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## Representing, Defending, and Questioning Religion: Pragmatist Sociological Motifs in Plato's *Timaeus*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Laws*

**Abstract** Plato may be best known as a philosopher, but his depictions of people's involvements in religion are important for social scientists not only because of the transcultural and transhistorical resources that they offer those in the sociology of religion, but also because of their more general pragmatist contributions to the study of human group life.

Thus, although Plato (a) exempts religion from a more thorough going dialectic analysis of the sort to which he subjects many other realms of human knowing and acting (e.g., truth, justice, courage, rhetoric), (b) explicitly articulates and encourages theological viewpoints in some of his texts, and (c) sometimes writes as though things can be known only as ideal types or pure forms in an afterlife existence, Plato also (d) engages a number of consequential pragmatist (also pluralist, secular) aspects of people's experiences with religion.

In developing his materials on religion, Plato rejects the (popular) notions of the Olympian gods described by Homer and Hesiod as mythical as well as sacrilegious. Still, it is instructive to be mindful of Plato's notions of divinity when considering the more distinctively sociological matters he addresses (as in the problematics of promoting and maintaining religious viewpoints on both collective and individual levels and discussions of the interlinkages of religion, morality, and deviance).

Still, each of the four texts introduced here assume significantly different emphases and those interested in the study of human group life should be prepared to adjust accordingly as they examine these statements. All four texts are consequential for a broader "sociology of religion," but *Timaeus* and *Phaedo* are notably more theological in emphases whereas *Republic* and *Laws* provide more extended insight into religion as a humanly engaged realm of endeavor.

The paper concludes with an abbreviated comparison of Plato's notions of religion with Chicago-style symbolic interactionist (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969; Prus 1996; 1997; 1999; Prus and Grills 2003) approaches to the study of religion. Addressing some related matters, an epilogue briefly draws attention to some of the affinities of Emile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* with Plato's analysis of religion.

**Keywords** Plato; Religion; Pragmatism; Sociology; Symbolic Interactionism; Emile Durkheim; George Herbert Mead; Morality; Deviance; *Republic*; *Laws*; *Timaeus*; *Phaedo*

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Although Plato (420-348 BCE) is widely acknowledged as a philosopher and frequently is referenced as an idealist as well as a theologian, Plato's texts are only marginally known to sociologists and most others in the social sciences. As part of the task of reconnecting Greek and contemporary scholarship in a broader study of the development of Western social thought,<sup>1</sup> the present paper focuses on Plato's contributions to the study of human knowing and acting by using religion as a more sustained point of reference.<sup>2</sup>

Whereas the more distinctively theological materials that Plato introduces in *Timaeus*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Laws* have been developed mindfully of the religious viewpoints of Socrates (469-399 BCE) and Pythagoras (580-500 BCE), our interests are much more directly related to Plato's considerations of divinity as a community experienced phenomenon than his notions of religion *per se*.

Many of the conceptions of religion that Plato introduces are strikingly parallel with notions of divinity developed within Judaic and Christian,

<sup>1</sup> This paper represents part of a larger pragmatist study of human knowing and acting from the classical Greek era (700-300 BCE) to the present time. The larger project traverses a wide array of scholarly endeavors including poetics, rhetoric, theology, history, education, politics, and philosophy (see Prus 2003a; 2004; 2006; 2007a; 2007b; 2007c; 2008a; 2008b; 2008c; 2009a; 2009b; 2010; 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d; 2011e; 2012; Puddephatt and Prus 2007; Prus and Burk 2010; Prus and Camara 2010).

<sup>2</sup> While this paper focuses on Plato's analysis of religion, Plato's contributions to the study of human knowing and acting are much more extensive than suggested herein. Thus, readers are referred to interactionist considerations of Plato's works as these pertain to causality, agency, and reality (Puddephatt and Prus 2007), poetics (i.e., fiction; Prus 2009a), love and friendship (Prus and Camara 2010), education and scholarship (Prus 2011a), morality, deviance, and regulation (Prus 2011c). This is not to deny Plato's structuralist, idealist, and moralist emphases, but to acknowledge his much overlooked contributions to pragmatist scholarship. Plato's considerations of the human condition are less consistently pluralist, secular, and pragmatist than those of his pupil Aristotle (384-322 BCE), but Plato's work remains foundational to pragmatist thought in a great many respects.

as well as Islamic theology.<sup>3</sup> Still, of much greater consequence for our immediate purposes are (a) the linkages that Plato develops between religion and social order (as in notions of justice, morality, virtue, and government), (b) people's interrelated involvements in religion, deviance and control, education and scholarship, and poetics and entertainment, and (c) Plato's more pervasive philosophic (and sociological) conceptions of human knowing and acting (including people's multiple and shifting perspectives on religion).

Thus, while acknowledging the more specific religious beliefs that Plato introduces in these texts,<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Because Plato's works predate Christian and Islamic theology, as well as much of the recorded Judaic text, one can make the case that all three of these theologies were influenced by Greek thought in the broader eastern Mediterranean arena.

<sup>4</sup> As a more general caveat, it should be recognized that while Plato often appears to adhere to the theological position he assigns to Socrates and his kindred speakers in *Timaeus*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic* and to the Athenian speaker in *Laws*, Plato's texts are characterized by a broader set of tensions.

Thus, in addition to some of the (a) idealist, (b) skepticist, (c) poetical, and (d) pragmatist viewpoints that Plato introduces in his considerations of religion in these texts, Plato's (Socratic) notions of religion are presented in the midst of concerns with (e) establishing a functional political order, (f) placing philosophers in governing positions in these states, and (g) intensifying human quests for justice, virtue, and wisdom on both community and more individual levels.

Plato clearly rejects the images of the gods developed by the Greek poets Homer and Hesiod, but his speakers generally profess clear notions of divinity. Likewise, Plato's speakers appear adamant about the pragmatist value of religion as a mechanism for generating social order.

Still, in his dialogues more generally, Plato (via Socrates) often questions human abilities to know anything. Although this latter position presumably would include (and would invalidate) Socratic, as well as any other claims regarding a divine essence(s), Plato clearly does not subject religion to the same sort of dialectic analysis with which he addresses other features of, or claims about, community life.

It is mindful of these contradictions that Nietzsche (Zuckert 1996) argues that Plato primarily uses religion as a means of seeking personal prominence in the political arena (i.e., as a cloak of authority in the "lust for power"). We do not know if Nietzsche (who more openly craves for power) is correct in his claims about Plato, but there are many points at which Plato seems much more concerned about the pragmatic/integrative features of religion for the community than promoting any particular set of beliefs.

It also may be the case that Plato had mixed views on religion. Thus, whereas Plato (a) may have followed Socrates in

the emphasis is on issues such as: (a) the ways that people deal with the unknown; (b) when and how people invoke, formulate, promote, question, defend, and reject notions of divinity; (c) how people incorporate religion into their life-worlds – as in routines, identities, relationships, emotionalities, and the like; and (d) how people manage notions of religion, morality, and deviance on a day to day basis.

For those less familiar with Plato's works, it may be observed that his texts are presented as dialogues in which his speakers (of whom Socrates [469-399 BCE] often assumes the central role) engage wide ranges of topics pertinent to one or another aspect of human existence. In dealing with their subject matters, Plato's speakers typically introduce and consider conceptually diverse sets of standpoints on the matters at hand.

To the frustration of many readers, Plato's speakers typically leave questions unresolved in the end. Nevertheless, Plato's speakers are concerned about defining their terms of reference and generally pursue topics in highly reflective terms. As well, because his speakers often engage their subject matters in extended, discerning, and comparative analytic manners, those who are patient and thoughtful can glean much insight into the overarching issues addressed by attending the subtopics that the speakers consider along the way.

Before we engage these texts more directly, it also may be instructive to caution readers about Plato's

matters of theology, it is possible that he also (b) was skeptical of theology as a scholar/dialectician, and yet (c) as a social theorist recognized that religion was a consequential feature of community life and (d) as a community planner and moralist valued the integrative features of any religion. While more overtly writing as a theologian, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) also appears to have struggled with somewhat parallel matters as both a highly astute dialectician and a most exceptional student of Aristotle's texts.

style of presentation and about the importance of following the flows of his texts in more patient ways. Thus, whereas Plato's student Aristotle (384-322 BCE) writes in a particularly direct and exceptionally compacted analytic style, Plato develops his analyses in conversational formats. Nevertheless, Plato's texts are still remarkably systematic and offer extraordinary conceptual depth.

In developing this paper, I have tried to stay close to the specific conversational flows that Plato develops in each of these texts, referencing his materials in "chapter and verse." This way, readers might better appreciate the overall ordering of his dialogues, as well as more readily locate particular sections of these texts for further examination.

As well, although much of the analysis may seem delayed in the present paper, it is important to establish Plato's position in some detail before developing an analytic commentary. This way, by treating Plato's texts as ethnohistorical documents, readers will be better able to participate in, assess, and possibly extend the analysis. Relatedly, because of the claims I make in this paper, it is Plato's analysis of human group life rather than my commentary that is central here.

To put Plato's "sociology of religion" in context, it is instructive to examine the theological position Plato represents prior to his broader analysis of religion as a humanly engaged process. After addressing some of the more central features of Plato's theology as expressed in *Timaeus* and *Phaedo*, this statement focuses on Plato's depictions of people's involvements in religious matters in *Republic* and *Laws*.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Given the references that Plato makes to *Republic* within *Timaeus*, *Timaeus* appears to have been written after *Republic*, but *Republic* and *Laws* more fully address religion as a humanly engaged process.

Plato appears concerned about articulating viable conceptions of divinity in all four of these texts and has developed various aspects of his philosophy around this objective. Nevertheless, to his "sociological" credit, Plato also recognizes the problematic, socially engaged nature of community life within which people's notions of divinity take shape.

### *Timaeus* and *Phaedo*

Although not intended as a set, *Timaeus* and *Phaedo* provide instructive introductions to Plato's notions of religion. Further, prior to the Renaissance (1400-1600 CE), *Timaeus* provided the primary source of contact for Western scholars with Plato's texts (see *Plato: The Collected Works* 1997:1224-1225). Even now, many who read *Timaeus* are apt not to have read *Republic* and often focus instead on the creation story and the related notions of divinity addressed within *Timaeus*.

Nevertheless, *Timaeus* contains a mixture of theological and philosophical materials. Relatedly, while the theological matters are clearly more speculatively in quality and some other "claims of fact" are clearly unsubstantiated, some of the philosophic concepts introduced in *Timaeus* are notably sophisticated and are apt to have contributed to a distinctively pluralist, dialectic or inquisitive emphasis on the nature of existence and the matters of human knowing and acting on the part of theologians as well as secular scholars over the centuries.

As will become apparent later, the emphasis in *Phaedo* is notably different than that of *Timaeus*. Still, in addition to providing some insight into the character of Socrates that Plato establishes for his readers, *Phaedo* deals with another popular Western religious theme – the immortality of the soul.

### *Timaeus*<sup>6</sup>

Whereas *Timaeus* [TS] contains important references to several of Plato's philosophic notions, it also represents Plato's most focused theological statement. Those familiar with Stoic theology will find much in *Timaeus* that is consistent with Stoic religion.<sup>7</sup> However, readers familiar with Judaic, Christian, and Islamic theology also are apt to find many congruities between Plato's *Timaeus* and consequential aspects of these religions.

<sup>6</sup> The present statement is based on the translation of *Timaeus* developed by Benjamin Jowett (1937).

<sup>7</sup> Stoicism (from Zeno of Citium [334-262 BCE]) – no preserved text remains; emerged as a philosophic position in Athens (circa 300 BCE), but later achieved considerable popularity in Rome. Cicero (106-43 BCE) provides a particularly lucid review of Stoic philosophy in *On the Nature of the Gods*. Although placing particular emphases on sense-based knowledge and logic, the Stoics also argue that the universe is governed by a natural, divinely inspired source (god/gods).

Albeit an extension of Pythagorean and Socratic thought, Stoic philosophy also assumes some consequential divergences. Perhaps most notably the current history, circumstances, and experiences of human life are seen as but a temporary phase in an endless set of repetitions or reoccurring cycles of development and (re)birth of the universe as the gods recreate and regulate the processes of nature throughout eternity. Because they envision humans to be immensely indebted to the gods both for their creations of all things and their unending dedication to all of nature, the Stoics encourage people to accept things as the gods would intend. Thus, the Stoic emphasis is on pursuing an honorable or virtuous life-style in which the gods are revered. From a Stoic viewpoint, as well, community order is fostered through people's subservience to the divine ordering of nature.

The Stoics not only argue for the existence of god(s) that regulate all of nature, but also presume that human experiences are divinely fated or predestined. Relatedly, it is posited that by reading signs provided by the gods, people may foresee and adjust to future developments. Still, while human outcomes are predetermined in more general terms, people are thought to have some freedom of choice and are explicitly encouraged (through instruction, dedication, and careful, logical reasoning) to pursue virtuous avenues of action that would put them in closer alignment with their natural godly intended destinies.

Whereas the Stoics, like Aristotle, insist on the importance of sensory perceptions (distinctions) for knowing and appear attentive to a more logical (vs. emotional) rhetoric, the Stoics' emphases on divine life-worlds and fatalism take them some distance from Aristotle's secular scholarship. For a notably extended analysis of Stoic and Epicurean conceptions of divinity and related notions of human knowing, acting, and destiny, see Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods* (also see Prus 2011e).



Although Socrates, Critias, and Hermocrates also are involved in the dialogue, Timaeus emerges as the principle speaker. The dialogue opens with Socrates (TS:17-19) providing a very brief review of *Republic*.

Despite the many references to religion that Socrates makes in Plato's *Republic*, his references to *Republic* in *Timaeus* focus almost entirely on the nature and well being of the (secular) state. Somewhat ironically, as well, Socrates (in *Timaeus*) largely disregards *Republic's* emphasis on justice, virtue, and philosophy.

Following a quick reference to the division of labor (as in farmers, trades people, soldiers and guardians) necessary for a viable state, Socrates focuses on those who would serve as guardians or administrators of the state he envisions. The guardians are to be highly dedicated, well educated, wise, and noble.

As well, the guardians are to live in modest lifestyles in a setting in which all goods are communally owned. Their female companions are to participate in the activities of the male guardians, including warfare. To avoid more specific ties of kinship and to encourage the guardians to envision themselves as one family, the wives and children of the guardians are to be shared in common. Then, discussing the state somewhat more generally, Socrates also discusses the desirability of selective breeding in the community. Relatedly, he stresses the importance of insuring that children of the best citizens are well educated while still being mindful of the value of moving those who show potential to higher levels and assigning those with lower qualities to live among the inferior classes.

With this highly abbreviated overview of *Republic* as his starting point, Socrates observes the state still needs something more than what he has provided

in *Republic*. Thus, Socrates (TS:20) says that he would like to provide an account of the origins of his city-state, one that would give the citizens a sense of pride in its struggles and accomplishments.

While contending that he is unable to devise a worthy statement on his own, Socrates also dismisses the poets and the sophists as adequate authors for this project. Describing the poets as imitators, he sees the challenge as beyond their abilities. Defining the sophists as travelers who lack roots, loyalties, and knowledge of local matters, Socrates also considers them inappropriate for this task. It is in this spirit that Socrates seeks assistance from Timaeus, Critias, and Hermocrates, each of whom is held in high repute in matters of philosophy and statesmanship.

Critias (TS:20-27) engages Socrates' objective by retelling a story told to him by his grandfather. His grandfather had heard it from Solon who, in turn, had learned about the glories of a much earlier Athens from an Egyptian priest. Noting that Greece had been subject to numerous deluges or natural disasters over the millennia, the priest informed Solon that the Egyptians have records showing that Athens was once home to the greatest of all nation states. Eventually, however, it was overcome by earthquakes and floods as, likewise, was the island of Atlantis.

Affirming that he has been accurate in his rendering of the account of the lost ancient city of Athens, Critias also observes that the features of Socrates' *Republic* correspond with those of the perfect Greek state described by the Egyptian priest. Notably, too, the same goddess Athene was the founder and guide of both city-states.

Socrates very much appreciates the connections with the past provided by Critias, but his compan-

ions have yet more to offer. Thus, after calling on the gods for assistance and understanding, Timaeus (TS:27) develops a creation story intended not just for the city, but also for the entire universe and all inhabitants of the earth.

Acknowledging that a world (i.e., universe) that is amenable to the senses, Timaeus (TS:27-29) says that an eternal creator, without beginning or end, was the cause or initiator of the world. Thus, God created the universe as a likeness to himself by giving the universe a soul or spiritual intelligence that comprehends all components and features of its organic (animal-like) whole (TS:30-33). Observing that the universe also has a material or corporeal existence, Timaeus says that all matter consists of fire, earth, water and air.

While shaping the universe in the form of a globe or sphere (TS:33-37), the creator had first created the invisible soul that would reside at the center. After stating that notions of existence and being are problematic in more comprehensive terms, Timaeus (TS:38) contends that time came into being at the instant of creation and, likewise, would be dissolved if ever the products of creation cease to exist. For now, however, time represents a moving image of existence.

Following a commentary on the solar system, Timaeus (TS:39-40) identifies four sets of living entities that God created: the gods of heaven; the creatures of the air; the species of the water; and the animals (humans included) that live on land.

Noting that their own knowledge of the gods is limited, Timaeus (TS:40) says that they can only rely on what has come to them through tradition.

Still, Timaeus (TS:41) continues. He states that God had instructed the (lesser) gods he created to over-

see the mortal bodies of people and the lower animal species. Thus, whereas God would provide the souls for all beings, his lesser gods were given the responsibility of preparing mortal bodies in which these divine souls would reside.

In addition to being the most religious of all earthly beings, people also were to possess capacities for sensation and emotional experience (as in pain and pleasure, fear and anger). Recognizing that people would struggle with their sensations and emotions, God intended to reward those who lived honorable earthly lives with a blessed existence. Those who did not would (in subsequent lives) pass into continually lowered states of animal life until they overcame their earthly failings.

Having developed things thusly, God then turned matters over to the younger gods that God had created. God left them to deal with human bodies and souls as best they could (TS:42).

After noting that the sensations that people encounter can affect their bodies in intense manners, Timaeus (TS:43-44) also observes that people are born without intelligence. Nevertheless, with nurturing and education, people can develop more extended intellectual capacities.<sup>8</sup>

Later, Timaeus (TS:49-52) considers some of the problematic features of human knowing. Recognizing that the (basic) elements of fire, earth, air, and water are continually changing, he says that it is inappropriate to say that things "are" or have certain qualities or to make other statements that imply permanence. Viewed thusly, there are three states of nature: that which is in the process of chang-

<sup>8</sup> Readers may appreciate some early pragmatist/constructionist emphases in Timaeus' (TS:43-63) comments on the nature of human knowing and acting.

ing; that in which change takes place; and the other things that the (particular) things in the process of changing resemble.

Continuing, Timaeus (*TS*:51) asks if things properly (a) have any inherent qualities or whether (b) things exist only to the extent that people, in some way, perceive these things through their sense organs? Relatedly, he asks (c) if things have existence only through the names they are given?

Pursuing these matters, Timaeus argues for a distinction between the things that people might know through sensate experience and things that may be understood only through reason. Then, focusing on reason more exclusively, Timaeus argues for the existence of true ideas that transcend human sensations. Further, Timaeus contends, it is these invariant truths (the contemplation of which rests with intelligence) that provide testimony to a being that pre-exists creation. Timaeus (*TS*:52) subsequently posits that it was necessary to create space before the matters that occupy space could be brought into existence. Process, likewise, needed to exist before the heavens could be formed.

After providing an account of the ways in which the elements of fire, earth, water, and air were configured into the universe, Timaeus (*TS*:57) observes that things cannot move without a mover or a source of motion. Relatedly, there can be no movement without something to be moved. Next, Timaeus (*TS*:58-61) considers the motion of the four elements (fire, water, earth, and air), as well as a variety of forms that these material essences may assume.

Timaeus (*TS*:61-63) subsequently discusses human capacities for sensate experience. He focuses on touch-related sensations (hot-cold; hard-soft; light-

heavy; and rough-smooth), before considering the emotions and the matters of pain and pleasure more specifically. Then, positing that pain is the product of disturbances to one's system and that pleasure is dependent on a restoration of one's natural state, Timaeus (*TS*:64-68) considers the ways in which human sensitivities to taste, odor, sound, and sight are connected with people's (sensory enabled) experiences with pain and pleasure.

Then, stating that God alone has the capacity to create and combine all things of his creation, Timaeus (*TS*:68-69) briefly summarizes his position as he moves toward the conclusion of his story. Timaeus states that God not only created the universe and gave order to what otherwise would be chaos, but also generated a soul for the universe that allowed for the intelligent, organic capacity of the universe to comprehend and adjust to all of the entities within. Further, while providing people with immortal souls, God had given his closest offspring, the newer gods, the task of preparing and tending to the mortal bodies in which people's souls would be hosted. It was here, too, that people would be subject to the human weaknesses (and temptations) associated with pain, pleasure, and other emotions amidst human capacities for love:

[a]s I said at first, when all things were in disorder God created in each thing in relation to itself, and in all things in relation to each other, all the measures and harmonies which they could possibly receive. For in those days nothing had any proportion except by accident; nor did any of the things which now have names deserve to be named at all – as, for example, fire, water, and the rest of the elements. All these the creator first set in order, and out of them he constructed the universe, which was a single animal comprehending in itself all other animals, mortal and immortal. Now of the divine, he himself was the creator,

but the creation of the mortal he committed to his offspring. And they, imitating him, received from him the immortal principle of the soul; and around this they proceeded to fashion a mortal body, and made it to be the vehicle of the soul, and constructed within the body a soul [psyche – RP] of another nature which was mortal, subject to terrible and irresistible affections, first of all, pleasure, the greatest incitement to evil; then, pain, which deters from good; also rashness and fear, two foolish counsellors, anger hard to be appeased, and hope easily led astray; these they mingled with irrational sense and with all-daring love according to necessary laws, and so framed man. (Plato [*Timaeus*:69]; Jowett trans.)

Amidst a somewhat extended consideration (*TS*:70-86) of the ways that people's bodies are (physiologically) prepared for life and disease, Timaeus also makes a brief argument for prophecy as implied in the art of divination.<sup>9</sup> Timaeus (*TS*:77) subsequently notes that trees, plants, and lower animal forms also were provided for man's existence.

Following a discussion of human diseases (*TS*:78-85), Timaeus (*TS*:86-87) engages the topic of vice in more direct terms. He says that people who encounter great pain or pleasure lose their capacities to reason adequately. Timaeus insists that no one is voluntarily bad, but that people do bad things because of these and other afflictions that foster anger, depression, cowardice, stupidity, disregard, and the like. In addition, Timaeus remarks that people who have poor educations or live in badly governed settings also are prone to vice.

<sup>9</sup> While accepting the viability of divination as a message from the gods, Timaeus (*TS*:71-72) argues that people are most likely to receive these messages when they are asleep or in demented states (as in mental anguish or spiritual possession). However, because people in these latter states are considered unfit to judge their own experiences, these (messages) are to be interpreted by others who are more accomplished in the art of divination.

While noting that people may be encouraged to avoid vices through education and study, Timaeus quickly puts these matters aside. Instead, he will concentrate on the importance of maintaining an appropriate balance between one's immortal soul and the body in which it is hosted.

Noting that some souls are intensively focused on studies and teaching while others are deeply engrossed in disputation and strife, Timaeus cautions both of these sets of people not to neglect the care (e.g., exercise) of their mortal bodies. However, he observes, the greatest of diseases will be experienced by those who neglect their souls by disregarding the quest for knowledge.

Timaeus (*TS*:89-92) then delineates three aspects of the soul [psyche] to which people should attend: the divine, the mortal, and the intellectual. While acknowledging the divinely-enabled nature of one's existence and the importance of caring for one's mortal being, Timaeus particularly stresses the intellectual component. It is here, in questing for knowledge and true wisdom, he says, that people will achieve the greatest affinities with divinity.

In concluding, Timaeus (*TS*:90-92) says that the souls of men who have not lived virtuous lives will assume lower forms of existence in subsequent lives. In this way, Timaeus accounts for the initial development of women and human sexuality, the birds, other animals, reptiles, and fishes. This having been said, Timaeus acknowledges God as the creator of all. [Thus concludes the dialogue.]

### *Phaedo*<sup>10</sup>

Well known as an account of Socrates' last days of his death sentence, *Phaedo* represents another of Pla-

<sup>10</sup> In developing this material I have built extensively on Benjamin Jowett's (1937) translation of Plato's *Phaedo*.



to's more notable theological statements. While emphasizing the immortality of the soul (as a spiritual essence) and its capacity to know things (in both human and divinely-enabled terms), this text also deals with the matters of people facing death, resisting tendencies toward suicide, and the interlinkages of philosophy, virtue, and divinity.

Still, in contrast to *Timaeus*, which has a more distinctive theological emphasis (via the creation story that Timaeus recounts), *Phaedo* places greater emphasis on philosophy as an idealized (cultic) pursuit. Thus, whereas one finds strong affirmations of a divinity-enabled immortal soul in *Phaedo*, the immortal soul is sustained by a virtuous philosophic life that is mindful of the existence of absolute standards rather than through a devout religious life *per se*.

This dialogue opens with Echecrates asking Phaedo if he had been present when Socrates drank the poison that resulted in his death. Echecrates has heard about Socrates' trial (see *Socrates' Defense* or *Apology*) and expresses his disbelief and dismay that Socrates had been condemned to death.

In developing his account, Phaedo (*Phaedo*:58-59) first comments on the noble, gracious manner in which Socrates dealt with the entire affair. Phaedo also identifies those who had been with Socrates during his last few days and hours. Plato, presumably ill at the time, was absent.

Inspired by a dream, Socrates had been composing musical verses while on his own. However, after the others have arrived, he directs their conversation to the journey he is about to make (*Phaedo*:61).

While conversing with Socrates (*Phaedo*:61-62), Cebes and Simmias ask why suicide is considered unlaw-

ful. In response, Socrates says that people are the possessions of the gods and have no right to destroy the things that the gods own. Instead, people are to wait until God summons them. Relatedly, Socrates states that his time has come.

When Cebes and Simmias suggest that Socrates may be too eager for his own death and perhaps ought to fear death more, Socrates (*Phaedo*:63) says that he might be more fearful if he did not believe he was in the care of the gods. Thus, in the afterlife, Socrates fully expects to join the earlier departed who had been wise and good in the sensate world.

Elaborating on his position, Socrates (*Phaedo*:64) states that the real philosopher should be in good spirits when he faces death. While noting that most people would not understand, Socrates says that true philosophers are always engaging death.

Recognizing that the senses are untrustworthy, true philosophers (*Phaedo*:65) are continually attempting to separate their souls from their bodies, to distance their spiritual essences from the sensual failings of their bodies. Thus, Socrates references absolute justice, absolute beauty, and absolute good as elements that are inaccessible to the senses and that can exist in pure forms only in the clarity of the mind.

Then, citing things such as the quest for food, encounters with diseases, and loves, lusts, fears, fascinations, and foolishness of all sorts, Socrates (*Phaedo*:66) says that the body is the source of endless difficulty. Indeed, the soul cannot achieve pure knowledge while embedded within the body. Thus, Socrates (*Phaedo*:67) states, it is only after death; on the separation of the soul from its earthly host, that one's soul may be purified. Viewed in this manner,

death provides the true philosopher that which he most desires – to be alone with the soul.

Those who fear death, Socrates (*Phaedo*:68) insists, are not lovers of wisdom, but lovers of the body. Most likely, as well, they also are lovers of money and power, if not both. Further, Socrates adds, most people who claim to be temperate merely control their pleasures in most areas only because they are conquered by specific other pleasures of the body. True virtue, Socrates proclaims, is inseparable from true wisdom.

While listening to Socrates, Cebes (*Phaedo*:70) suggests that people may still be fearful that their souls might dissipate with death and, effectively, cease to exist.

Saying that he will locate his discussion within the realm of probabilities, Socrates (*Phaedo*:70-72) references an ancient doctrine that claims that when people die their souls are reborn from the dead. Thus, Socrates posits, the living come from the souls of those who had earlier died and the souls have an existence apart from the body. Socrates follows this with a commentary on the existence of opposites and concludes that living essences are generated from those that had earlier died.

After Cebes (*Phaedo*:72) observes that the notion of souls being born again into other bodies is consistent with Socrates' doctrine of recollection, Simmias asks Socrates to refresh his own memory on this theory.

In elucidating his position on recollection (also see *Meno* [in Plato; Jowett trans.]), Socrates (*Phaedo*:73-77) says that people may recall things that they have never perceived in that manner. He describes recollection as a process of recovering notions that had

been lost or neglected overtime. Rather than just remembering things, the claim is that people sometimes recall things of a higher order than they have ever experienced in their (present) sensate lives.

Instead of assuming that people are born knowing these things at birth, the more viable argument is that people knew these things from a previous life; though a pre-existent soul that inhabits the present body. Since these ideas existed before people were born, Socrates concludes, the souls also existed before birth; conversely, if not the ideas, then not the souls. But, Socrates affirms, since notions of absolute beauty, perfect goodness, and the like, exist, so must souls exist.

Encountering some skepticism from Simmias who is not yet convinced that the soul will endure after death, Socrates (*Phaedo*:77-82) asks what is most likely to break up at the time of death – the simple and unchanging soul or the complex and changeable human body? Likewise, he asks, what is more vulnerable to dissolution, the invisible soul or the visible body? Socrates also reminds Simmias that when the body and soul are united, it is the soul that directs the body. By this function, as well, Socrates argues the soul is closer to the divine and therefore more likely to be immortal. Then, insisting that there is a true, invisible, noble afterlife, Socrates claims that the invisible souls of good people will depart to the invisible world at death.

However, Socrates insists, the souls of evil people would be dragged down to (an invisible world on) earth where they are compelled to undergo punishment for their past misdeeds. Further, after appropriate punishment, and because of their earlier human failings, these souls would later occupy the bodies of lower, less worthy animal species.

Developing his position further, Socrates (*Phaedo*:82) says that while more virtuous people will be much happier in the afterlife, it is only those souls that both have studied philosophy and are virtuously pure that may be allowed to partake in the company of the gods:

[Socrates:] No one who has not studied philosophy and who is not entirely pure at the time of his departure is allowed to enter the company of the gods, but the lover of knowledge only. And this is the reason, Simmias and Cebes, why the true votaries of philosophy abstain from all fleshly lusts, and hold out against them and refuse to give themselves up to them, not because they fear poverty or the ruin of their families, like the lovers of money and the world in general; nor like the lovers of power and honour, because they dread the dishonour or disgrace of evil deeds. [Instead – RP]... when philosophy offers them purification and release from evil, they feel that they ought not to resist her influence, and whither she leads they turn and follow. (Plato [*Phaedo*:82]; Jowett trans.)

After insisting that it is only through philosophy that people may gain a vision of true existence and escape the bars of their prison,<sup>11</sup> Socrates (*Phaedo*:83-84) comments on the particular dangers that sensations of pain and pleasure represent for the soul. Because people's experiences with pain and pleasure can be so intense, these sensations have a uniquely compelling presence; one that so completely bonds the soul to the body that the soul loses virtually all sense of its divine origins. Under these conditions, there is little hope of these souls grasping aspects of true knowing. It is for this reason, Socrates explains, that philosophers must so scrupulously guard themselves against the more intense sensations of

the body. Socrates assures his listeners that virtuous souls will not become lost.

Suspecting that Simmias and Cebes still have doubts, Socrates (*Phaedo*:84-88) encourages them to express their concerns. Cebes returns to the question of the soul surviving the death of the body. Cebes observes that while one person might outwear many coats, some coats are apt to survive the owner. He asks whether something of this sort may not occur with the soul. Given the many bodies that the soul occupies over time, may the soul not weaken or wear out – so at some point, the soul might expire with its current body. Past survivals of the soul, Cebes contends, do not guarantee subsequent survivals.

In developing his reply, Socrates (*Phaedo*:89-90) first cautions people about being either hardened skeptics about people or haters of ideas. Still, Socrates (*Phaedo*:91) says, at this point he is not a philosopher so much as a partisan. Nevertheless, unlike most partisans, Socrates says that his objective is not to convince others of his viewpoint as much as it is to convince himself and, in the interim, to provide something for others to consider in more impartial terms.

In the discussion following, Socrates (*Phaedo*:92-95) reminds the others that the soul exists prior to the body and that the soul, especially the wise soul, directs the body. Socrates then reviews Cebes' concerns about the soul not outlasting the body in which it is presently situated.

After noting that Cebes has raised a set of issues pertaining to the processes of generation and decay, Socrates (*Phaedo*:96-99) informs the others that as a young philosopher he also was eager to learn the causes of things. At this time, too, Socrates felt highly confident in the comparative notions of greater and

lesser. Now, however, Socrates questions whether one can understand the concept of causality or even whether things exist at all.

Relatedly, Socrates earlier had hoped that Anaxagoras (500-428 BCE), who said that the mind was the source and agent of all things, would provide some answers. However, on reading his texts, Socrates found that Anaxagoras (a materialist, atomist philosopher who preceded Democritus [460-357 BCE] and Epicurus [341-270 BCE]) very much disregarded the mind and instead concentrated on air, water, and other oddities.

Seemingly after some other unproductive philosophic ventures, Socrates (*Phaedo*:100) says that he assumed a new methodology. He would pick the strongest principle he could find and judge the value of other things mindfully of the correspondence of these other things with that principle.

In explaining his method, Socrates (*Phaedo*:100) says that he holds the position that there is absolute beauty, goodness, and greatness. These being the absolutely most viable standards, all things exist only in reference to these comparison points. Hence, it is only by reference to absolute beauty or greatness that something else may be considered beautiful or great, for instance. Instead of invoking relative comparisons between two or more (sensible) things (as other people might do), Socrates contends, that these absolute standards provide one with exacting or perfect reference points.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Readers may see the foundations of Socrates' ideal forms or types in his methodology. Clearly, Aristotle (*Categories*), who says that nothing has any quality except in reference to that which it is compared, does not accept Socrates' methodology. Likewise, while Plato seems sympathetic to Socrates' conception of absolute (especially divinely inspired) truth, Plato also introduces direct challenges to this viewpoint in *Parmenides*.

Then, following a consideration of the existence of opposites and the impressions they generate, Socrates (*Phaedo*:105-106) says that it is the soul that gives the body life and that the (life-giving) soul would never become the opposite of what it is (i.e., die). Defining the immortal as the imperishable, Socrates says that the soul is both immortal and imperishable. Thus, while the mortal body will perish, the soul will survive.

Assuming that the soul moves to another world after the death of the body and has an immortal quality, Socrates (*Phaedo*:107-108) stresses the importance of people taking appropriate care of their souls during their presence on earth. Socrates also states that when souls enter the afterlife they will be judged and be sanctioned according to the virtues and impurities of their earthly lives.

Their consideration of the afterlife is diverted somewhat by a discussion of the earth. [Amongst other things, Socrates (*Phaedo*:108-111) not only describes the earth as spherical in shape, but also at the center of the universe.]

Returning more directly to the plight of the soul, Socrates (*Phaedo*:113-114) distinguishes three ways in which people's souls may be treated in the afterlife, depending on their earthly lives. Those who have lived more moderate lives can expect to undergo punishment for their evil deeds. However, after becoming thusly purged of their sins, these souls, likewise, will be rewarded for the good things they have done.

Those judged to have committed particularly heinous offenses are hurled into Tartarus wherein they are subject to unrelenting punishment. After an extended period of punishment, those souls that are



deemed salvageable may be given an opportunity to appeal to their victims for leniency. Should their victims not wish to forgive them, these souls would be returned to Tartarus. For the souls that are considered incurable, there is no other destiny than perpetual punishment in Tartarus.

Those who have lived virtuous lives are allowed to live pure, content lives in the afterlife. Still, Socrates affirms, those virtuous souls who also know philosophy will fare even better in the afterlife.

After cautioning his listeners that the afterlife that he has described is only a reasonable approximation of what actually exists, Socrates (*Phaedo*:114) says that there is good reason to be optimistic about the future of his soul. Indeed, he contends, those who have severed themselves from the sensations and trappings of the body and who have lived virtuous life-styles are ready to face death when their time comes.

Then, returning to the more immediate matter of his own death, Socrates (*Phaedo*:115) reminds his companions that the earthly body that he leaves behind is not the true Socrates. Thus, they should not be troubled by the state or disposition of his earthly remains. The dialogue ends with *Phaedo* (*Phaedo*:116-118) describing the sense of loss experienced by those in the setting and, somewhat concurrently, the calm, peaceful manner with which Socrates faced death.

### *Timaeus* and *Phaedo* in Context

In developing *Timaeus* and *Phaedo* Plato humanizes his considerations of religion in consequential respects. Thus, while dealing with abstract matters in certain regards, Plato is attentive to the ways that people enter into the process as agents. Thus, for instance, *Timaeus* may revolve around an account that

the speakers consider mythical, but they are explicitly attentive to the importance of developing shared reference points as sources of meaning and motivation for citizens in the state.

In *Phaedo*, Plato gives much attention to the “immortality of the soul,” but still shows how people may struggle with ambiguity, knowledge and wisdom, and doubt, and virtue and religion in the face of one’s own death and those of one’s associates. These sorts of things may seem obvious, but humanly engaged matters along these lines have largely been overlooked in “the sociology of religion.”<sup>13</sup>

### *Republic* and *Laws* – Questing for Community

In contrast to the more limited scope of *Timaeus* and *Phaedo*, Plato’s *Republic* and *Laws* are intended as encompassing guidelines or models for community life. Plato still introduces a set of theological viewpoints in developing his models of community life. However, because he is attentive to so many features of community life as elements “in the making” in these two texts, Plato provides some early and exceptionally valuable pragmatist considerations of the ways in which people engage a wide array of matters pertaining to divinity.

Although we will be focusing on religion as an arena of community life separately in these two texts, Plato is clearly aware of the interconnectedness of religion and other realms of people’s involvements.

<sup>13</sup> As well, although each religious community develops somewhat unique sets of beliefs and practices, it is instructive to ask about the affinities (continuities and divergencies) one encounters in the viewpoints expressed by Plato’s speakers in *Timaeus* and *Phaedo* and more contemporary variants of Judaic, Christian, and Islamic religions. By revisiting Plato’s texts, we may better understand similarities and differences not only between these three major religious traditions, but also between some of the variants one finds within.

Thus, since Plato envisions human involvements in theology as embedded (being developed, experienced, instructed, resisted, and changing over time) within the broader parameters of community life, his notions of religion are developed amidst discussions of education, poetics, wrongdoing and punishment, and marketplace activity, as well as within more encompassing considerations of justice and the affairs of state.

It also is important to note that the emphases of Plato’s *Republic* and (later) *Laws* are somewhat different. *Republic* addresses the development of a state in which justice and social order are maintained through the activities of a more elite set of guardians (philosopher-kings) who would manage the affairs of state in virtuous (as in knowledgeable, courageous, wise, temperate, and just) manners. By contrast, Plato’s *Laws* focuses on the matter of developing a centralized constitution and an explicit legal code that not only would define the essential parameters of conduct for all citizens, but would also include provisions for “regulating the regulators.”

Notably, too, whereas *Republic* deals with scholarship and philosophy in more sustained terms, *Laws* is more attentive to the task of preserving and maintaining the community at large. Still, in both texts, one finds a sustained emphasis on justice at a community level and virtue as a highly desirable individual quality. While justice and virtue are defined as closely interconnected, justice is seen as fundamental to overarching notions of divine and human (community) order, whereas individually achieved virtue represents people’s primary means of insuring a more viable divinely-enabled afterlife.

Moreover, whereas Plato’s speakers are highly attentive to the integrative features of religion and envision

religion as a highly important mechanism for fostering the moral order of the community, as well as providing direction for individual character and moral well-being, Plato’s speakers are also attentive to the relativist, problematic, enacted, and contested nature of religion. They are also mindful of the importance of policies, practices, and even entertainment motifs for sustaining religious viewpoints, along with the social and personal implications thereof.

Interestingly, as well, although Plato is often dismissed as an idealist, his analysis of religion, virtue, evil, and regulation exhibits a noteworthy pragmatist attentiveness to human knowing and acting as a collectively, community-achieved, adjustive process. Thus, in addition to acknowledging the multiple viewpoints that people may adopt with respect to the situations in which they find themselves, Plato’s speakers are also mindful of people’s activities, identities, emotionality, reflectivity, and persuasive interchange (and resistance).

### *Republic*<sup>14</sup>

[Adeimantus:] Once more, Socrates, I will ask you to consider another way of speaking about justice and injustice, which is not confined to the poets, but is found in prose writers. The universal voice of mankind is always declaring that justice and virtue are honourable, but grievous and toilsome; and that the pleasures of vice and injustice are easy of attainment, and are only censured by law and opinion. They say also that honesty is for the most part less profitable than dishonesty; and they are quite ready to call wicked men happy, and to honour them both in public and private when they are rich or in any other way influential, while they despise and overlook those who may be weak and poor, even though acknowledging

<sup>14</sup> In developing this statement on Plato’s *Republic*, I am very much indebted to the translations of Benjamin Jowett (1937), Paul Shorey (Hamilton and Cairns 1961) and G.M.A. Grube and C.D.C. Reeve (Cooper 1997).

them to be better than the others. But most extraordinary of all is their mode of speaking about virtue and the gods: they say that the gods apportion calamity and misery to many good men, and good and happiness to the wicked. And mendicant prophets go to rich men's doors and persuade them that they have a power committed to them by the gods of making an atonement for a man's own or his ancestor's sins by sacrifices or charms, with rejoicings and feasts; and they promise to harm an enemy, whether just or unjust, at a small cost; with magic arts and incantations binding heaven, as they say, to execute their will. And the poets are the authorities to whom they appeal. ... And they produce a host of books written by Musaeus and Orpheus, who were children of the Moon and the Muses – that is what they say – according to which they perform their ritual, and persuade not only individuals, but whole cities, that expiations and atonements for sin may be made by sacrifices and amusements which fill a vacant hour, and are equally at the service of the living and the dead; the latter sort they call mysteries, and they redeem us from the pains of hell, but if we neglect them no one knows what awaits us. (Plato [*The Republic*, II:363-365]; Jowett trans.)

Denoting an extended analysis of community life, Plato's *Republic* [*Rep*] is one of the most remarkable statements developed within the broader tradition of political science. Still, rather than deal with *Republic* (a rather substantial text) in more comprehensive terms, this discussion focuses more specifically on matters pertaining to religion.

*Republic* begins with Plato's spokespeople (of whom Socrates is most notable) embarking on a statement on justice. While envisioning justice as a central and highly enabling of community life, they also recognize that justice is a problematic and elusive feature of human group life (*Rep*, I:352).

Relatedly, although they stress the importance of virtue and intend to find ways of promoting justice, the speakers also view injustice as an important (al-

beit negative) feature of community life. They note that people often think that injustice (as in deception and evildoing) can be highly profitable (*Rep*, II:358-360). They also observe that wrongdoers who appear honest may not only achieve considerable material advantages, but are also often honored for their successes. Further, those who appear dishonest may be severely punished, even if they are innocent (*Rep*, II:361-362).

While recognizing the fairly widespread "slippage of justice" that exists in community life, the speakers also note that people typically encourage young people to behave virtuously. Still, rather than encourage virtue as a means of pursuing justice, people typically emphasize the matters of maintaining good reputations and building character (*Rep*, II:363). Relatedly, people often tell others that justice will be achieved in the afterlife, even if it eludes them in the human present. The claim is that those who are truly virtuous will enjoy a luxurious afterlife whereas the evildoers will be severely punished for their worldly misdeeds in a different afterlife setting.

At the same time, however, the speakers (*Rep*, II:364) recognize that people often describe virtue as an unpleasant or painful experience whereas vice is more likely to be associated with more pleasurable human life-styles. As well, the speakers observe, certain people have assumed roles as prophets or mediators and claim (often for compensation) to be able to speak to the gods on behalf of those who might desire to be forgiven for their transgressions. Likewise, those who attend to the poets Hesiod and Homer may be led to believe that they can gain expiations and atonements for their sins by performing certain rituals, making sacrifices, and engaging in various mysteries involving the living and the dead.

After commenting on the effects that these matters might have on the minds of the young, the speakers (*Rep*, II:365) introduce a number of differing viewpoints on the gods. First, because the gods possess superior intellects and abilities, it seems inappropriate to believe that the gods can be deceived or compelled by human activities. Still, these notions would be inconsequential if the gods do not exist; or, if the gods exist, but do not care about human matters. Then, after noting that people know of the gods only through tradition and the poets (most centrally Hesiod and Homer), the speakers also observe that it is these same poets who claim that the gods can be influenced by words, sacrifices, and the like.

Leaving their discussion of these issues in this situation, the speakers (*Rep*, II:369-377) next discuss the processes by which a state (community) is developed and other matters pertaining to war, leadership, and education might be managed. Then, returning to religion more directly, the speakers (*Rep*, II:377-386) propose that the poets (such as Hesiod and Homer) be censored for their false representations of the gods.

In particular, Plato's speakers are concerned because the poets often represent the gods as acting in irresponsible, immoral, and quarrelsome manners. To be viable, God is to be presented in more sincere terms, as the author of good only.<sup>15</sup> Those who dis-

<sup>15</sup> Plato's speakers are somewhat inconsistent in their references to God and the gods. In the main, however, Plato appears to insist on a single overarching spiritual essence, with lesser essences seen as derivatives or creations of the one. Likewise, while Plato sometimes refers to God as a prime mover (*Timaeus*) in ways that more closely approximate Aristotle's notions of a prime mover, Plato's speakers also seem attentive to good and evil gods at times, as well as subscribe to a yet broader assortment of gods (as in Olympian gods and/or other divinely-enabled spiritual forces). In these latter respects, Plato's speakers approximate what later will become known as Stoic theology. Those who deem Christianity to be more exclusively monotheistic may wish to examine St. Augustine's *City of God* wherein he explicitly compares Greek and Christian views of overarching divinities and lesser spiritual essences.

cuss God are to do so only in terms that are good and just. Likewise, as a perfect being, God would not be compelled by external influences (including human demands) and, being perfect, would have no reason for changing within. Relatedly, God would not represent himself in ways that are not authentic, nor would God be pleased with such representations by others.

Continuing, the speakers (*Rep*, II:386-387) propose not only to eliminate poetic passages that misrepresent the gods, but also to purge poetic materials of the vivid, depictions of the punishments depicted in Hades (lest these image traumatize young minds).

Then, after noting that only misrepresentations that serve the public good may be allowed (*Rep*, II:389) in the state and commenting on the importance of young people achieving temperance or self-regulation, the speakers again condemn the poets for representing the gods as foolish and indecent in their behaviors (*Rep*, II:390-391).<sup>16</sup>

Still, only much later in *Republic*, after dealing with leadership, property, communal life-styles, education, philosophy, and forms of government, and poetics, do Plato's speakers re-engage religion in more direct terms.

Retaining their emphasis on virtuous conduct, the speakers (*Rep*, X:608) consider what may be the greatest of rewards for human virtue: the prospect of an eternal existence of the soul. Still, rather than dispose of the souls of evil people, the speakers conclude that human souls are immortal and

<sup>16</sup> Envisioning the poets as providing models for people's future behavior, Plato's speakers also are critical of the poets for not representing people and city-states in more consistently virtuous terms (*Rep*, II:392).



cannot be destroyed by the evils of the body. Relatedly, they (*Rep*, X:609-611) add that the soul is one with the eternal.

Mindful of the oneness of people's souls with divinity, the speakers (*Rep*, X:613) consider next how one might be a better friend of the gods. They define the just person as one who strives to be personally virtuous and fair in his treatment of others, no matter what life may present in the way of obstacles. The speakers also reason that someone who strives to be a friend of the gods, who tries to be like the gods as much as humanly possible, would not be neglected by the gods. Then, after claiming that people will be rewarded in the afterlife in direct proportion to their good deeds, Socrates shares a tale of the afterlife that he has heard.

The "vision of Er" (*Rep*, X:614-621) involves a man who was killed in a battle and later is carried home to be buried. Oddly, his body did not decay and on the twelfth day, Er returned to life. Most importantly, though, Er was able to provide an account of what he had experienced in the other world.

Following his battlefield death, Er found himself in the company of the souls of others who also had died. He observes that these souls were subjected to a judgment process wherein they were held directly and openly accountable for their earthly deeds. After judgment, some souls were allowed to go directly to heaven, but many had to spend time in Hades. Here, they were to undergo ten-fold punishments for instances of human wrongdoing before they might be considered for admission to heaven. The souls of those who are judged to have been particularly wicked would never leave the gruesome conditions of the underworld. Notably,

while the rewards of virtue are great, Er describes the penalties for evil in horrifying terms.

After the souls of the dead had moved forward (including more virtuous souls, as well as those who had been cleansed by punishment), they were given opportunities to choose new worldly lives for themselves. Because he would be returned alive to his former life, Er was not permitted to select another life at this time.

The souls were informed that there were more lives from which to select than the souls at hand. Likewise, samples of a great variety of human and nonhuman lives were displayed for the souls to consider. Working with the stipulation that the new life was to be different from the past, the souls were encouraged to choose wisely, to be mindful of the risks and liabilities that each life may have with respect to virtue and justice. Then, in turn, by chance arrangements, the souls were to choose new mortal lives. Er reports that people often made choices that would prove to be foolish and sad, if not clearly disastrous, for the subsequent states of their souls.

The souls had been free to choose in knowing ways. However, once their choices were made, the souls were subject to "the plain of forgetfulness" and drank from "the rivers of unmindedness." In assuming their new lives, thus, the souls would not know from whence they came or how they arrived in their subsequent states.

Socrates concludes saying that it is only in the quest for virtue and justice that people may deal with good and evil, be valued by one another and the gods, and successfully deal with the long-term pilgrimage of the soul. [*Republic* ends on this note.]

### *Laws*<sup>17</sup>

Plato's *Laws* may be much less well known than *Republic* is, but *Laws* represents another major statement on political science and the interlinkages of religion, governing arrangements, and education with the moral order of the community. Thus, although Plato's speakers envision religion as an important feature of community life and are attentive to the ways in which religion can contribute to the moral order of the community, they are particularly mindful of the ways in which religion is sustained and perpetuated, as well as disregarded and jeopardized as people engage other aspects of community life.

Whereas *Republic* begins with Plato's speakers attending to justice in particularly direct terms, Plato's *Laws* opens with a consideration of the origins of law. The speakers (an Athenian Stranger; Cleinias, a Cretan; and Megillus, a Lacedaemonian [Spartan]) posit that their laws likely had divinely inspired origins, but emphasize the importance of a legal constitution for the well-being of the community (*Laws*, I:624). Thus, even the Cretan and the Spartan who envision conflict as a natural state of affairs for city-states, as well as the villages, families, and individuals within, argue for the importance of an organized governing unit characterized by a system of law (*Laws*, I:625-631).<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> This statement on Plato's *Laws* is developed from the translations of Benjamin Jowett (1937), A. E. Taylor (Hamilton and Cairns 1961), and Trevor J. Saunders (Cooper 1997).

<sup>18</sup> Those familiar with Thomas Hobbes' (1588-1679) *Leviathan* (1994) will recognize the particular affinities of these materials with Hobbes' conception of the state as one wherein everyone is in a natural condition of conflict with one another. As evidenced in Hobbes' translation of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* (1975) and his synopsis of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (1984), Hobbes seems well versed in Greek scholarship. Readers also may appreciate that the last half (and most controversial part) of *Leviathan* represents Hobbes' attempt to establish a more virtuous community (with or without religion).

Noting that laws are intended to serve those who invoke them, the Athenian (*Laws*, I:631) defines a more virtuous set of qualities to which all states may aspire. Most notably, these include wisdom, temperance, justice, and courage. Still, the Athenian also acknowledges the importance of some less virtuous qualities, including people's personal health, beauty, strength, and wealth. It is with this broader set of concerns in mind that the speakers subsequently will address matters of education, forms of government, and authority, before the formation of a model state (*Laws*, IV onward) in which these objectives may be pursued through a constitutional government.<sup>19</sup>

Although religion is seen as an important aspect of community life, Plato clearly does not see religion as an element (factor or product) unto itself. Thus, while Plato's speakers generally quest for and intend to promote religious motifs within the course of ongoing community life, they also acknowledge the fuller range of religious and irreligious beliefs and practices that people may engage both across and within communities. As well, they are attentive to an assortment of state objectives (e.g., safety, justice, prosperity) and personal concerns (e.g., wealth, pleasure, physical well-being) and practices that people commonly interfuse with notions of divinity.

Likewise, instead of focusing on people's religious viewpoints and practices as more individualistic or mechanistic matters, Plato's speakers explicitly ac-

<sup>19</sup> Among other aspects of government, Plato's speakers deal with constitutional matters pertaining to state and civil affairs, office holders and management concerns, deviance and regulation, family relations and child rearing practices, trade and international relations, and entertainment, as well as religion. While considering the ways that a more just state might be established, the speakers are also concerned about the ways that a state of that sort might be maintained and how the various participants within might be encouraged to pursue viewpoints and activities that correspond with and contribute to the broader objectives of the state while also achieving higher levels of individual virtue.

knowledge the ways in which people envision, engage, and experience religion in more active and interactive terms. Thus, they seem particularly concerned with the images, beliefs, and practices that people develop within the collectively enacted (and sustained) features of community life. Further, although Plato's speakers assume and/or insist on more distinctive theological stances at times, they are also attentive to the relativist, problematic, and socially constituted nature of people's religious experiences.

As with the preceding consideration of *Republic*, this statement follows the overall flow that Plato develops in *Laws*. While enabling readers more readily to locate specific materials on religion in *Laws*, this ordering may also help remind readers that Plato does not envision religion as something unto itself, but instead deals with religion as a collectively-achieved, community-based phenomenon.

Fairly early in *Laws*, the Athenian (*Laws*, I:644-645) asks if it might not be appropriate to view people as "the puppets of the gods."<sup>20</sup> Still, whether people constitute the playthings of the gods or were created with other purposes, he observes that people experience a range of tensions between virtuous and dishonorable activities and struggle with these matters through reason and legislation.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> In the midst of a broader discussion of education, the Athenian will make another reference to "people being the playthings of the gods" (*Laws*, VII:558). He encourages people to assume this role as best they are able. The parallels with Stoic philosophy are much more evident in *Laws* than in *Republic*.

<sup>21</sup> Using the consumption of alcohol as an illustrative reference point, the Athenian (*Laws*, I:645-651) considers (a) people's concerns with self regulation, (b) their encounters with pleasurable experiences and temptations, and (c) their attentiveness to pain, evil, and disgrace, as well as (d) their participation in social occasions, and (e) the situated development of character.

An analysis of people's drinking activities may seem somewhat peripheral to many readers, but the Athenian pointedly observes that a sustained knowledge of people's tendencies and practices is of greatest importance for the art of politics (i.e., political science). Plato does not draw explicit linkages between self-regulation, religion, and virtue at this point, but the parallels seem evident.

Later, when discussing the formation of an ideal state, the speakers (*Laws*, IV:709) consider the primary elements affecting human experiences. They identify three competing viewpoints on social order. In addition to claims that (a) human experiences are largely matters of chance and (b) people can control or shape outcomes through artful (as in technology, skill, focused effort) endeavor, the speakers also acknowledge a third position, that (c) the gods control all things, including all aspects of chance and meaningful human conduct.

After some discussion of the problematics of human governors and legislation, the Athenian argues for the importance of divinely-inspired guidance in the affairs of state. Drawing on a fable of a city that should be named after God, the Athenian (*Laws*, IV:713-716) briefly describes the ideal state that guides his subsequent commentary. Viewing divine goodness as the most desirable condition to which people may aspire, the emphasis is on pursuing worldly rule in ways that are consistent with divine notions of virtue and justice.

Thus, in contrast to the view that "man is the measure of all things" (Protagoras), the Athenian insists that God is to be recognized as the measure of all that is (*Laws*, IV:716) and is to be honored as such. Relatedly, good people will be known by their reverence for God while the unjust would only waste their time making offerings to the gods.

The Athenian (*Laws*, IV:717) subsequently establishes a hierarchy of honor to which humans should attend, with the Olympian gods and the gods of the state assuming priority over all other beings. They are followed, in turn, by the demons and spirits of the underworld, the heroes, ancestor gods, and one's parents (living or dead). Those who honor in

this manner, the Athenian alleges, can expect to be appropriately rewarded by the gods.

As part of a broader consideration of education, the speakers (*Laws*, VII:821) note that some people would think it impious to inquire into the nature of the supreme God and the universe more generally. However, adopting the standpoint that the best and truest knowledge of all things would be good for the state and would seem acceptable in every way to God, they proceed. Indeed, they contend, such things are important if the citizens and youth are more fully to appreciate the gods and act appropriately and reverently toward them.

With the Athenian again taking the lead, the speakers (*Laws*, VIII:828-829) next discuss the institution of religious festivals, the laws governing their implementation and conduct, the specific gods to be honored on particular occasions, and the ways in which sacrifices and other tributes may be arranged to maximize (divinely-bestowed) benefits for the state more generally.

Following considerations of other state festivals and contests, as well as the regulation of the marketplace (commodities, participants, and practices within), the emphasis shifts (*Laws*, IX) to law suits involving the citizens at large. After noting that legislation serves to deter crime (as a result of implied punishment), as well as provide a basis of punishing people for their misdeeds (*Laws*, IX:853), the Athenian states the first law should prohibit theft from temples (*Laws*, IX:854-855). Penalties for these offenders are to be severe and unavoidable. Hence, whereas strangers and slaves who commit such offenses are to be branded, beaten, and banished, citizens (as better educated and responsible members of the community) are to be executed. The next most reprehensible crimes involve

activities that threaten the state (as in treason, revolution). Those who jeopardize the security of the state also are to be treated severely.

Later, noting that young people not only are particularly apt to engage in excesses, but also tend to be insolent in disposition, the Athenian (*Laws*, X:884-885) reiterates the group's viewpoint that the worst crimes are those against religion. Still, he adds, before deciding on punishment, one should ascertain the more particular religious frameworks to which particular offenders subscribe. He contends that no one would act in such offensive manners unless they (a) do not believe the gods exist; (b) do not believe that the gods, if they exist, care about people; or (c) believe the gods exist, but also think that the gods easily can be pacified.

Continuing, the Athenian (*Laws*, X:885) states that, when confronted with crimes against religion, the offenders are apt to defend their activities. Thus, they may insist that they should be understood before being punished and that they require proofs, variously, that gods exist, that the gods care, and that they are not easily appeased.<sup>22</sup>

In developing a response, the Cretan (*Laws*, X:886) first states that the ordering of the universe constitutes a proof of divine existence, as also does the fact that all manners of Greeks and Barbarians believe in the gods.

Despite his own agreement with the Cretan, the Athenian cautions him that these claims will not be adequate in themselves. Indeed, the Athenian says,

<sup>22</sup> In accepting the challenges posed in these defenses, Plato's speakers will address some of the most consequential issues in religious studies. Indeed, it is not until Cicero's (106-43 BCE) *On the Nature of the Gods* that matters of these sorts are given more extended philosophic consideration in the extant literature (also see Prus 2011e).



the poets and philosophers have greatly complicated matters. While the poets have introduced all sorts of dubious tales about the gods, their genealogies, and their behaviors, some philosophers have claimed that the heavenly bodies are no more than chunks of earth and stone and that these material essences have no regard for humans. Likewise, the Athenian observes, these (material) philosophers argue that religion is entirely fictional in essence.

Recognizing the limitations of merely legislating on the premise that the gods exist, the Athenian (*Laws*, X:887) suggests that they find some ways of persuading others that the gods do exist, that they care, and that they are genuinely attentive to justice.

Noting that there always are some people who have doubts despite their upbringing and their awareness that others believe, the Athenian (*Laws*, X:888-890) proposes that they consider the position of the philosophers who deny any divine intervention; who say the universe is the product of nature and chance alone or that all humanly known things are the products of nature, chance, and human endeavor. Summarizing the positions of these philosophers, the Athenian states:

[Athenian:] In the first place, my dear friend, these people would say that the Gods exist not by nature, but by art, and by the laws of states, which are different in different places, according to the agreement of those who make them; and that the honourable is one thing by nature and another thing by law, and that the principles of justice have no existence at all in nature, but that mankind are always disputing about them and altering them; and that the alterations which are made by art and by law have no basis in nature, but are of authority for the moment and at the time at which they are made. These, my friends, are the sayings of wise men, poets and prose writers, which find a way into the minds of youth. They

are told by them that the highest right is might, and in this way the young fall into impieties, under the idea that the Gods are not such as the law bids them imagine; and hence arise factions, these philosophers inviting them to lead a true life according to nature, that is, to live in real dominion over others, and not in legal subjection to them.

[Athenian:] ...what should the lawgiver do when this evil is of long standing? ... Should he not rather, when he is making laws for men, at the same time infuse the spirit of persuasion into his words, and mitigate the severity of them as far as he can?

[Cleimias:] Why, Stranger, if such persuasion be at all possible, then a legislator who has anything in him ought never to weary of persuading men; he ought to leave nothing unsaid in support of the ancient opinion that there are Gods, and of all those other truths which you were just now mentioning; he ought to support the law and also art, and acknowledge that both alike exist by nature, and no less than nature, if they are the creations of mind in accordance with right reason, as you appear to me to maintain, and I am disposed to agree with you in thinking. (Plato [*Laws*, X:889-890]; Jowett trans.)

Mindful of the long-standing nature of religious skepticism, the speakers stress the importance of using the laws to persuade rather than threaten the citizenry. However, they (*Laws*, X:891) also observe that, once instituted, the laws can help maintain the very viewpoints they reference. Still, in the absence of other defenders of religion and virtue, the speakers envision their duty as legislators to encourage honorable viewpoints wherever possible.

Then, embarking on what will be a more sustained argument for the existence of the gods, the Athenian (*Laws*, X:891-899) develops the position that the soul (as a living, spiritual essence) must precede the material features of the universe. He contends that the physical (material) philosophers (who reduce ev-

erything to fire, water, earth, and air) are in error because they neglect the spiritual, divine essence that must precede the existence of all other matter. It is only the soul that alone is capable of moving itself; of initiating change from within. Likewise, the Athenian states, it is the soul that has given motion to all other things.

Continuing this line of argument, the Athenian posits that since the soul inhabits all things that move, the soul is the cause of evil, as well as good, and the unjust, as well as the just. Presumably, however, the world is governed by the better aspects of the soul, or by the better soul (assuming that there are good and evil souls). Proceeding in this manner, the Athenian proposes that somewhat different souls or spiritual essences may be involved in sustaining all heavenly objects.

Hinging his position on the argument that "the soul must be the origin of all things," the Athenian (*Laws*, X:899) concludes he has said enough on the existence of the gods. He now turns attention to those who believe that the gods exist, but do not believe that they care about the condition and affairs of humans.

In an attempt to convince people that the gods do care, the Athenian (*Laws*, X:900) begins by asserting that the gods are good and possess virtue, as in courage, honor, and responsibility. Likewise, the Athenian (*Laws*, X:901-903) observes that the gods know all things that people do and that these divine souls have the power to accomplish many things both great and small.

Further, the Athenian stresses, it is important for people to remember that they came about only as part of a much larger creation process rather than presume that the larger creation was developed for

the individuals within. Indeed, the Athenian (*Laws*, X:904-905) explains, people are assigned to places that best enable them to contribute to the larger order of destiny. Relatedly, those who are more virtuous will be rewarded while those who act in evil ways also will be punished accordingly. However, he adds, because people are unable to see the larger scheme of things, they may not understand the more exacting nature of divine justice.

Having arrived at this point, the Athenian (*Laws*, X:905-906) next takes issue with those who think the gods easily can be placated or appeased with respect to human wrongdoing. Emphasizing that the gods are people's greatest allies in the conflict between good and evil, he says that it is absurd to assume that the gods are so fickle or greedy that they can be bribed into instances of dishonor or injustice. Indeed, the Athenian asserts, as people's principal guardians, the gods would act in people's best interests.

Then, describing himself as zealous in his opposition to evil people, the Athenian (*Laws*, X:907-909) proposes imprisonment for impious persons. The nonbelievers who maintain a tolerance and respect for the religious viewpoints and practices of others may avoid imprisonment, but those who are more openly critical of the religious practices of others and subject believers to ridicule are to be placed in a reformatory for a five year term. Second time offenders would be sentenced to death. Other nonbelievers who commit offenses against divinity or humanity are seen as incorrigible and are to be sentenced to life imprisonment.

Next, noting that gods and temples are not easily instituted and sustained, the Athenian proposes that citizens also are to be forbidden from estab-

lishing personal temples, as well as practicing sacrifices and other religious rituals in private settings (*Laws*, X:909-910).

In concluding *Laws* (XII:964-966), Plato's speakers emphasize the importance of the guardians or administrators of the city-state being people of virtue. Thus, the guardians are to possess courage, temperance (self control), justice, and prudence (judgment). In addition, the speakers insist that all those who occupy these elevated offices also have knowledge of the gods and be inspired accordingly.

Summarizing their religious viewpoints, the speakers insist that the two main arguments for believing in the gods revolve around the priority or pre-existence of a (divine) soul and the ordered nature of the universe. These are the two essential principles that characterize a true believer.

Still, in addition to an attentiveness to divinity and the other virtuous attributes associated with those who would govern the city, the speakers require yet one more element for a constitutional government, a council of magistrates to oversee the governors (i.e., to "regulate the regulators"). *Laws* concludes with the Cretan and the Lacedaemonian insisting that they would like to enlist the services of the Athenian in developing their state.

## Plato in Perspective

In this section of the paper, I briefly overview Plato's philosophy of religion as this pertains to both his theological and his sociological emphases. Because Plato engages so many topics pertinent to religion in the texts considered here,<sup>23</sup> this overview will be

<sup>23</sup> Plato also introduces some materials pertaining to theology and the soul (as a spiritual essence) in *Socrates Defense* or *Apology* (on theology), *Cratylus* (on the soul), and *Phaedrus* (on the soul).

extremely sketchy at best. Still, for our more immediate purposes, it may be sufficient to acknowledge three aspects of Plato's material on religion: (a) theological standpoints; (b) considerations of the moral order of community life; and (c) a more distinctive pragmatist (or constructionist) philosophic analysis of religion.

### Theological Representations

When approaching *Timaeus*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Laws*, it is important to acknowledge the overarching theological standpoint (predominantly following Pythagoras and Socrates) that Plato's speakers introduce. Expressed in highly compact terms, the theological position that Plato represents most centrally rests on the claim that there is a single intelligence that created and oversees the entire universe and all things that inhabit the universe. This intelligence not only has given the universe an adjustive or organic capacity, but also created other essences (lesser gods) that administer aspects of the universe and give people souls "of an infinite nature" to inhabit their temporary mortal bodies.

Of all earthly creatures, people not only have been given the greatest capacities for reason, religion, and virtue, but also the most pronounced sensations for desires, temptations, and evil. Accordingly, it is in the human condition that notions of good and evil are experienced most comprehensively.

It is in striving for perfection, in living virtuous, moral lives, and otherwise imitating divinity that people would more completely (closely) become one with God in the afterlife. Conversely, those failing to live virtuous lives will suffer the consequences of their human shortcomings and injustices in the

afterlife.<sup>24</sup> Not only do people's souls survive their mortal bodies, but death also is not to be feared by those who have lived virtuous lives. While developed more fully in *Timaeus* and *Phaedo*, the preceding notions are also notably evident in *Republic* and *Laws*. Still, even though Plato's speakers endorse religious viewpoints and practices of this sort just outlined, it also should be noted that they invoke broader, more notably pluralist, pragmatist analytic standpoints even as they do so.

### Religion and Moral Order

Matters pertaining to the social or moral order of the community are given some attention in *Timaeus* and *Phaedo*, but they are pursued much more extensively in *Republic* and *Laws*. Still, because the present statement has focused more exclusively on religion rather than the associated matters of politics, education, family life, deviance, and regulation, readers will obtain only a very partial consideration of the matters of state and civility from the preceding discussions of these texts.

Thus, while endeavoring to establish models for the entire realm of people's political (community) lives in *Republic* and *Laws*, Plato also considers the ways that people do things and attempts to find ways of more closely aligning people's current relationships and practices with more ideal notions of community justice, individual virtues, and afterlife salvation.

Whereas religion is seen as a vital component of community life, religion is much more than an in-

<sup>24</sup> Clearly, Plato does not subscribe to the representations of the gods depicted in the texts of poets such as Homer and Hesiod. Stressing the importance of people living virtuous lives with respect to one another, Plato also questions the value of piety as it is commonly envisioned and pursued through sacrifices and prayers. Likewise, Plato recognizes that religious viewpoints are not uniformly acknowledged or practiced.

spirational or motivational focus. Not only is religion interfused with other aspects of human group activity and interchange as part of the developmental flows of community life, but religion is also dependent on human enterprise for its continuity.

Accordingly, Plato's speakers seek out ways to insure that people will envision religion as a more consequential feature of human existence and follow a code for more virtuous life-styles. His spokespeople also intend to defend religion from those who disregard, misrepresent, or otherwise fail to accord (community-endorsed) religion an appropriate level of respect. More important than a particular religion or set of beliefs, (potentially any) religion is seen as providing an integrative community quality and is deemed central to the moral order of the community.

Notably, although expressing some particular theological viewpoints, Plato's spokespeople invoke more distinctive pragmatic standpoints as they attend to the actualities and problematics of regulating human conduct. Plato's concerns about the socialization of young people and the corrupting influences of the poets (*Republic*) are especially relevant here as also are his discussions of poetic representations of divinity as a basis for knowing and acting and his focused considerations of censure as a regulatory endeavor.

Plato's discussions of deviance on the part of the young and people's more general disregard of divinity in monitoring and adjusting their own behaviors are similarly instructive. In these and other discussions of morality (good and evil), readers are also introduced to pragmatist features of human intersubjectivity and agency – of people developing a knowledge of things through linguistic association with others and acting in deliberative, purposive, adjustive terms.



## Pragmatist Motifs

Plato may be a “theologian interested in saving souls,” as well as a “moral entrepreneur” (Becker 1963) concerned about order and justice within the human community, but in contrast to most theologians and moralists, Plato addresses issues about the origins, variations, significance, and maintenance of people's religious viewpoints and practices in notably direct pluralist, humanly engaged terms.

Thus, Plato approaches religion both as an essence developed within the community and as an enacted realm of activity that is maintained in conjunction with other aspects of community life. Accordingly, he introduces many matters of great consequence to a pragmatist sociology of religion.

In acknowledging the multiple viewpoints that people may adopt with respect to religion and divinity, Plato's speakers also consider: the problematics of knowing divinity (evidence/arguments/ways). In more relativist terms, his speakers also ask whether divine essences exist, care about humans and their activities, and would forgive human transgressions.

Even more consequentially in sociological terms, Plato focuses attention on the processes of constructing and sustaining religious beliefs and practices. He also considers the linkages of religion with other realms of community life (as in the interconnections and interdependencies of religion, politics, law, education, and poetics).

Attending to people as active, minded participants in the community, Plato's notions of religion also encompass matters pertaining to (a) human agency, justice, virtue, and afterlife existences; (b) the interlinkages of people's activities and beliefs; (c) people's exposure to notions of, and tendencies toward, good

and evil; and (d) temptations, justifications, defenses, and sanctions for wrongdoing.

Still, despite the many matters that Plato engages with respect to religion, including an illustration of the circular reasoning implied in people's more common notions of piety or holiness (*Euthyphro*),<sup>25</sup> and Plato's overt discussion of doubts or disbelief that people might have about the existence of the gods, their activities,

<sup>25</sup> Albeit one of Plato's shortest dialogues, *Euthyphro* (hereafter, *EU*) is notable for the ways in which Plato (with Socrates as his principal spokesperson) questions people's notions and pursuits of piety. The dialogue (I have relied primarily on Jowett's translation [1937]) is set outside the courtroom, where Socrates awaits charges of corrupting the youth by introducing new versions of religious beliefs.

On encountering Euthyphro, who claims to be acting in a pious manner in charging his own father with murder, Socrates expresses the desire to learn about piety and the standards implied within (*EU*:1-5).

After being informed that people commonly define piety as that which pleases the gods, Socrates asks Euthyphro if things are holy because the gods value them or whether the gods value things because they are holy? In developing a response, Euthyphro (*EU*:6) identifies the poets as the principal sources of people's notions of the gods.

Reflecting on poetic representations of the gods, Socrates (*EU*:7-13) asks Euthyphro if the gods (like people) adopt differing standpoints on the meanings of things (including notions of good and evil, as well as justice and culpability) and if the gods, accordingly, are at odds with one another in the things they most value. Euthyphro's answers suggest that even divine standards for piety, holiness, and the like are vague, if not also contradictory.

When Euthyphro adopts the position that “the holy is defined by what the gods value” and “what the gods value is holy,” Socrates (*EU*:14) asks for more clarification. In particular, Socrates asks about the art or practice of piety and what people hope to achieve by being pious.

After discerning that piety revolves around the dual practices of sacrificing or giving to the gods and praying or asking for concessions from the gods, Socrates asks whether piety has any substantial meaning for the parties (people and gods) involved. Continuing, Socrates (*EU*:15) observes that people often appear to benefit much from the work of the gods, but that the gods appear to have no need of anything from people. When Euthyphro insists on the importance of honoring (and thus pleasing) the gods (something they would not seem to require), Socrates points out that he and Euthyphro have done little more than go around in circles.

Seemingly frustrated, Euthyphro says that he has no time to discuss the matter further. In response, Socrates expresses disappointment that he will not benefit by learning more about piety. Although Plato's *Euthyphro* questions the validity of people's notions of piety, as well as the value of sacrifices and prayers for the religiously inclined, it may be appreciated that the matters that Euthyphro emphasizes clearly are not central to Socrates' notions of theology (wherein the emphasis is on living a virtuous life combined with an enduring philosophic quest for wisdom as the means of more adequately achieving a spiritual oneness with divinity).

and their concerns about justice, it should be noted that Plato does not subject religion to a sustained dialectic analysis (and more totalizing skepticism associated thereof) of the sort he invokes with respect to truth, self knowledge, courage, loyalty, wisdom, and knowing (e.g., see *Cratylus*, *Gorgias*, *Laches*, *Philebus*, *Theaetetus*).<sup>26</sup> Whereas a more sustained dialectic consideration of religion would have added to the overall value of Plato's pragmatist analysis of religion, as well as his considerations of the functionalist qualities of religion for community life, his pragmatist and functionalist considerations of religion are of substantial significance for the sociology of religion. However, the absence of a fuller dialectic (comparative) analysis of religion suggests that Plato intends to stress the more uniquely indispensable quality of a collective attentiveness to divinity as the cornerstone of community morality.

On another level, Plato is highly mindful of the pragmatist functional features of religion for the community at large (as in fostering conformity, cohesion, and devotion to the well-being of the community).<sup>27</sup> Still,

<sup>26</sup> If one uses Socrates as Plato's primary reference point, then true religion (as a route to a genuine, divinely-enabled existence) is best epitomized by those who promote justice at a community level, pursue virtue in their own lives and dealings with others, and strive for philosophic wisdom of divinity in the company of like-minded others.

Because he does not speak directly for himself, Plato's own views on religion have been the subject of much intellectual debate as well as extended theological intrigue.

It may be the case that, being cognizant of the hostile treatments accorded Heraclitus, Socrates, and others who offended the theological sensitivities of the broader Greek community, Plato endeavored to engage religion in more ambiguous (and circumspect) terms. However, Plato's exemption of religion from a fuller dialectic analysis may reflect his own theological sympathies and/or broader concerns about maintaining the moral order of the community. Still, regardless of his own position on religion, we can be grateful to Plato for addressing people's experiences with religion in such a broad and often pluralist assortment of analytic terms.

<sup>27</sup> Although Plato discusses religion in “structuralist-functionalist” terms at times, wherein outcomes are envisioned as the products of earlier institutionalized practices, Plato is also attentive to a “pragmatist functionalism” wherein people (as reflective, deliberately, strategizing agents) act in regulatory, cooperative, and uncooperative ways – with particular outcomes emerging as part of this minded, interactive flow.

while preferring religion of virtually any sort to a society without religion, Plato seems particularly concerned that any religion promoted within the community would emphasize justice on a broad basis and virtue at an interpersonal, more individualized level.

## Plato and Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interaction rests in the last analysis on three simple premises. The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings they have for them... The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (Blumer 1969:2)

As a preliminary caveat, it might be observed that no one working in the interactionist tradition has approached the sociology of religion in a way that compares with the scope achieved by Plato.<sup>28</sup> However, in asking to what extent Plato's considerations of religion resonate with an interactionist approach, it is instruc-

<sup>28</sup> Thus, whereas Prus (1997) briefly outlines an agenda for the interactionist study of religion and introduces an extended set of interactionist-based resources that one might use to study religion or any other realm of human endeavor and some interactionist ethnographic research on religion is cited elsewhere in this paper, interactionist research and analysis generally has had a comparatively limited scope with respect to the sociology of religion. Among those in the interactionist community, William Shaffir's (1974; 1978a; 1978b; 1983; 1987; 1991; 1993; 1995a; 1995b; 1998a; 1998b; 2000a; 2000b; 2001; 2002; 2004; 2006; 2007) work on religion is especially significant. Speaking more generally, there are few analyses of religion as realms of human lived experience that may be compared to the texts developed by Plato. The most notable approximations include Cicero's (106-43 BCE) *On the Nature of the Gods*, Thomas Aquinas' (1225-1274) *Summa Theologica*, and Emile Durkheim's (1858-1917) *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*.

Those familiar with Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966) will recognize many affinities between constructionist and interactionist approaches to the study of religion. Nevertheless, like the interactionists, the constructionists have developed little research on religion as a humanly enacted realm of activity. Notably, despite the text that Berger and Luckmann jointly published in 1966, neither Thomas Luckmann (1967) nor Peter Berger (1967) have much to offer to a social constructionist analysis of religion.

tive to compare Plato's materials with interactionist (a) premises, (b) methodology, and (c) analytic emphasis.

Building directly on Herbert Blumer's (1969) exceptionally valuable text on the theoretical and methodological foundations of symbolic interaction, along with some related sources (see Mead 1934; Blumer 1969; Strauss 1993; Prus 1996; 1997; 1999; Prus and Grills 2003), I have delineated twelve premises or assumptions that inform the interactionist paradigm. Addressing central features of symbolic interactionism, these premises provide consequential reference points for our subsequent considerations of religion:

1. *Human group life is intersubjective.* Human group life is accomplished (and made meaningful) through community-based, linguistic interchange.
2. *Human group life is knowingly problematic.* Rather than positing an objective or inherently meaningful reality, it is through activity, interchange, and symbol-based references that people begin to distinguish (i.e., delineate, designate, and define) realms of "the known" and "the unknown."
3. *Human group life is object-oriented.* Denoting any phenomenon or thing that can be referenced (observed, referred to, indicated, acted toward, or otherwise knowingly experienced), [objects] constitute the contextual and operational essence of the humanly known environment.
4. *Human group life is (multi)perspectival.* As groups of people engage the world on an ongoing basis, they develop viewpoints, conceptual frameworks, or notions of reality that may differ from those of other groups.
5. *Human group life is reflective.* It is by taking the perspective of the other into account with re-

spect to one's own being that people become objects unto themselves (and act accordingly).

6. *Human group life is sensory/embodied and (knowingly) materialized.* Among the realms of humanly knowing "what is" and "what is not," people develop an awareness of [the material or physical things] that others in the community recognize. This includes attending to some [sensory/body/physiological] essences of human beings (self and other), acknowledging human capacities for stimulation and activity, and recognizing some realms of practical (enacted, embodied) human limitations and fragilities. Still, neither phenomena, nor sensations, nor motions are meaningful in themselves.
7. *Human group life is activity-based.* Human behavior (action and interaction) is envisioned as a meaningful, deliberative, formulative (engaging) process of doing things with respect to [objects].
8. *Human group life is negotiable.* Because human activity frequently involves direct interactions with others, people may anticipate and strive to influence others, as well as acknowledge and resist the influences of others.
9. *Human group life is relational.* People do things within group contexts; people act mindfully of, and in conjunction with, their definitions of self and other (i.e., self-other identities).
10. *Human group life is processual.* Human lived experiences (and activities) are viewed in emergent, ongoing, or temporally developed terms. The emphasis, accordingly, is on how people (as agents) make sense of and enter into the instances and flows of human group life in meaningful, purposive terms.

11. *Human group life takes place in instances.* Community life is best known through an attentiveness to the particular occasions in which people engage things. Conceptions of human experience are to be developed mindfully of, and tested against, the particular occasions or instances in which people attend to and otherwise act toward self, other, and other objects of their awareness.

12. *Human group life is historically informed, culturally enabled, collectively sustained.* Whereas activity takes place in instances, community life and the interchanges that develop within are built up over time, through shared sets of meanings, practices, technologies, and other artifacts that become embedded within the life-worlds and collectively developed memories of the groups and the individuals within.

Although rudimentary in certain respects, these premises have profound conceptual and methodological implications for those studying the human condition. They encourage social scientists to acknowledge (1) the ways in which people make sense of the world in the course of symbolic (linguistic) interchange, (2) the problematic or ambiguous nature of human knowing (and experience), (3) the object-oriented worlds in which humans operate, (4) people's capacities for developing and adopting multiple viewpoints on [objects], (5) people's abilities to take themselves and others into account in engaging [objects], (6) people's sensory-related capacities and [linguistically meaningful] experiences, (7) the meaningful, formulative, and enabling features of human activity, (8) people's capacities for influencing, acknowledging, and resisting one another, (9) the ways that people take their associates into account in developing their lines of action, (10) the ways that people experience (and accomplish)

all manners of community life in the ongoing or emergent instances of the "here and now" in which they find themselves, (11) the "whatness" of human group life by examining the instances in which community life take place, and (12) the ongoing flows of community life in each area of human endeavor – even as people linguistically, mindedly, and behaviorally build on, accept, resist, and reconfigure aspects of the (cultural) "whatness" that they have inherited from their predecessors and have come to know from their more immediate associates, as well as through their adjustive considerations of earlier, present, and anticipated activities.

Because Plato introduces a broad array of emphases (including theology, idealism, morality, structuralism, functionalism, and totalizing skepticism) in his texts, only some of his work has a more discernable pragmatist quality. However, if one may judge by the texts considered in this paper, as well as some of Plato's other works (e.g., *Cratylus*, *Theaetetus*, *Statesman*, *Sophist*), it is quite apparent that Plato is highly cognizant of most matters addressed in these premises with respect to human knowing and acting. Still, rather than examine the "whatness" of human group life in the actual instances in which they occur, Plato focuses his analysis on more prototypical or generic categories of phenomena. Still, interestingly, and to his credit as a dialectician, Plato often insists on examining particular matters from a variety of standpoints (something that is much less common in contemporary scholarship).

On the surface, Plato's materials seem more removed from the interactionists on a methodological level. Unlike his student Aristotle (384-322 BCE), who insists on examining things in the instances and developing concepts from comparisons of the



instances,<sup>29</sup> Plato is much more uneven in his emphases.

As a theologian, Plato argues for the purity and infinite superiority of divinely-inspired knowing. At other times, too, Plato subjects all knowing to a (more thoroughly relativistic) dialectic analysis in which Plato's principal speaker, Socrates, claims "the best that can be known is that nothing can be known." Still, in other places (especially see *Republic* and *Laws*), Plato puts great stress on human language, sensation, action, and collectively achieved and sustained culture. In these latter regards, there is much in Plato's work that presages George Herbert Mead's (1934) attentiveness to "the generalized other."

Given these apparent contradictions in Plato's "methodology," scholars adopting more pluralist or pragmatist approaches will find parts of Plato's dialogues much more relevant than other components and will need to adjust accordingly.

Still, because his materials are so detailed, analytically astute, and involve comparisons of prototypic cases, Plato provides contemporary readers with valuable depictions of people's practices in religious, philosophic, and poetic arenas.<sup>30</sup> Plato's texts lack the more consistent pluralist and secular methodological rigor and attention to "instances in the making" that one associates with Chicago-style ethnography. Nevertheless, even in his more proto-

<sup>29</sup> For a fuller consideration of some of the parallels between Aristotle's views of human group life and contemporary symbolic interactionism, see Prus (2003b; 2004; 2007a; 2008a; 2009a).

<sup>30</sup> Insofar as theologians attempt to "explain something," discourse about religion may be seen as philosophic in that broader sense. However, the distinction here refers to the more pluralist/analytic features of philosophic endeavor. In contrast to many theologians, thus, Plato may be seen both as a (partisan) religious spokesperson and a philosopher in this latter, more distinctively pluralist/analytic sense. As Plato is also well aware, the distinctions between "theologians" and "poets" are not as sharp as some might claim.

typic representations of human knowing and acting, Plato provides us with an extended corpus of sophisticated ethnohistorical materials.<sup>31</sup>

Although some contemporary interactionists have studied aspects of people's involvements in religion in more detailed and situated terms than Plato does,<sup>32</sup> it also should be acknowledged that Plato introduces an extended array of process-related issues (pertaining to the matters of human knowing and acting in religious and associated spheres) that the interactionists have yet to consider.<sup>33</sup>

With this last point, we move into a third theme involving Plato and Chicago-style interactionism. This revolves around the use of analytic induction and the development of process-oriented concepts (based on comparisons of similarities, differences, and inferences thereof).

<sup>31</sup> It also may be appreciated that Plato assumes the role of a "participant observer" in developing his dialogues. Plato sometimes obscures his texts with literary playfulness (and fictionalization), but Plato is very much a participant and analyst of the broader philosophic (and theological) life-worlds about which he writes.

Thus, like more extended contemporary ethnographies, Plato's ethnohistorical materials (e.g., *Republic* and *Laws*) are to be valued for their contributions to a broader understanding of "the generalized other" (Mead 1934). In that sense, Plato's texts add notably to our "collective wisdom about human group life."

<sup>32</sup> For some interactionist ethnographic work on religion, see Simmons (1964), Shaffir (1974; 1978a; 1978b; 1983; 1987; 1991; 1993; 1995a; 1995b; 1998a; 1998b; 2000a; 2000b; 2001; 2002; 2004; 2006; 2007), Prus (1976; 2011d; 2011e), Kleinman (1984), Shepherd (1987), Jorgensen (1992), Heilman (1998; 2002), and Kahl (2012). Although not an interactionist, Van Zandt's (1991) work is largely consistent with this approach. Also see Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter (1956).

<sup>33</sup> Thus, for instance, Plato not only is especially attentive to the developmental flows (and disruptions) of collective beliefs in the broader community, but he also is mindful of the ways that various people (e.g., poets, law-makers, priests, and citizens at large) enter into this process. As well, Plato is attentive to the enacted interchanges of members of the community with respect to their notions of religion, poetics, law, justice, deviance, morality, and the like. For example, Plato's speakers in *Republic* and *Laws* plan to use the laws, traditions, and emergent practices to "prop up" people's involvements in religion, as well as use religion as a motivational reference point in fostering loyalty to the state.

Although analytic induction is the central means by which people achieve generalizations and concepts of all sorts,<sup>34</sup> comparative reasoning has not been pursued with great intensity or in more sustained ways by many of those in the human sciences. Whereas Plato develops his analyses of religion on more abstract levels and the interactionists situate much of their analyses of religion in ethnographic research, both Plato and some interactionists (see Glaser and Strauss 1967; Blumer 1969; Strauss 1993; Prus 1996; 1997; 1999; Prus and Grills 2003) make extensive use of comparative reasoning in developing their conceptual frames.

As an analyst, Plato not only insists on his speakers defining their terms of reference, but he also subjects speaker viewpoints and observations to extended comparative analysis. Thus, whereas Plato may be best known for his dialectic analysis, his dialectic analysis invokes analytic induction wherein things are continuously and extensively compared with respect to similarities, differences, and the inferences (claims and uncertainties) thereof. Even though Plato often ends his analyses by establishing the problematic nature of human knowing, readers may learn a great deal about people's viewpoints and activities, as well as the concepts with which participants (and any outside analysts) may work by attending to the comparisons Plato develops. Albeit often presented in the form of questions regarding particular claims and observations, amidst some deductive reasoning, analytic induction emerges as the single most central enabling feature of Plato's analysis of community life.

Those who examine Plato's dialogues will find that he is attentive to a great many of the complexities

<sup>34</sup> As Aristotle (see Spangler 1998) observed, all knowing involves comparisons of things with other things – that things can be known only in relation to other things.

of human group life with which the interactionists grapple in their research and analysis (as in speech and meaning, viewpoints, identities, relationships, activities, negotiation, reflectivity, coordination, conflict, deviance, and regulation). Further, Plato's careful methods of reasoning and questioning are highly instructive for any who might attempt to come to terms with the study of human knowing and acting.

Still, Plato's analyses lack a "groundedness in the instances" that the interactionists emphasize in their ethnographic research. Although most of Plato's dialectic analyses involve references to aspects of human lived experience and some of his texts (e.g., *Republic*, *Laws*) are especially attentive to the processes and problematics of human group life, Plato's analyses are still notably limited with respect to the actual instances in which people do things.<sup>35</sup> As well, whereas Plato's analytic objectives are more mixed or diffuse, the Chicago interactionists (see Blumer 1969; Strauss 1993; Prus 1996; 1997; 1999; Prus and Grills 2003) are more consistently attentive to the task of developing generic, process-oriented concepts with which to explain the nature of human group life.

Thus, while recognizing the analytic resources that Plato brings to the study of group life as humanly engaged fields of activity and the study of religion as realms of humanly accomplished lived experience within, we also may acknowledge some of the resources that the interactionists more specifically offer to the study of religion as an ongoing feature of community life.

First, insofar as analysts attend to the relevance of generic social processes for comprehending the

<sup>35</sup> By contrast, Aristotle (more like the interactionists) explicitly insists on the necessity of knowing things (i.e., by developing concepts and connections) from sustained examinations of the instances in which things occur.

nature of human group life, the interactionist literature could be used more systematically to inform the study of religion pertaining to people's (a) *careers of participation* (initial involvements, continuities and intensifications, disinvolvements, and reinvolvements) in religious matters, (b) *experiences, in particular religious life-worlds* (e.g., acquiring perspectives, developing identities, doing activity, experiencing emotionality, managing relationships engaging in collective events), (c) *participation in the "grouping process"* (e.g., as in forming and coordinating associations; also cooperation, conflict, negotiation, competition) in which religion is embedded, and (d) collective involvements in the *development and maintenance of moral order* (and the related matters of defining morality and regulating deviance).<sup>36</sup>

In addition, the interactionists have developed a well-defined methodology for studying people's involvements in life-worlds of all sorts (Prus 1997; Prus and Grills 2003). Further, in contrast to theologians and others adopting partisan standpoints, the interactionists engage their research and analyses in ways that are more pointedly and pluralistically attentive to the viewpoints, practices, and interchanges of all of those involved in any particular realm of community life.

As a result, the interactionists not only are able to benefit from the "humanly engaged" features of Plato's works but, because of their integration of theory, methods, and research, the interactionists also would be able to draw fairly specific process-oriented linkages between Plato's texts and other materials from across the millennia that address human knowing and acting in more explicit and sustained terms.

<sup>36</sup> For more comprehensive considerations of generic processes, see Blumer (1969), Strauss (1993), Prus (1996; 1997; 1999; 2003b; 2004; 2007b), and Prus and Grills (2003).

In developing this statement, two objectives were pursued. The first major task was to provide a more sustained (chapter and verse) depiction of Plato's consideration of religion in *Timaeus*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Laws*. This is important, not only because of (a) the exceptionally instructive analysis of religion that Plato provides and (b) the value of his texts as transhistorical resources, but also because (c) few scholars in the human sciences have a viable working level of familiarity with these materials. The second objective was to develop some substantive and conceptual comparisons of Plato's materials on religion with that of those working in the interactionist tradition – even if only on a very preliminary level at present. Denoting a corpus of theory, methodology, and data derived from field research, the interactionist literature offers a notably systematic, unified conceptual framework and a set of comparative resources for the study of people's involvements in religion as an aspect of human knowing and acting more generally.

Given his mixed emphases (i.e., theological, idealist, dialectic skepticist, functionalist, structuralist, and pragmatist), Plato's texts are best approached with some conceptual and methodological caution. However, as indicated herein, Plato has much to offer to the study of religion as a humanly engaged and sustained realm of community life.

## Epilogue

Far from being antiquated or of limited relevance for comprehending religion as a contemporary community-based phenomenon, Plato's texts provide insightful ways of informing and revitalizing "the sociology of religion" in a more enduring pragmatist sense.

Because of his remarkable attentiveness to human knowing and acting (as in speech, reflectivity, objects, activity, and strategic interchange), Plato's texts represent an invaluable set of transhistorical and transcontextual reference points that those adopting an interactionist approach may use in more fully comprehending people's experiences with religion (and community life more generally).<sup>37</sup> Relatedly, and with the reader's indulgence, I briefly comment on Plato's works as a transhistorical comparison point by referencing Emile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* [EFRL].

Although I had been working with Plato's texts (and the broader classical Greek, Latin, and Western European literatures) for some time prior to examining Emile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* and some other humanist sociological materials that Durkheim developed later in his career,<sup>38</sup> I would contend that Durkheim's EFRL not only is the closest sociological approximation to

<sup>37</sup> Whereas this epilogue focuses more exclusively on some conceptual affinities between the approaches to religion developed by Plato and Emile Durkheim, some other valuable trans-cultural, transhistorical materials on religion can be found in texts developed by Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE; Prus 2011e), and Dio Chrysostom (40-120; Prus 2011d). Cicero may be best known as an orator (Prus 2010), but his analysis of religion – wherein he considers the viewpoints of the Epicureans, the Stoics, and the Academicians, as well as the nature of human knowing and acting regarding divinity, merits careful study on the part of students of community life, as well as those focusing on religion more specifically. Dio Chrysostom's text is much less extensive, but still offers considerable insight into the ways that people's images of deities are developed, presented, and sustained.

<sup>38</sup> Focusing on Durkheim's *Pragmatism and Sociology*, *Moral Education*, and *The Evolution of Educational Thought*, more extended depictions of Emile Durkheim's "sociological pragmatism" or "pragmatist sociology" can be found in Prus 2009b, 2011b, and 2012, respectively. Durkheim's *Moral Education* is seldom referenced as a text pertinent to religion, but in analyzing the matters of devotion, discipline, and character, as well as the roles that intermediaries (instructors, associates) might play in the educational process, this statement also has much to offer to a broader understanding of the interconnections of religion and secular life as realms of human lived experience.

Plato's work on religion that one encounters in the literature, but that Plato's, as well as Durkheim's analysis of religion becomes even more compelling when the two sets of analyses are considered in comparative analytic terms. Still, a few preliminary comments seem appropriate.

First, even though EFRL is frequently cited in the sociological literature, I have found that the fuller contents of this text are not at all well known amongst sociologists, including many of those working in "the sociology of religion." Not only have a great many scholars in this subfield of sociology imitated the structuralist, quantitative emphases one encounters in Durkheim's *Suicide*, but most also seem inattentive to the conceptual and methodological contents of EFRL.

Whereas EFRL seems to have been dismissed as an anomaly of sorts by those adopting structuralist/positivist approaches to the study of religion, the contents of this text also has been almost entirely neglected by the interactionists and other sociologists adopting interpretivist approaches to the study of human knowing and acting. Defining Durkheim mostly in structuralist and/or positivist terms, few sociologists have carefully examined this remarkable study of people's lived experience.

Rather ironically, thus, the same Emile Durkheim who earlier (1933 [1893]; 1951 [1897]; 1958 [1895]) had assumed such a central role in promoting a structuralist, quantitative approach to the study of community life on the part of sociologists also has provided the most astute conceptually articulated and ethnographically informed statement on religion that we have in the sociological literature. Emphasizing the centrality of historical analysis



and ethnographic inquiry for the study of community life in *EFRL*, Durkheim attends to religion as denoting collectively articulated, developmentally achieved, situationally accomplished, and community sustained realms of human lived experience.

In addition to dismantling more conventional rationalist and empiricist philosophic approaches to the study of human knowing (i.e., epistemology), as well as animist and naturist positions regarding religion in *EFRL*, Durkheim also refuses to reduce the complex reality of human group life to abstract structures and variable analyses. Attending to religion and all other realms of knowing as humanly experienced, collectively-informed fields of activity, Durkheim (1915 [1912]) insists on the centrality of ethnology and history for the sociological venture.

Interestingly, and despite the many affinities of Plato's works on religion with Durkheim's *EFRL*, Durkheim (as far as I can tell) draws no explicit linkages between his work and Plato's analysis of religion in *Republic*, *Laws*, *Timaeus* or *Phaedo*.<sup>39</sup> This is especially noteworthy because in addition to Plato's attentiveness to the functional, structural, and processual

<sup>39</sup> Whereas most philosophers and social theorists appear much more familiar with Plato's texts than those of Aristotle, comparatively few of those in the human sciences (including Durkheim, Weber, and Marx, as well as Peirce, James, Dewey, and Mead) had a particularly strong background in classical Greek scholarship. They would have had some exposure to this literature and some have built more directly on aspects of classical Greek scholarship, but sustained contact with the Greek literature is more limited than might generally be supposed. Likely, these and other social theorists would have been diverted by various issues (along with denigrations and misrepresentations of classical Greek thought) that other scholars (e.g., René Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, Auguste Comte, and Friedrich Nietzsche) had generated in the interim. Durkheim's (1977 [1904-1905]; also see Prus 2012) analysis of "the evolution of educational thought" in Western Europe also helps shed light on the relative neglect of classical Greek philosophy prior to, amidst, and following the 16<sup>th</sup> century Renaissance.

interdependence of religion with other aspects of community life, Plato is highly mindful of the ways that people actively engage, shape, and maintain religious beliefs and practices. He is also attentive to the ways that people's involvements in religion are depicted, instructed, monitored, and regulated by others. Durkheim approaches religion in much more consistently pluralist analytic terms than does Plato (who sometimes pointedly writes as a theologian and/or moralist). Nevertheless, there is much in Plato's considerations of religion and community life with which Durkheim's analysis of people's experiences with religion resonates.<sup>40</sup>

Durkheim may have developed *EFRL* over 2000 years after Plato, but those intent on learning about the ways that people experience religion in actual practice will find intellectual treasure chests of great value in the works of both Plato and Durkheim. Still, as both Plato and Durkheim would stress, much more can be gleaned by subjecting these and other sets of more notably parallel materials to more sustained comparative analysis and attending to the conceptual insights thereof. It is here that symbolic interactionism, with its pragmatist emphasis on attending to human lived experience, represents a particularly viable conceptual medium for pursuing comparative analyses of this very sort.

<sup>40</sup> Having engaged Emile Durkheim's *EFRL* in somewhat parallel analytic terms to the consideration of Plato's texts presented in this paper, I had anticipated developing a more extended comparison between Plato's analysis of religion and that which Durkheim articulates in *EFRL*. Indeed, mindful of the pragmatist sociological standpoint with which Durkheim approaches the study of human knowing and acting more generally in *EFRL*, there is much to recommend an analysis along these lines. However, given the extended analysis of religion (and related matters) that Plato provides in the texts considered here and the conceptually massive quality of Durkheim's *EFRL*, along with other challenges involving "the Greek project" (as I sometimes call it), I have not yet been able to pursue this objective.

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