will arise from the harmonious agreement between our wills and God’s will. ... There is nothing contrary to God in the whole world, nothing that fights against him, but self-will.<sup>1191</sup>

Assuming these words of Cudworth’s to be genuine, they must again cast some doubt about the highly rationalized interpretation of Cudworth’s works as a whole (in contrast to, say Henry More). But why would Cudworth have dedicated so much of his life to his written

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<sup>1190</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 406.

<sup>1191</sup> Cragg, *Cambridge Platonists*, p. 380-1.



sincere endeavors for the public good is the hearty prayer of, Your most humble servant, Ralph Cudworth.<sup>1192</sup>

Knowledge independent of religion is dangerous; but that is not even true knowledge. For all knowledge tends to God (including atomic physiology, for example) and, in fact, may strengthen religion insofar as it is ultimately an intellectual perception of the imprints of God in every aspect of the world. Moreover, a sharpened faculty of understanding can assist in conveying the spirit of the Gospel, for “[s]weetness and ingenuity will more powerfully command men’s minds than passion, sourness and severity. . . . Truth and love are two of the most powerful things in the world; and when they both go together, they cannot easily be withstood.”<sup>1193</sup> It is thus the combination of spirit and knowledge that Cudworth is seeking and the pursuit of the latter without a genuine dedication to the former that Cudworth is criticizing.

What will be shown next is that though the tradition and conveyance of the spirit of the life of Christ from soul to soul does not require an explicit understanding of specific concepts or arguments—let alone the system of the universe—it has become increasingly entangled in the traditions of knowledge to the point where the latter have become a serious stumbling block for the progress of the Church and must be reckoned with.

#### D. Providence and knowledge

The spirit of love is endowed to Man at his inception but takes time to become cultivated, realized, articulated, organized, and made the foundation of life through the Church. Just as this spirit is innate, yet needs development, so too with knowledge: like an

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<sup>1192</sup> Cragg, *Cambridge Platonists*, pp. 372-3.

<sup>1193</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 399.

emanation into the world, it is revealed by God, and, given the endowment of reason, it gets cultivated by the intellect's work on the given material. And like the growth of the Church through the lives of the saints and the influence of Christ, the actualization of knowledge is a co-operative effort, since it depends both on reason and on revelation.

All theoretical truth can be traced back to the Mosaic revelation, as we have seen. Indeed, all falsity can be traced back to it as well, since falsity is a distortion and diminution of truth. As Cudworth writes in his *Discourse Concerning the True Notion of the Lord's Supper* (1676), "[t]here is always some Truth which gives being to every Error."<sup>1194</sup> As has been mentioned, Cudworth's primary method in the *TIS* is to find the source of the error (such as the misinterpretation of the maxim *ex nihilo nihil*) and steer the reasoning back on course. This is his project because false systems (e.g., Hobbes') have started to gain momentum in leading people away from God. As we will now see, this situation too is, according to Cudworth, part of the divine will: it has been prophesized that a scientific age would come about, and this is when the way of knowledge must be reconciled with the way of spirit. It is time for the true system to re-emerge explicitly and stabilize the tradition of the living spirit in an age which demands reasons for everything.

Cudworth quite clearly believes that Judeo-Christian prophecies extend beyond the first coming of Christ and contain the whole of this history, including the place of knowledge in it. In Cudworth's interpretation (as in Henry More's),<sup>1195</sup> the books of *Daniel* and *Revelation* "set down a prophetic calendar of times, in a continued series...., to the very

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<sup>1194</sup> Introduction to *A Discourse Concerning the True Notion of the Lord's Supper*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: R. Royston., 1676), p. 1. Cudworth's next point expands on this: "All great Errours have ever been intermingled with some Truth. And indeed, if Falsehood should appear alone unto the world in her own true shape and native deformity, she would be so black and horrid that no man would look upon her; and therefore she hath always had an art to wrap up her self in a garment of Light, by which means she passed freely disguised and undiscerned." (p. 1)

<sup>1195</sup> See More's *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos* (1680) and *Paralipomena prophetica* (1685).

end of the world,”<sup>1196</sup> which, as a Millenarian, Cudworth believed was soon.<sup>1197</sup> Most pertinently to Cudworth’s own intellectual and evangelical projects is the prophecy that the end will be heralded by a highly philosophical climate; and he perceived that his own times were “an age so philosophical.”<sup>1198</sup> Cudworth actually begins his sermon to the House of Commons with this point:

We have much inquiry concerning knowledge in these latter times. ... There [are] many that speak of new glimpses and discoveries of truth, of dawns of Gospel light, and no question but God hath reserved much of this for the very evening and sunset of the world, for in the latter days knowledge shall be increased. But yet I wish we could in the meantime see that day to dawn, which the apostle speaks of, and that day-star to arise in men’s hearts’ [cf. 2 Pet. 1:19]. I wish, whilst we talk of light and dispute about truth, we could walk more as ‘children of light’ [Eph. 5:8].<sup>1199</sup>

In these “latter days”, the “new glimpses and discoveries of truth” are, in fact, revivals of ancient knowledge, and belong within a long “prophetic calendar of times”. The ideas which comprise the true intellectual system make their first appearance in the world through oracles and prophecies, which the human intellect must work to interpret. Human reason must incorporate these insights into its given system of understanding and thereby expand the latter. Socrates is a famous example of this process, returning from Delphi with his philosophical task at hand. The Mosaic revelation then lifts this scattered development of knowledge in the world to a higher level, setting up the conditions for full comprehension. The theological and moral ideas enter into common circulation in the ancient Jewish form of life (i.e., the “Jewish Church”) and are developed through philosophical consideration; coupled with the appearance of Christ, the conditions in the world are laid for the future appropriation of the truth in an age so philosophical.

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<sup>1196</sup> *TIS*, vol. 3, p. 28.

<sup>1197</sup> Popkin, *Third Force*, p. 346.

<sup>1198</sup> *TIS*, vol.1, p. xlvi.

<sup>1199</sup> Cudworth, Ralph. *Life of Christ, the pith and kernel of all religion*, sermon before the House of Commons (March 31, 1647). Reprinted in Cragg, *Cambridge Platonists*, pp. 367-407.

The reasons for thinking that all of this falls within God’s foreknowledge, according to Cudworth, are as follows. First, Cudworth claims that even prior to creation, God knew that Adam would fall from his original state of grace and that Christ would be sent to redeem humanity.<sup>1200</sup> Second, Cudworth claims that there is “one grand design of Christianity”—namely, “to free the world of idolatry and creature worship.”<sup>1201</sup> That is to say, the aim of history is for the Church to expand in its scope and deepen in its integrity and faithfulness. Third, to this end, the heathen world was prepared providentially for the reception of Christ through the philosophical tradition initiated by Moses. In particular, Cudworth regards the development of the Platonists as “a wonderfull providence of almighty God.”<sup>1202</sup> Furthermore, other figures (such as Athanasius) who direct the Church in the correct way are considered “highly instrumental and serviceable to divine providence.”<sup>1203</sup> Finally, the point above is that all the knowledge gained in the ancient world in the esoteric cults, philosophical schools, and the rabbinic tradition—which is to say, in exclusive groups of people—is foreknown by God to become revived (by the Italian Platonists and Descartes in particular) and now publicly known (though largely corrupted) in modern times, at “the evening and sunset of the world.” For this has been prophesized, and true prophecy is always a transmission of divine knowledge.<sup>1204</sup>

This belief in a providentially-governed world history is highly significant for Cudworth. Not only did his writings serve to collect all of the ancient wisdom and demonstrate that the kernel of truth has been passed along and developed through history;

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<sup>1200</sup> *Union*, pp. 30-1.

<sup>1201</sup> *TIS*, vol. 2, p. 457.

<sup>1202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1203</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1204</sup> Of God’s providence, Cudworth elsewhere writes: “[T]here is one only necessary existent, the cause of all other things; and this an absolutely perfect Being, infinitely good, wise, and powerful; who hath made all that was fit to be made, and according to the best wisdom, and exerciseth an exact providence over all....” (*TIS*, vol. 3, p. 516)

he was also involved in the world as a knowing actor in “the divine drama”. Citing Plotinus [III.2.xvi], Cudworth writes that the evolution of the world is:

PPPPPPPPPP, a ‘truer poem;’ and we men historical actors upon the stage, who, notwithstanding, insert something of our own into the poem too; but God Almighty is that skilful dramatist, who always connecteth that of ours, which went before, with what of his follows after, into good coherent sense, and will at last make it appear, that a thread of exact justice did run though all...<sup>1205</sup>

The entirety of human history is thus a single work foreknown by the Dramaturge, and individuals participate in this temporal thread through free-willed action.

Cudworth’s life work—both inside and outside the university—was his attempt to be a knowing participant in and agent of the divine will, bringing about the Second Coming. As the first Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge, Cromwell appointed him to a commission which negotiated with Rabbi Menasheh ben Israel in order to bring the Jews back to England—for Cudworth was a believer that Scriptural prophecies would be fulfilled soon in the thousand year Reign of Christ on Earth, and that this would be heralded by the conversion of the Jews.<sup>1206</sup> As for his philosophical work, this represents his effort to employ and appeal to reason with respect to the most important ideas in order to rectify commonly held errors so that his readers—i.e., members of the Church—might be saved. Finally, his philological work represents his effort to show how it is that human knowledge has progressed from inchoate and esoteric knowledge in the ancient world to the possibility of complete and public actualization of knowledge in the modern world, given the right and pious use of reason and the grounding in truth provided by revelation.

Cudworth is not simply reacting to contingent circumstances in the world. His intellectual climate is part of the pre-established order of history, foreknown by God and prophesized in Scripture. Since this general outline of history is within God’s will, it is also

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<sup>1205</sup> *TIS*, vol. 3, pp. 476-7.

<sup>1206</sup> Popkin, *Third Force*, p. 346.

rational in the sense of being within God's wisdom. As Cudworth makes clear in his argument against (Descartes') voluntarism, the will of God "is always free, though not always indifferent, since it is its greatest perfection to be determined by infinite wisdom and infinite goodness."<sup>1207</sup> God's will is determined by his wisdom because

wisdom in itself hath the nature of a rule and measure, being a most determinate and inflexible thing. But will being only a blind and dark thing as considered in itself, but also indefinite and indeterminate, that therefore the nature of a thing regulable and measurable. Wherefore it is the perfection of will, as such, to be guided and determined by wisdom and truth.<sup>1208</sup>

Whatever is determined by wisdom and truth is at least partly knowable by humans, for:

all the knowledge and wisdom that is in creatures, whether angels or men, is nothing else but a participation of that one eternal, immutable, and increated wisdom of God, or several signatures of that one archetypal seal, or like so many multiplied reflections of one and same face, made in several glasses, whereof some are clearer, some obscurer, some standing nearer, some further off.<sup>1209</sup>

As has been stated earlier, the purpose of *EIM* is to show that the same objective order serves as the common rational basis for divine judgment on human action.

When this thinking is applied to the conviction that the prophetic calendar of times set down in Scripture has continually been fulfilled, it follows that there must be some logic to that history which can be uncovered.

#### E. History as recollection

The belief in a providentially-governed history, from creation to Judgment Day, sets an individual's life within a meaningful temporal order. For Cudworth, that order is structured around the relationship between God and humanity—which is also to say

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<sup>1207</sup> *EIM*, p. 27.

<sup>1208</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>1209</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26. Cf. p. 131; *TIS*, vol. 3, p. 65.

between Christ and the Church. Even atheistic philosophies are to be understood within this rubric, since they ultimately stem from the ancient revelations through which the Church was established as an earthly institution. Bearing in mind the entirety of history and the fact that humanity as a whole constitutes its primary subject (in relation to God), we may discern something of the logic of this history from an epistemic point of view.

Cudworth writes that “our common Christianity agrees thus far, as to suppose a kind of imputative pre-existence in Adam, in whom all were created pure, and so consequently involved in his after miscarriage....”<sup>1210</sup> By stating that we have an imputative pre-existence in Adam and are involved in or inherit his Fall, Cudworth is making two claims: that we as humans share the same basic nature, and that as we are all part of that single drama of history beginning with creation and ending with Judgment Day. That the spirit of love and the ideas of all things are innate in us corresponds to the first, metaphysical claim concerning our basic character. The way that these potentialities get developed is the plot of the drama—which is to say, the explication and growth of the Church and its struggle with the force of the intellect which defiantly strives to be independent. We have seen that particular individuals are highly significant in shaping the direction of this movement; the saints, for example, bring the Church back to God, while Democritus, for example, lures it astray. Such individuals are nodes who Cudworth regards as actors in relation to the whole movement, and which prompt the activation of innate potentialities, though not always to the proper end.

Thus, from the perspective of the human race as the descendents of Adam (the Hebrew for ‘humans’ is *b’nai Adam*—i.e., children of Adam), the revelation to Moses is a revelation to a tiny part of the whole, a planting of a seed in a vast garden. But its

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<sup>1210</sup> *TIS*, vol. 3, p. 482.

germination is more akin to a fungus than a tree: it spreads underground through esoteric traditions and sprouts up into various but similar formulations above ground, where they are recognizable to one who is trained in identifying them. The intermittent articulations of the ancient wisdom are indications that this knowledge is continually being carried over into the future, though largely outside the scope of the conscious awareness of the whole of humanity. The illumination of the true intellectual system to Moses is an appearance of knowledge in an isolated and minute part of the whole; for a brief moment, that knowledge was within consciousness in one part on behalf of the whole—that is, it was explicitly known while the Church was being established as a continuous institution on earth. The carriers of this knowledge—i.e., the prophets, the rabbis and the philosophers—are likewise conscious of it in varying degrees; but with respect to the whole of humanity, that knowledge is almost entirely unconscious, though still active. For the whole, this constitutes a kind of forgetfulness, which is a retreat from explicit awareness (through a representative) into a memory that is kept alive in shady, inaccurate ways. But the conditions later arise so that all of what has been underground and scattered in various systems may be brought out and their underlying unity revealed. As this unity is the unity of the system which was at one point explicitly known in the world, the subsequent explication in a philosophical and philological context—which is to say, an exoteric, public domain—constitutes a recollection of what was once known, so long as we are speaking in terms of the whole and of individuals as its representatives. The epistemic form of history is thus explicit idea (in a part), implicit (in tradition and in the life of the Church), then explicit once again (in the whole). This is part of the spread of truth to redeem all humans—or at least to enabling all to be redeemed through their own free use of reason.

In an individual mind, memory usually works without the conscious mind knowing this. In Cudworth's example of recognizing an acquaintance in a crowd, one may not give a thought to this person for decades; and yet, when he is seen again, it becomes clear that the mind was remembering all along, but not consciously. Analogously, the whole of humanity, represented as inclusion or exclusion from the Church, is not generally aware of the fact that it possesses a continuous memory of the true system from Moses on. Cudworth is trying to make his readers recognize that there has been a long history of forgetfulness, but that the truth has persisted and has presented itself as an old acquaintance. The main difference between individual and collective recollection is that for the latter, there is a quantitative increase in the recollective moment, since the truth becomes explicit in more individual souls than the original knower.

When the system of knowledge reappears in the early modern period, Cudworth claims to recognize it, and is able through study to see the isolated moments of explicit (though incomplete) recollection along the way. Just as the idea of God was implicit in polytheistic mythic systems, where it may not have been conscious to many except for the sages who uncovered what was implicit, so too in the modern systems of thought—in religion and science—the truth is implicit and recognized only by a few. When the knowledge that is derivative of the true system becomes dangerous to the fidelity of the Church, it must reckon with its founding knowledge. It must seek that knowledge within its history to respond to the distortions. Thus one of Cudworth's responses to the partial truth of Descartes' philosophy is to point out that these are actually *Meditations on Old Philosophy*.<sup>1211</sup> The knowledge claims that are dangerous to the Church are not foreign to it, but derived from it. In order to counter them, it needs to recover the truth in order to

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<sup>1211</sup> *EIM*, p. 24.

expose the origin of the error. Recognition of the truth through philosophy is the necessary end of the pre-ordained drama of history, where salvation is found in the right use of reason, and modern reason is redeemed by being brought back to its ancient roots.

## Chapter 15: Summary and Conclusions - Plato and the Cambridge Platonists

The Cambridge Platonists are not mere expositors of Plato's philosophy, as Plotinus claimed he was;<sup>1212</sup> they draw on any and all ancient philosophies, from Zoroastrianism to Skepticism. In light of this syncretism, the main reason why they have been considered Platonists is that their thinking begins from the premise that mind or spirit is prior to matter and governs the latter. This fundamental idea sets them against contemporary materialists and extends into all parts of their philosophy. The same can equally be said of Plato. While plenty of minor differences are to be found in their respective views, and considering that attributing any single position to Plato is contentious as it is, there are several uncontroversial similarities in their positions, such as their belief in the immortality of the soul (at least in the future), the existence of immutable intelligible objects, and the ethical ideal of the purification and rational governance of the soul. My intention here is not to compare them with regard to all of these matters. I will, rather, be focussing on less obvious points of comparison which have emerged in the course of this study, and which stem from the fact that Cudworth's Platonism is Christian.

### A. Similar diagnoses of the foe

The point of comparison with which this study began concerned the intellectual climate in early modern Europe and Plato's Athens. We are now in a position to explain this similarity in greater detail and to use this as a further basis of comparison once we consider their theoretical responses to their situations. The similarity in question has been

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<sup>1212</sup> Lloyd Gerson, *Plotinus*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 225.

stated in general terms by Eugene Austin in his work on the ethics of the Cambridge Platonists: “Cudworth, More and all the others saw that Plato in his day was a brilliant opponent of the same foes which they were facing in their day.”<sup>1213</sup> Yet who or what is the foe exactly? The comparison which I will be making here is that of their respective interpretations of this question. In both cases, I will argue, the foe consists of a complex of intellectual symptoms which characterize a single disease. As we will see, this disease arises in the same intellectual context, which I will call ‘modernity’, understood as a relative term. I will show that their understandings of and reactions to modernity are very similar, with some notable differences, which I hope will shed light on both when revealed.

To start (and to repeat), Cudworth explicitly speaks of this fact that he was facing a similar situation to that of Plato. Referring to *Laws X*, Cudworth writes:

Plato gives an account, why he judged it necessary in those times, publicly to propose that atheistic hypothesis in order to a confutation, as also to produce rational arguments for the proof of a Deity, after this manner: ¶

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..... ~ “Had not these atheistic doctrines been publicly divulged, and made known in a manner to all, it would not have been needful to have confuted them, nor by reasons to prove a Deity; but now it is necessary.” And we conceive, that the same necessity at this time will justify our present undertaking likewise; since these atheistic doctrines have been as boldly vented, and publicly asserted, in this latter age of ours, as ever they could be in Plato’s time, when the severity of the Athenian government must needs be a great check to such designs; Socrates having been put to death upon a mere false and groundless accusation of atheism, and Protagoras, (who doubtless was a real Atheist) having escaped the same punishment no otherwise than by flight, his books being notwithstanding publicly burnt in the market-place at Athens, and himself condemned to perpetual exile.... Whereas atheism, in this latter age of ours, hath been impudently asserted, and most industriously promoted; that very atomic form, that was first introduced (a little before Plato’s time) by Leucippus, Protagoras, and Democritus, having been also revived amongst us, and that with no small pomp and ostentation of wisdom and philosophy.<sup>1214</sup>

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<sup>1213</sup> Austin, *Ethics*, p. 16.

<sup>1214</sup> *TIS*, vol. 1, p. 274.

The situation here is the rising popularity of atheism, supported by a materialist version of atomism. Though not all materialists are necessarily atheists, Cudworth notes, “yet Atheists universally have been corporealists; this being always their first and grand postulatum, that there is no other substance besides body. Thus Plato long ago declared concerning them [in his Sophist].”<sup>1215</sup> Hence, atomism must be vindicated and clarified in order to show that it properly belongs within a theistic system as opposed to a strictly materialist system. This is one of Cudworth’s major tasks in the *True Intellectual System*.

As was shown in Chapter 6, the modern Athenians had begun to abandon their belief in the gods as part of the effort to break free of tradition and affirm the value of the individual’s worldly and sensuous desires. Materialism was a particularly helpful tool in justifying the release from any metaphysical order which places ethical demands or constraints on the individual. Cudworth has clearly identified the fairly obvious connection between materialist natural philosophy and atheism (for God is usually conceived as an intellectual or spiritual substance), and his project against the materialists (e.g., Hobbes) is precisely to prove the prior existence of such a metaphysical and moral order.

For Plato, the shift in the hierarchy of values manifested itself in the intellectual sphere as sophism. And indeed, Cudworth recognizes this too as part of the complex. He notes that it was “a considerable observation of Plato’s that it is not onely gross sensuality which inclines men to atheize, but also an affection of seeming wiser than the generality of mankind.”<sup>1216</sup> And again:

...we find the same thing at this very day, that Atheists make a great pretence to wisdom and philosophy; and that many are tempted to maintain atheistic opinions,

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<sup>1215</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 228. In his chapter on Cudworth, Tulloch writes: “The essence of Atheism, in short, is the displacement of Mind from its position at the head of nature—the subordination of mind to matter as its outcome and highest flower of development, rather than its Maker and Governor. All Atheism is materialism, or, as Cudworth calls it, corporealism.” (*Theology*, p. 253)

<sup>1216</sup> *TIS*, vol. 1, p. 274

that they may gain a reputation of wit by it. Which indeed was one reason that the [*sic*] rather induced us nakedly to reveal all the mysteries of atheism, because we observed, that so long as things are concealed and kept up in huggermugger, many will be the rather apt to suspect that there is some great depth and profundity of wisdom lodged in them; and that it is some noble and generous truth which the bigotic religious endeavour to smother and suppress.<sup>1217</sup>

Atheists employ reason in order to dazzle others for the sake of self-aggrandizement or profit. Hence, Cudworth sets out to “resist those sophistical reasonings that shall be made against [faith],”<sup>1218</sup> such as those of “Democritus and Epicurus, ... [those] infatuated sophists, or witty fools, and debauchers of mankind.”<sup>1219</sup> While it may be the case that Cudworth is using the term ‘sophist’ loosely, he does explicitly substitute Hobbes for Protagoras, regarding their views as essentially the same.

A fourth aspect to this complex, in addition to atheism, materialism, and sophism, is the claim to novelty. In Plato, we saw that the rise of individualism and the decay of virtue in Athens came about partly as a consequence of the unrestraint of novel ideas and customs, beginning with changes to the traditional music. Cudworth similarly finds the claims to novelty of Descartes and especially Hobbes to be overly bold and simply false. This is especially clear in the case of Hobbes, who claimed to have been the first true political scientist, equivalent to Euclid as the first true mathematician.<sup>1220</sup> Against Hobbes’ position, Cudworth notes that:

... this was the old atheistic generation of justice, and of a body politic, civil society, and sovereignty. For though a modern writer affirm this hypothesis (which he looks upon as the only true scheme of politics) to be a new invention, as the circulation of the blood, and no older than the book de Cive, yet it is certain that it was the commonly received doctrine of the atheistic politicians and philosophers before Plato’s time; who represents their sense concerning the original of justice and civil society in this manner.<sup>1221</sup>

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<sup>1217</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279.

<sup>1218</sup> *Ibid.*, Preface, vol. 1, p. xlv.

<sup>1219</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 495.

<sup>1220</sup> Strauss, Leo. *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*. transl. Elsa M. Sinclair. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), p. 136. Henceforth, “Hobbes”.

<sup>1221</sup> *TIS*, vol. 3, pp. 497-8. Cudworth then cites *Republic*, book II.

With respect to Descartes and the Cartesians, Passmore expresses the Cambridge

Platonists' reaction nicely:

The Renaissance was principally the reaffirmation of an ancient tradition; the seventeenth-century 'modernists', on the other hand, thought of themselves as making a fresh start. The Cartesian 'method of doubt', with its emphasis on the need for reconstructing our thought from the foundation upwards, is not merely a philosophical technique. It expresses, in a formal way, a genuine ambition, one which Descartes shared with many of his contemporaries and immediate successors. Philosophy, so Descartes thought, could and ought to start with a clean slate. / Cudworth, on the other hand, looked upon philosophy as an arena of conflict; the contestants might change their name, or might improve their technical apparatus, but they could not seriously modify the fundamental structure of their arguments. He was impressed by the recurrence of certain patterns of philosophical controversy; he was not impressed by the claim of his contemporaries that they had shaken themselves free from tradition in order to embark upon an enterprise quite novel, in a manner untrammelled by the errors of the past. In an age which insisted above all upon originality, he insisted upon the continuity of tradition. He knew that his emphasis upon the past could not be expected to win him popularity. 'We do often give an account', he writes, 'of the doctrine of the ancients; which, however, some of our over-severe philosophers may look upon fastidiously, or under-value and depreciate.' But his scholarship was not a mere 'defect of philosophical style', as Muirhead describes it; it is often tiresome, often inaccurate, but none the less it is essential to his purpose—to depict in general terms the kinds of philosophical outlook (not merely X's views and Y's views) which threaten 'the True Intellectual System of the Universe.' ... Cudworth's scholarship, then, is not mere pedantry: it is a deliberate protest against the modern emphasis upon originality and innovation. In form it is a variation upon a method employed by Plotinus ('this doctrine is not new: it was professed from the most ancient time, though without being developed explicitly' [*Enneads*, 5, I, 8]) and worked out in detail by Ficino. It is difficult to avoid forcing analogies of this kind, and from this temptation Cudworth did not always escape. These long and dreary wastes of tortuous ingenuity particularly repel the modern reader.<sup>1222</sup>

Cudworth's "repulsive" philological method is his attempt to show that all advancements and distortions of human knowledge belong within the grand history of the true intellectual system becoming known as the necessary means of fortifying the Church. The very claim to be independent of tradition is both false and arrogant—even impious, considering that the epistemic history of humanity is part of divine providence.

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<sup>1222</sup> Passmore, *Cudworth*, pp. 12-4.

Hobbes' and Descartes' error here is highly significant: modern thinking that regards itself as independent from and superior to tradition does not properly understand itself—even in simple matters of fact, such as the former existence of the same theories. Considering Cudworth's claim that all knowledge is ultimately self-knowledge,<sup>1223</sup> their failure to acknowledge their forerunners renders their thinking suspicious in that it clearly lacks at least one kind of self-understanding. This is not to say that Cudworth leaves his critique on the level of an *ad hominem*, for he proceeds to treat the positions by assessing their fundamental assumptions. The point is that Cudworth's admonition with regard to lack of historical self-understanding actually constitutes a greater affirmation of his opponents and their followers than they know. His critique of the modern claim to novelty is intended to elevate modern thinking by grounding it in its actual source. This parallels the idea in Plato that the Athenians are young and have no memory. For Plato has Solon intending to tell the modern Athenians that, despite their high esteem for themselves, they are actually ignorant of their true legacy, against which their conceit pales in comparison. In both cases, the message to the opponent is that some humility would render them even greater than they currently believe.

There is significant point of difference in their diagnoses of the foe, however. It is that Plato adds democracy to this complex of atheism-materialism-sophism-modernism; in fact, from an aetiological perspective, the rise of democracy is at the basis of the rest of the symptoms. None of the Cambridge Platonists comment on the rise of democracy (or at least the Commons), and they acquiesced equally under Cromwell and the Restoration. It is quite clear at the outset that, as Christians, such worldly affairs are largely irrelevant,

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<sup>1223</sup> See Part II, Chapter 3, §B and Chapter 4, §A above.

especially when their work of charity as preachers and writers is unaffected by political changes. Yet, I believe there is more to be said about this difference.

#### B. The response to modernity and the conditions for philosophical recognition

Given a similar—though, as we will see, not identical—diagnosis of the problem, both Plato and the Cambridge Platonists engage in rational argumentation with sophistical arguments and attempt to establish certain metaphysical, epistemological, and moral positions through reason alone. But in both cases, part of their response involves an effort to contain the foe by providing a supplementary treatment of how the truth appears or has appeared in the world—and thus how the opponent came to be as it is.

As I have shown, the logic of the appearance of truth is discernable in Plato through his presentation of the various political and psychological constitutions through time. For the Cambridge Platonists, and most explicitly in Cudworth, that logic is framed within Scripture's account of past and future history. The situation that both face is that of a degradation and publication of knowledge which is making moral life increasingly obscure—a situation which occurs relatively late in the relevant history and may be rectified through a recollection of ancient knowledge.

In more detail, Plato's response to this modern situation is an attempt to reform the intellectual trends by turning them inward in order to recover the fundamental ideas of virtue which gave rise to their way of life in the first place. Philosophical recognition constitutes a revival of ancient wisdom, which was maintained implicitly, but decreasingly, in the customs, ideals, and language of the Athenians. In Chapter 8, it was shown that the

possibility of retrieving the original knowledge of virtue through recollection depended upon:

- a) the existence of the idea in its implicit mode in a living *nomos*, whose opinions and customs can be analyzed;
- b) the reflective distance that allows one to examine the given world critically, which distance only comes relatively late in the decline of the polity;
- c) the general power of the intellect to analyze this life and synthesize the elements that are found to be common;
- d) the orientation in thinking that is passed down through an initiatory tradition; and
- e) the virtuous character of Socrates, which embodies the idea to the extent that the idea is recognized concretely in him.

Both the response and the set of conditions are essentially the same for Cudworth. Condition a) is met in Cudworth's thinking insofar as the moral idea is implicit in Jewish life and law. This is part of the reason for his dedication to the Jewish philosophical and Cabbalistic tradition.<sup>1224</sup> The extent and manner in which the moral idea is effective in modern European—or more specifically, English—life is unclear in the Cambridge Platonists, for they generally eschewed such discussions. Nevertheless, the ideas that were then circulating, both common and scientific, still contain the implicit traces of their origin; and Cudworth's method of refutation lies in reducing these ideas to their fundamental principles, then explicating those principles in order to correct their improper application.

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<sup>1224</sup> The other reason is that the Cabbalistic natural philosophy is congruent with Neoplatonism and offers a vitalist alternative to strict (i.e., materialistic) mechanism. See Alexander Jacob, "The Neoplatonic Conception of Nature in More, Cudworth, and Berkeley," in Stephen Gaukroger, ed., *The Uses of Antiquity: The Scientific Revolution and the Classical Tradition*. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), pp. 101-121.

That is to say, since the scientific advancements of recent times are derived from the true system, they can be led back to that truth.

Condition b) is met in Cudworth's thinking insofar as he understands the contemporary world as an "age so philosophical"—that is, the "latter days" which herald the end of the world. The fact that Hobbes and Descartes could (pretend to) begin anew reflects an independence of thought from given opinion and modes of understanding. Thus the power of reason is heightened; but, for the Cambridge Platonists, it needs to be directed at past thought in such a way that one is open to being transformed by it. That is, independence of thought (i.e., reflective distance) does not imply present superiority, as is indeed the case in modern Athens in Plato's view.

Condition c) is met insofar as the general power of reason is vindicated as "the light of nature" and "the candle of the Lord" within. Though faith may suffice for salvation, the faculty of reason must now be affirmed as having become necessary in modern times, where there is too much confusion, factionalism, and ubiquitous doubt in matters of faith. Reason can be trusted insofar as it is furnished with natural prolepses or anticipations of the true moral ideas, which may serve as the common ground for all souls. But this is no guarantee of its success, for the use of reason in unpurified souls leads away from God and morality, as it is governed by self-love.

Hence, there must be an initiation into a tradition of purification; thus condition d) is met through the careful study and re-iteration of the Platonist tradition along with the writings of the Church Fathers, where initiation occurs entirely through the integration of scholarship into one's own life. This ability to transform the ideas of the past into life was

what Benjamin Whichcote was famous for among his students, including Cudworth.<sup>1225</sup>

Once integrated into life, this scholarship provided the proper hue, as it were, to enable the light of nature to illuminate what is within.

Finally, the condition of having an ideal character to prompt recollection through perception is met through the witnessing or conjuring of Christ's life through the Gospel, or perhaps through lesser examples of piety and virtue in figures such as Benjamin Whichcote.<sup>1226</sup> These, in turn, are fulfillments or embodiments of the principle which remained implicit in the Jewish way of life (or the 'Jewish Church').

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<sup>1225</sup> John Tillotson, *A Sermon Preached at the Funeral of Reverend Benjamin Whichcot D.D.*, (London: M. Flesher, 1683), p. 28.

<sup>1226</sup> On May 24, 1683, John Tillotson, then Dean of Canterbury, formerly attorney-general for Cromwell, and later Archbishop of Canterbury, gave a sermon at the funeral of Benjamin Whichcote, who was, at the time of his death, Minister of St. Lawrence Jewry in London. Of Whichcote's term as provost at King's College, Tillotson writes: "And in those wild and unsettled Times [he] contributed more to the forming of the Students of that University to a sober sense of Religion than any man in that Age." (p. 24) Indeed, "it was at the home of one such student that his soul departed from his earth, namely his ancient and most learned Friend, Dr. Cudworth, Master of Christ's College." (p. 28)

Tillotson describes Whichcote as a just, honest, kind, prudent, charitable, and generous man: "To be able to describe him aright it were necessary one should be like him; for which reason I must content my self with a very imperfect draught of him. / I shall not insist upon his exemplary piety and devotion towards God, of which his whole life was one continued Testimony. Nor will I praise his profound Learning, for which he was justly had in so great reputation. The moral improvements of his mind, *a Godlike temper and disposition* (as he was wont to call it) he chiefly valued and aspired after; that universal charity and goodness, which he did continually preach and practice. / His Conversation was exceedingly kind and affable, grave and winning, prudent and profitable. He was slow to declare his judgment, and modest in delivering it. Never passionate, never peremptory: so far from imposing upon others, that he was rather apt to yield. And though he had a most profound and well-poized judgment, yet was he of all men I ever knew the most patient to hear others differ from him, and the most easie to be convinced when good Reason was offered; and, which is seldom seen, more apt to be favourable to another man's Reason than his own." (pp. 31-2) Master of his own passions—hardly ever seen angry, Whichcote "understood humane nature very well, and how to apply himself to it in the most easie and effectual ways." (p. 33) Hence, his reproof of others only came in the form of silences or slight gestures. Tillotson concludes the account of his life by returning to the theme of his sermon, namely that true happiness and the true home is in heaven: "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace." (p. 30)

As Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury reasserted in his 1698 collection of Whichcote's sermons, "God knows we could very ill at this time have spared such a Man, and have lost from among us as it were so much balme for the healing of the Nation, which is now so miserably rent and torn by those wounds which we madly give our selves. But since God hath thought good to deprive us of him, let his vertues live in our memory, and his example in our lives. Let us endeavour to be what he [i.e., Whichcote] was, and we shall one day be what he now is, of blessed memory on earth and happy for ever in heaven." (*Select Sermons of Dr. Whichcot [sic]*. ed. Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury. (London: Awnsham and John Churchill, 1698), p. 34) These same words could have been spoken about Socrates.

All but condition c), which refers to the power of human reason, are arrived at through philological history as the history of the true intellectual system, and through biblical history as the history of the Church. The possibility of explicit knowledge of the true system through philosophy thus depends on bringing these conditions together—a task which appears in the Cambridge Platonists as the problem of the relation between reason and revelation. This problem is to be reframed when considering Cudworth's works as a whole. In Whichcote and More, the problem was whether revelation contains anything that is beyond reason, and if not, whether revelation was superfluous for soteriological purposes. Part of their response was that the very message of revelation had much to do with a life under the governance of reason, and therefore the two could not be neatly separated. Cudworth went beyond this by trying to show that the development of reason is historically grounded in the fact of revelation insofar as revelation established the conditions for future recollection; it did so by making the fundamental metaphysical and religious ideas explicit in the world, then propagated and sustained through various traditions. Furthermore, Cudworth's works indicate that the development of reason is actually part of the long process of revelation itself: for the truth is revealed not simply to particular individuals at particular times, but to humanity as a whole throughout the course of history. In the modern philosophical age, reason may bring the Church back from its wanderings astray and culminate the revelation of truth through Christ's influence—that is, so long as there are stewards who are directing the use of reason towards the proper human ends. For reason to be the saving grace of modern world, intellectual responsibility must be taken by some on behalf of the whole. This is what I believe Cudworth took himself to be doing in his philosophical and philological work.

### C. Christianity and the universalization of philosophy as the means to salvation

There is a certain tension in the Platonic corpus in regard to the possibility of philosophical activity—that is, whether it is limited to a select few who take on the intellectual responsibility for the whole, or extended it into a universal possibility for human reason as such. Philosophy aims at generalizations which ought to be assented to by any reasonable thinker. This fact alone suggests that philosophy is inherently a universal possibility. Yet, as was discussed in Chapter 7, very specific conditions must be established for truly reasonable thinkers to exist on any large scale. Theoretically speaking, then, the possibility of philosophy appears to be co-extensive with human reason; yet practically speaking, philosophy is only possible given certain historical conditions which provide reason with an accurate starting point within intuition. This tension is manifest in the two possible interpretations of the theory of recollection—that is, whether it is intended to explain the possibility of all knowledge (Scott’s “Kantian interpretation”) or only the specialized philosophical thinking that departs from ordinary thought (Scott’s “Demaratus tablet interpretation”).<sup>1227</sup> For the latter distinction depends on there being conditions (i.e., a), b), d), and e)) beyond merely a healthy faculty of reason—conditions which are contingent on historical circumstances.

In contrast to Plato, Cudworth’s Christianity allows him to resolve this tension by incorporating both sides into an historical development. He begins by affirming the dispositionalist version of innatism, as his epistemology refers to all human reason as such. As was discussed in Chapters 12 and 14, as children of Adam, all humans share as their essence the same image of the divine mind, which is furnished with common prolepses or

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<sup>1227</sup> See Part I, Chapter 7, §D.

anticipations. (These are equivalent to Whichcote's "truths of first inscription".) This corresponds to the claim in the myth of the *Phaedrus* that all souls must have at least seen the Forms (and forgotten them) in order to have been embodied as humans in the first place.<sup>1228</sup>

But beyond this basic starting point there must be, in both Plato and the Cambridge Platonists, a supplemental level of education in order for knowledge to be actualized. In both cases, the supplement is a bestowal by God or the gods to humans, but only in an exclusive set of people—in certain polities for Plato, and in the Jewish nation for the Cambridge Platonists. (This is the "truth of after-revelation" in Whichcote.) In both cases, the truth becomes embodied in a form of life and internalized on an intuitive level as common sense; this allows for recognition of that truth to occur when presented explicitly either in an exemplar or in idea.

Yet, for the Cambridge Platonists, this exclusivity is a means for the truth to become universally attainable. In Judaism, the actual appearance of the ideal in the world, which serves to prompt its recognition in others (i.e., condition e)) remains on the level of an idea, namely the idea of the Messiah. Moses, who stands at the origin of both the philosophical and political strands of propagation of the moral idea, does not represent this idea in his person (and therefore is barred from entering the holy land). That embodiment is projected to arise out of the traditions he has initiated. Plato is similar in this regard to the Jewish tradition. For in Plato, the embodiment of the ideal is still a projection into the future. Socrates' virtue is incomplete and suggestive, as his wisdom was largely negative. It was at times sufficient to prompt philosophical inquiry, but it was insecure insofar as Socrates lacked knowledge. Once Christ appears, by contrast, the perception of his ethical

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<sup>1228</sup> *Phaedrus*, 249b-c.

nature alone can suffice for salvation, given faith in this possibility; for the emanation of the spirit of love does not depend on any particular intellectual achievements, as Cudworth emphasizes in his speech to the House of Commons. It depends solely on the common prolepses, which are drawn forth in their entirety through the perfect exemplar. However, in a philosophical and skeptical age, the intellect must be appealed to in almost a reverse manner: now that the Christian ethic has become intuitive (though rarely achieved), and now that an age of reason has come about, the ideas which long ago anticipated the embodied appearance of truth (i.e., the complete Mosaic revelation) may once again be presented explicitly so as to allow a recognition of the truth (as the correspondence between intuition and thought). That is to say, in a philosophical climate, the ideas now serve as the prompt for recollection rather than the perception. Reason can be appealed to as the universal means to salvation only insofar as the intuitive, ordinary understanding that characterizes common sense (at least across Europe) has been thoroughly permeated by Christianity. Though the revelation of those ideas was originally in an exclusive context, “[t]he whole world,” writes Cudworth, is “one city, of God and rational beings.”<sup>1229</sup>

What follows is a difference between Plato and the Cambridge Platonists with respect to who it is that performs philosophical recognition. In Plato, it is the philosopher (or philosopher-king, ideally) who attains true knowledge and recalls the wisdom of the gods and ancient lawgivers on behalf of the polity. Just as the lawgiver initially had the revelation and instituted the knowledge for the sake of the whole, the philosopher-king is a small part of the polity who revives the knowledge and uses it to serve the whole. The rest of the citizens, even ideally speaking, are not philosophers; rather, they are reasonable and obedient to properly rational laws. (See Chapter 7.) They do not discover the truth for

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<sup>1229</sup> *TIS*, vol 3., p. 511.

themselves, but assent to it once it has been presented to them. For Cudworth, by contrast, there does not seem to be any particular part of the whole in which the recollection takes place, no mediating institution or person. In fact, it seems that his battleground is precisely the public intellectual sphere, implying that anyone can seek knowledge for themselves. This is not to say that it is necessary for every individual; for anyone with faith and a pure heart is saved. Nonetheless, in comparison with the philosopher-king, who is specially educated and extremely rare, the possibility of recollection is universal for Cudworth. This is part of the Cambridge Platonist opposition to the Calvinist doctrine of pre-destination.

This last point should be qualified, though. That anyone may participate in the Church's recollection of its founding wisdom is a possibility that belongs only in "the evening of the world," when knowledge has increased. It would not have been possible for pagans prior to Moses, for example, to recollect what had not yet been fully actualized in the world in the first place. The possibility of recollection is a result of history.

We can see a ramification of this difference in their respective attitudes towards writing and publicity. In light of the fact that the atheists have gone public, Cudworth too must be a publicizer of knowledge. Not only does he reveal the falsity of those sophistic mysteries, as he refers to them above, but he exposes as much of the traditions of true esoteric knowledge as he can (such as the Cabbalistic tradition). The knowledge that is now to serve as the support and bulwark of faith in a skeptical age must be laid bare before all so that they may be saved. Plato, by contrast, is ambivalent with respect to publication: on one hand he writes, and, as is self-referentially discussed in the *Phaedrus*, acknowledges that writing cannot be controlled, as it gets released from the teacher-student relationship into the public.<sup>1230</sup> In this sense, Plato is self-consciously allowing his thinking to be

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<sup>1230</sup> *Phaedrus*, 276a.

disseminated. Yet there is also good reason to think that Plato kept at least some of his doctrine within a limited sphere of initiates. Aside from the fact that no particular position is absolutely clearly attributable to Plato, due the dialogue form he uses, his (or supposedly his) second epistle and the testimony of Aristotle at the very least suggest that there may have been a strictly oral Platonic doctrine.<sup>1231</sup> This ambiguity of Plato's points to a certain mistrust of the public which the Cambridge Platonists do not seem to share. In this, they are more on the side of the moderns than the ancients.

These last few differences between Plato and the Cambridge Platonists centre around the issue of equality. Notice, then, that there seems to be a distinct hierarchy of kinds of people for Plato. His categorization of people-as-occupation in the *Statesman*, his repeated idea of there being two strands of citizens to be woven together by the third (i.e., the philosophical ruler), and his point in the *Phaedrus* about souls following different gods all indicate some fundamentally significant differences in types of people. In contrast, a human soul is simply a human soul, for Cudworth—perhaps with the exception of the difference between males and females (which Cudworth barely mentions and I will not go into). The cosmopolitan sentiment expressed above—that the whole world is one city, with God and rational beings—makes it clear that all are fundamentally equal before God.

Likewise, nationality does not seem to have any relevance to one's identity in Cudworth. His claim, for example, that Christianity overcomes any and all political entities through martyrdom<sup>1232</sup> indicates how superfluous the political entity is in relation to the

<sup>1231</sup> The *Seventh Letter* (341b-2a) contains the claim that philosophical truths cannot be expressed in writing at all; the *Second Letter* (314c) claims that Plato has never written his philosophy; and Aristotle's *Physics* (209b11-17) claims that Plato's true philosophy is only to be found in his oral teachings. For the debate on these matters, including the authenticity of the letters, see Harold Tarrant, *Plato's First Interpreters*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. 19-25; "On Plato's Oral Doctrine," in Vlastos, *Platonic Studies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 379-403; and Terence Irwin, "Plato: The Intellectual Background," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 88, note 82.

<sup>1232</sup> *TIS*, vol. 2, p. 627.

fundamental purpose of life. All bonds between humans are based on innate and therefore common moral standards, as well as the dictates of conscience; and though Cudworth admits that the distinction between ruler and ruled is perfectly natural,<sup>1233</sup> the very right of the sovereign, and hence the political bond, is based on the same bond of fidelity in regard to keeping promises, and the conscience of the ruler.<sup>1234</sup> That is, there is no fundamental difference between ruler and ruled despite that structure being necessary in the world. For the Cambridge Platonists, the only truly significant relationship among humans is the ethical.

#### D. The rational and the genetic critiques of modernity

##### i) On the question of continuity between the two forms of critique

Christianity is supra-political and therefore allows the Cambridge Platonists to vindicate the common power of reason as the means to salvation in latter days without falling prey to the factionalism of their times. However, though Cudworth was able to identify several key features of the new rise of atheism and materialism, and relied in part on Plato's assessment of his own time, he did not take full advantage of Plato's insights into the causes of intellectual decay. Considering that Hobbes was Cudworth's primary target, perhaps Plato's link between politics, psychology and religion could have been summoned to undermine the great modern thinker in a more effective way. I cannot attempt to do so in retrospect on behalf of Cudworth, as that would require thoroughly

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<sup>1233</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 511-2.

<sup>1234</sup> *Ibid.*

considering Hobbes' work.<sup>1235</sup> Allow me, however, to suggest that Cudworth too readily accepted Hobbes' division between science and history—i.e., between the connections among ideas on one hand and the collection of facts on the other;<sup>1236</sup> for Cudworth explicitly considered philosophy and philology to be two separate endeavours.<sup>1237</sup> Cudworth took philosophy to be the account of the eternal system of ideas in itself, which is to say, of being as opposed to becoming. Yet, for Cudworth, the realm of becoming is an emanation of being and is necessarily an aspect of it.<sup>1238</sup> Considering Cudworth's intellectualism with respect to the divine will, one would expect to be able to give a rational account of history that extends from the rationality of the system. Indeed, the system, according to Cudworth, is already historical in its very essence, since it involves the future prospect of Judgment Day. Though Cudworth mentioned at several points that Hobbes was nothing new in the world, he did not put Hobbes in his place—which is to say, at the end of the grand historical process rather than the supposed beginning of an entirely new mode of life, disconnected from the history of past errors. While Cudworth was perhaps alarmed by the audacity of this position, and though he was able to recognize it as a symptom of self-will rather than piety, he was not able to explain why this was happening in those times. In this sense, Cudworth, along with More, appear as passive reactionaries to new currents in thought, despite the fact that their Latitudinarian ideas were regarded as radically new and that they participated in the founding of the Royal Society.<sup>1239</sup>

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<sup>1235</sup> Such an undertaking could use Strauss' interpretation of the arc of Hobbes' thinking as a starting point, since latter is shown to be a movement from aristocracy to bourgeois democracy—a movement which might parallel the decline of constitutions in Plato. See Strauss, *Hobbes*, esp. p. 126.

<sup>1236</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), p. 47 (I.ix.1-2).

<sup>1237</sup> *TIS*, Preface, vol. 1, p. xlv.

<sup>1238</sup> As is discussed in Chapter 5, §B, this point is implied in the notion of the union of Christ and the Church.

<sup>1239</sup> A. Rupert Hall, "Henry More and the Scientific Revolution," in *Henry More - Tercentenary Studies*, ed. Sarah Hutton, pp. 37-54; see p. 41. Hutton also comments that "The philosophy of spirit which More and Cudworth formulated was not a retreat from modernity, but a contribution to contemporary debates about

Plato, by contrast, presented sufficient material in his dialogues to explain the sources of error not only from a logical perspective, but from psychological and historical perspectives as well—that is to say, from a genetic perspective. Plato's vindication of reason as against its corruption in sophism framed the latter as the major obstacle within a larger historical process of the philosophical recognition of ancient wisdom and the grounding of the future based thereon. The Cambridge Platonists' vindication of reason likewise regarded much of contemporary thought to be the obstacle to the revivification of ancient, revealed knowledge through reason. Yet by making a strict distinction between the account of truth and the account of its appearance in the world, they lost any cogency they may have had once their philological facts became dubitable. In place of these facts, they could have drawn on Plato's more general, psychological and political explanations of the intellectual state of affairs—ones which have the virtue of being less susceptible to the veridity of particular facts.

In short, there is, in both Plato and the Cambridge Platonists, a rational or metaphysical critique of the foe and a genetic critique. As we will see, though, the two critiques are linked in Plato insofar as his theory of nature is continuous with his account of history; in Cudworth and the rest of the Cambridge Platonists, the two aspects of the critique are separate. This, I believe, is one reason why their critique of Hobbes failed to have much effect.

## ii) Politics and the images of divinity

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the viability of the mechanical philosophy.” (*EIM*, Introduction, p. xvi.)

We might loosely call Cudworth a ‘democrat’—what Scott calls an ‘optimist’ with regard to the universal possibility of knowledge. Herein lies a fundamental difference between Plato and the Cambridge Platonists. The complex of symptoms discussed above are all intimately linked with the rise of democracy for Plato. Indeed, the decline of constitutions is the principle by which to understand the logic of history. But there is no such link between political constitutions, psychological constitutions and the logic of history in any of the Cambridge Platonists. That is to say, despite recognizing common foes, and despite responding in a way that was similar to Plato, and even drawing largely on his thinking, none of the Cambridge Platonists was able to provide any explanatory principle for the intellectual climate they faced, aside from showing that it was prophesied in Scripture. Considering that democracy was sprouting in England with the rise of the House of Commons during the reign of Charles II and particularly in the interregnum period, it stands to reason that the complex does indeed have at least something to do with the rise of the commons; but they do not seem interested in such worldly affairs.

Tulloch has criticized the Cambridge Platonists on a related point. After noting how Cudworth in particular passively accepted both the Commonwealth and the Restoration governments, he claims that:

More than once in the course of our history we have had occasion to point out this fatal practical timidity on the part of men who yet did so much intellectually to advance the cause of liberty—who, in fact, first enunciated in England its true principles. Thinkers as they were, with a comprehensive insight into the genuine principles both of social and religious order, they lacked courage, and the adventurous enthusiasm which carries forward a great cause. And this is why History has hitherto done so little justice to them. Men of thought who do not venture to stand boldly forward in defence of their principles,—who in fact deliberately fall behind the men of action in the gravest turns of the State,—must be content to be forgotten—comparatively, at least—when the story of the State comes to be told.<sup>1240</sup>

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<sup>1240</sup> Tulloch, *Theology*, p. 214.

Tulloch's criticism is essentially that, in terms of action, the Cambridge Platonists were indifferent to their political world. This may be true. However, they were still men of action: their action consisted of preaching and education. Their progressive ("Latitudinarian") principles of reason and tolerance, which Tulloch has in mind here, were put into action through these interpersonal, ethical situations; the instability of political affairs would have only confirmed to the Cambridge Platonists that Christian action renders the political realm superfluous (and even dangerous) in terms of the spread of humanity and love. What I would add to Tulloch's critique, though, is that they were indifferent to a critical issue in the political world in theory as well. That is, though they need not have been involved in the political world, it had significance for their attempts to quell atheism and materialism.

Tulloch claims that Cudworth's

broad and keen rational insight, and deep though quiet seriousness, discerned the full nature of the crisis and had long done so. Slowly and heavily, but surely, his mind had been working for years at the special problems raised by the penetrating and bold genius of Hobbes, so fitly corresponding to the spirit of an age at once reactionary and sceptical.<sup>1241</sup>

The crisis Tulloch is speaking of is the post-Restoration "disgust with which men turned from the religious controversies of the preceding period, [which] not only vented itself in weariness and ridicule of what had gone before, but in a widespread distrust of spiritual verities altogether."<sup>1242</sup> I do not, however, agree that Cudworth discerned the full nature of what was occurring in those times. Though Cudworth did engage with Hobbes' arguments, his only real point was to show that justice cannot be grounded on materialism. He did not address or probably even perceive the movement in Hobbes' thinking from aristocratic to democratic principles, which would soon become effective.

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<sup>1241</sup> Tulloch, *Theology*, p. 222.

<sup>1242</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

For Plato, such changes in political constitution are crucially linked to the size and power of the foe. The real foe is common opinion, which, in modern times, is veering towards atheism and materialism (and being tricked by sophism). Plato's point is that common opinion is shaped by the political constitution (and vice versa); hence the fight against the circumstances of modernity is necessarily linked to the political critique of democracy. This connection between the governance of the soul and the governance of the polity is absent in the Cambridge Platonists, as the Church is the institution that serves the good of the whole. And, as has been mentioned, they stayed away from ecclesiastical debates in favour of a focus on spiritual reform on a local level.

Since it would take another dissertation to back up this next point, I can only suggest that this absence of engagement in the political issue follows not only from the Christian standpoint (of "giving Caesar his due..."), but also from the long tradition of the Neoplatonist rejection of the social and political dimension of Plato's thought.<sup>1243</sup> As the Cambridge Platonists have been called Plotinians at times, Porphyry's opening comments in his biography of Plotinus are relevant: "Plotinus, the philosopher of our times, seemed ashamed of being in the body. As a result of this state of mind he could never bear to talk about his race or his parents or his native country."<sup>1244</sup> While there are undoubtedly strong ascetic tendencies in Plato along with a clear and repeated argument that worldly goods are inferior to divine goods, the Neoplatonist view that the social and political aspect of Plato's works are secondary and inessential (as is evidenced by their curriculum choices—notably,

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<sup>1243</sup> One obstacle there would be in backing up this claim is the recent argument made by Dominic O'Meara that the Neoplatonists did not actually eschew the social and political realm at all within their thinking. See *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), especially Part II, "The Divinization of the State".

<sup>1244</sup> Porphyry, "On the Life of Plotinus and the Order of his Books," in *Plotinus*, vol. 1. (Loeb Classics) ed. Jeffrey Henderson, transl. A. H. Armstrong. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 3 (§1, lines 1-5).

the omission of the *Republic* and *Laws*)<sup>1245</sup> is clearly a choice that was made, and not the only viable understanding of Plato. Though I find this choice to be perhaps the most interesting feature of the history of Platonism, I have to put such broad speculations aside here in order to remain more focussed on the particulars of this comparison.<sup>1246</sup>

When we consider Cudworth's vindication of polytheism as implicit monotheism, we may see how, in a very subtle (and likely inadvertent) manner, Cudworth's thinking negates or suppresses the political dimension of Plato's thought. For both Plato and Cudworth, the history of the collective entity—i.e., the polity and the Church—outlines the manifestation and faring of an ideal form of humanity in the world. Plato's is essentially characterized as virtue, and Cudworth's as love. But in Plato, there is more than one ideal character which need to be unified. The various ideal characters are represented by particular gods who manifest particular aspects of virtue. Athena, and thus the Athenians, are wise but lacking in temperance, for example. The movement from polytheism to monotheism in Plato is thus linked to the theory of the unification of the virtues: there is an idea of the synthesis of characters into a single, virtuous one, but it has not actually occurred yet. That is, the unification of the virtues into a single ideal is mirrored in the unification of the gods into a supreme deity, since each particular god is an apotheosis of a particular ideal of virtue who stands at the foundation of particular forms of life. The life and thought of Socrates marks the need and anticipation for such a synthesis, as does the drafting of a set of laws by the Athenian Stranger for a Cretan population. Thus Plato can be regarded by the Cambridge Platonists as a precursor who attained the fullest

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<sup>1245</sup> Tarrant writes that the Iamblichean curriculum, which excluded these dialogues, left them in "some unspecified status ensuring continued detailed treatment." (*Interpreters*, p. 33;cf. p. 92) That is to say, though given a secondary position to the rest of the curriculum, they were not simply ignored by any means.

<sup>1246</sup> I would be inclined to take Nietzsche's essay on the origin of the ascetic ideal (in *On the Genealogy of Morals*) as a theoretical starting point to investigate this large question.

understanding possible prior to the appearance of Christ, which alone could prompt a complete recognition of the spirit of love within.<sup>1247</sup>

In Cudworth, by contrast, there is only one ideal that is slowly becoming increasingly manifest in the world; the synthesis has already occurred—both eternally as the supreme God, and temporally in the person of Christ. As a Christian, Cudworth maintains that the spirit or character of the single God, who is love, has indeed become manifest in the world not only through the act of creation but through embodiment in human life. The history of the Church is the history of the anticipation of this emanation of the divine spirit in Judaism, its first and fullest actualization in Christ, and its propagation into the world in Christendom.

Though there is a formal similarity between Plato and the Cambridge Platonists insofar as an ideal of humanity is regarded as a divinity and infused into the world, Plato's polytheistic elements cannot be glossed over without losing some diagnostical resources. In the course of refuting atheist arguments in the *TIS*, Cudworth tackles one that appeals to the natural and apparently universal phenomenon of polytheism as opposed to monotheism. Cudworth attempts to quell this objection by showing that the systems of polytheism implicitly tend toward monotheism and are actually improper or incomplete expressions of monotheism. Cudworth goes to great lengths to show that all polytheism is merely a civil theology employed by rulers to enforce order; and that the wise pagans all understood the "natural and philosophical" theology, which is to say, that there is a single God who governs the universe providentially. As a summary of his long treatment of the issue, he writes:

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<sup>1247</sup> Notice that by tracing Pythagorean ideas back to Moses, Plato too already falls within the sphere of revelation and is thereby justified as a precursor as well.

And now have we, as we conceive, given a full account of the seeming polytheism of the Pagans, not only in their poetical and fabulous, but also their political or civil theology; the former of which was nothing but fancy and fiction, and the conforming of divine to human things; the latter nothing but vulgar opinion and error, together with the laws and institutes of statesmen and politicians, designed principally to amuse the vulgar, and keep them the better in obedience and subjection to civil laws. Besides which, the intelligent Pagans generally acknowledged *another theology*, which was neither fiction nor mere opinion and law, but nature and philosophy, or absolute truth and reality; according to which natural and philosophic theology of theirs, there was only one unmade self-originated Deity, and many other created gods, as his inferior ministers. So that these many poetical and political gods could not possibly be looked upon otherwise, than either as the created ministers of one supreme God, whether taken singly or collectively; or else as the polynomy and various denominations of him, according to several notions and partial conceptions of him; and his several powers and manifestations of the world personated and deified.<sup>1248</sup>

Thus, according to Cudworth, the pagan gods are to be understood either as ministers of the supreme God, or else alternate names for the various divine attributes or manifestations of his omnipotence. In Plato, by contrast, there seems to be both polytheist and monotheist strands. While notions of the Good and the One are clearly monotheistic, there are so many apparently genuine references to the various gods that it is difficult to dismiss them. As we will now see, Cudworth's attempt to do so (insofar as he reduces all polytheism to monotheism) results in a departure from political theory in two ways.

The first is the fact that political wisdom is a divine attribute if there is a community of gods which is perpetually being governed. Thus, even if one can make Zeus somehow equivalent to the Good and the One in Plato (as Cudworth might have it), it is clear that part of Zeus' wisdom is political wisdom; for even if the other gods are conceived as ministers, the supreme god still governs a divine community; indeed, this is a key part of the divine wisdom which is revealed to the ancient lawgivers. The only connection that Cudworth makes between politics and the true intellectual system is that the rightful sovereign is a moral man. The political constitution is otherwise irrelevant to the attainment of the ideal

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<sup>1248</sup> *TIS*, vol. 2, p. 300.

in all other souls. As in the Cudworth's Christian reading of the Mosaic revelation, the political wisdom that is revealed is only a means for establishing the conditions for recognition of the appearance of the truth—conditions which then become superfluous.

The second relevant point in maintaining a polytheistic element is that if there is a community of gods, then the earthly community may be conceived as an image of the divine. In Cudworth, the individual human mind is an ectypal copy of the divine mind, which is eternally omniscient. The copy can only attain partial knowledge (and hopefully knowledge of the right things—those that can save it) and do so discursively in time. That is the basis of his whole idea of the mind cumulatively “displaying itself”; what it discovers was already and implicitly its own in virtue of the fact that it is an image of the divine mind. The other image of the divine intellect is nature in general, taken as the sensuous manifestation of the essential ideas of all things. Nature is thus the image of the divine ideas in their specificity, while the human mind is the (approximate) image of the divine mind as a whole. In Plato, the latter theme is certainly there as well, since the philosopher seeks to become like god as much as possible through knowledge of the unchanging intelligible reality which underlies all things. It follows from this that the human mind is in some way an image of the divine.<sup>1249</sup> Yet if there is also a community of divinities in Plato, there would be a third image of divinity in the *polis* itself. This is to say, Cudworth's reduction of polytheism to a manipulative civic theology for the vulgar, coupled with true monotheism, serves to negate the possibility that the worldly political body is also an image of individualized divinity.

The closest Cudworth gets to admitting this possibility is his claim that the civic sovereign participates in the authority of God:

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<sup>1249</sup> See Part I, Chapter 1, §C above.

Had not God and nature made a city, were there not a natural conciliation of all rational creatures, and subjection of them to the Deity, as their head... , had not God made ~~mmmm~~ , 'ruling and being ruled,' superiority and subjection, with their respective duty and obligation; men could neither by art, or political enchantment, nor yet by force, have made any firm cities or politics. The civil sovereign is no Leviathan, no beast, but a God, ('I have said ye are gods:' [psalm 82:6]) he reigns not in mere brutish force and fear, but in natural justice and conscience, and in the right and authority of God himself.<sup>1250</sup>

Yet his point here is only that the sovereign gains his right by abiding by the eternal and immutable morality—not that participation in a political entity is itself a participation in something divine. The participation in a collective entity that is an image of the divine is rather in the Church, which is grounded in mutual love *among individuals*, not in the ecclesiastical constitution itself.

Given the correlation between ideal characters and gods, the polytheistic strand remains in Plato's thinking at least insofar as there are political classes and types of people, which are characterized by partial virtue. These differences must be kept in order for the whole polity to be virtuous; and, given the reciprocal relationship between soul and polity, these differences are needed to ground the partial virtues within a fully virtuous context. This is the case not only politically speaking, but also psychologically speaking, since, in the ideal constitution, partially virtuous souls are now governed by reason internally as well (though heteronomously derived). Cudworth's reduction of polytheism to monotheism serves both to vindicate Plato insofar as he perceived the need for a synthesis of character into a single ideal, and yet to deny any differences among people: it is a democratic levelling. Yet such differences, at least in Plato's works, are the explanatory basis of the dynamics of common opinion, and hence the advent of atheism as a major force in modern times.

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<sup>1250</sup> *TIS*, vol. 3, pp. 511-2.

iii) The rationality of the world and the gap between nature and morality

What we have seen so far is how the Cambridge Platonists, or Cudworth in particular, missed the democratic element in diagnosing the problem of modernity, as he himself was a “democrat” in the sense of levelling differences and hoping to vindicate reason for all humans as such. We have also seen how, given their shared understanding of ethical life as an emanation of divinity into the world through particular forms of life, Cudworth’s treatment of polytheism negates the possibility of using Plato’s psychopolitical dynamics. What I will now attempt to show—or at least hypothesize for future research<sup>1251</sup>—is that the genetic critique of modernity in the Cambridge Platonists, which amounted to little, is necessarily separate from the rational-metaphysical critique; whereas in Plato the two are actually linked.

The quasi-mechanistic account of the elements of nature in the *Timaeus* is followed by animal and human physiology, which, if we follow the dialogue into the *Critias*, flows directly into human history. That is, there is a continuity between natural and civic history in Plato. This is not only a literary continuity, though. Despite the rational link not being stated explicitly at this juncture between the *Timaeus* and the *Critias*, it is afforded by the tripartite structure of the soul, which, as I have shown, is the basis of an historical rationality. A rational account of history is generated in Plato out of the dynamic possibilities inherent in the tripartite structure (i.e., the nature) of the soul; since the natural

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<sup>1251</sup> A further study would address the extent to which and manner in which Cabbala is employed in More’s writings in order to link natural creation with human history. The basic relevant texts would be More’s *Conjectura Cabbalistica* (1653), *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos* (1680), and *Paralipomena Prophetica* (1685). I clearly do not agree with Tulloch’s following comment: “To enter into any exposition of his Cabbalistical studies—of his discovery of Cartesianism in the first chapters of Genesis, and his favourite notion of all true philosophy descending from Moses through Pythagoras and Plato; and still more to touch his prophetic reveries,—the divine science which he finds in the dream of Ezekiel or the vision of the Apocalypse—would be labour thrown away, unless to illustrate the weakness of human genius, or the singular absurdities which beset the progress of knowledge, even in its most favourable stages.” (*Theology*, pp. 351-2.)

philosophy culminates in an account of human psychology, and Plato's psychology has a political dimension, psychological dynamics serve as the basis of a philosophy of history. Thus the decline of constitutions according to a changing relationship among the parts of the soul and the polity actually serves as a rational and explanatory link between nature and moral history; that is, the appearance, disappearance, and possible re-appearance of virtue is governed by the dynamics of politico-psychology. Thus the genetic critique of modernity is internally linked to the rational or metaphysical critique.

For the Cambridge Platonists, by contrast, the history of the world is rational only in a symbolic manner: events and phenomena mark the signal of the coming of Judgment Day. That is, the world is significant insofar as it indicates something beyond itself. It is a black box of sorts: the truth appears in this confusion, and though history manifests some sense (insofar as it has been predicted in prophecy), there is no essential order to it—that is, it is not predictable in itself, as natural phenomena are. Despite the fact that events and phenomena in history are necessary in the sense that they belong within divine providence, history for the Cambridge Platonists remains on the level of the accidental insofar as its rationality is not inherently linked to any essential or structural characterization of metaphysical entities. Thus the genetic critique of modernity in the Cambridge Platonists also remains accidental and contingent upon the truths of philology and biblical history, both of which get heavily disputed within a hundred years.

This theoretical gap results the moment one takes the political and the temporal-psychological (i.e., developmental) aspects of Platonism as inessential. The world thereby gets demoted below the plain of the divine-human relationship. It is not graced by the divine mind, but merely serves as the location, as passive matter that receives an imprint of the divine, whose trace can be detected by humans only for the sake of transcending that

world once again. Nature, as Cudworth claims, is essentially the same as artifice: matter is stamped with divine intelligence and purpose, which may be perceived by human subjects, who reside fundamentally in the same intelligible realm of ideas. We are, Cudworth claims, like readers of a divine book, in a sort of literary dialogue with the author of nature.<sup>1252</sup> Nature is simply the sensible expression of the divine mind and will in the way that writing is the expression of the author's thought. The emergence of morality is a progressive projection onto nature, a divinely initiated and humanly perpetuated imposition on and rectification of nature whose origin is external to nature.<sup>1253</sup>

In Plato, the divine principle finds expression in the world not as a mapping of the idea onto inert matter, as in the Cambridge Platonists, but, quite literally, as a drawing forth from out of the earth. The original manifestation of virtue—the one which is inherited despite the history of decay—is an autochthonous phenomenon: the transcendent divinity (i.e., a particular god) draws forth virtuous souls from the chosen land in order to populate the first cities.<sup>1254</sup> The inheritors of these communities inherit that nature (albeit in a diminishing way) and remain tied to the land through the mediation of the political constitution and the laws.

The autochthonous moment in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, by contrast, occurs in the story of Adam and Eve, who are associated with apostasy: their inheritance lies with their sin and their banishment from the land from which they were raised. The moment self-consciousness and free will arise, humanity is a stranger to nature. It is only in the story of Abraham, who leaves his homeland in search for a new, promised land that the

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<sup>1252</sup> *EIM*, p. 100.

<sup>1253</sup> A related point, which also warrants further investigation, in my opinion, is how the notion of the immanence of God is criticized in the Cambridge Platonists through their treatments of Spinoza's thinking. Cudworth, for one, categorizes Spinoza as a hylozoist, and is quite severe in his attack. The basic texts here would be Cudworth's *TIS* (vol. 3, p. 406ff.) and More's *Refutation of Spinoza*.

<sup>1254</sup> See Part I, Chapter 3, §A.

Judaeo-Christian ideal begins. The tradition of faith initiated by Abraham gets concretized through the Mosaic law, which still comes into effect prior to being tied to any land. Hence, what is being recollected in the Cambridge Platonists is, in the first place, knowledge of the system, which originally appeared in the abstract and as a graft onto the existing world. In the second place (and more importantly), as an ethical form of life, what is ultimately being recollected is the divine spirit, which is to say, the transcendent essence of God as love. In Plato, what is being recollected is indeed still divine and represented as originally transcendent; but as an ethical form of life, the recollection is of a former human nature and of a past form of politically organized human life. There is more immanence to the divine principle in Plato, whose writings are thus more pagan than the Cambridge Platonists perhaps wanted to admit.

This difference seems to be reflected in their respective temporal orientations. Plato, on one hand, appears to be nostalgic for ancient simplicity and virtue. Since the inception of the various polities, the 'divine dispensation' or the presence of the divine has been on the decline; they are moving further and further away from the origin or *archē*. Moreover, there is a hint of ancestor worship in Plato insofar as these are taken to be virtuous and perhaps descended from the gods. The Cambridge Platonists seem to be much more future oriented; the Apocalypse and Judgment Day are real and are coming soon. In contrast, never in Plato is there any mention of the end of history, though there are several accounts of the beginning. The Cambridge Platonists maintain something of the Messianic anticipation in the Millenarian belief in the second coming of Christ and the resurrection of the dead. Ostensibly, then, Plato is oriented by the past, while the Cambridge Platonists are oriented by the future.

However, this would be too much of a simplification. For one, Plato does have hope for a future—both with respect to the immortal future of the soul and the worldly future of Magnesia (or elsewhere). Indeed, his final endeavour was to leave behind a possible written constitution for a future state. Moreover, the development of the intellect throughout the decline of constitutions is a form of progress; for the emergence of philosophy represents both the possibility of stabilizing future states and the highest achievement for humans (as knowers). It is therefore not merely nostalgia that characterizes Plato. The ideal seems to be a reconciliation of ancient virtue (which is more closely approximated by the Spartans) and the modern intellect. And as for the Cambridge Platonists, there is also a reverence for ancestors—from the Jewish forefathers to the Apostles and the saints, to the great philosophers of the past. Furthermore, their participation in bringing about the end of history is grounded in revelations and traditions of the past. Indeed, the end is already contained prophetically in the beginning. Their future-orientation is thus entirely grounded in the past. They are often overlooked as mere antiquarians, after all.

The real difference that I perceive here, rather, is that the connection to the most distant past in Plato is also a connection to nature, whereas the connection to the most distant past in the Cambridge Platonists is an intellectual connection to supernatural ideas. The autochthonous ancestors in Plato are noble in constitution by nature, and it is a restoration of that nobility that Plato seeks through the reconciliation of the parts of the soul and the polity that have become divided through history. The Jews are outsiders to the land right from their inception, and it is the promise of possessing the land that stands as the continued motivation of their history. The Church is established by Moses as a real institution out of slavery, in the desert of transition, and in the hope and anticipation of a

new form of life. But it is not this mode of political life that Cudworth, the Professor of Hebrew, is in search of; but rather the ideas that temporarily take root and are transmitted through this tradition into modern times in order to carry souls into a blessed afterlife.

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