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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,¹ 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.²

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,

¹ 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).

² 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.³ 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,⁴

³ 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.

⁴ 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*.⁵

⁵ 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*⁶

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.⁷ 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.

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

⁷ 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.⁸

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-

⁸ 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.⁹ 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.

⁹ 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*¹⁰

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

¹⁰ 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,¹¹ 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

¹¹ Those familiar with Plato's other works may be reminded of Plato's "allegory of the cave" (*Republic*, VII). Readers will also find material in *Phaedo* (especially pp. 82-84) that may have inspired Boethius' (480-524 CE) *The Consolation of Philosophy*.

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.¹²

¹² 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.”¹³

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.

¹³ 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*¹⁴

[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

¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ Those who dis-

¹⁵ 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).¹⁶

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

¹⁶ 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*¹⁷

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).¹⁸

¹⁷ 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).

¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

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-

¹⁹ 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."²⁰ 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.²¹

²⁰ 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*.

²¹ 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.²²

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,

²² 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?

[Cleinius:] 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,²³ this overview will be

²³ 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.²⁴ 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-

²⁴ 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*),²⁵ and Plato’s overt discussion of doubts or disbelief that people might have about the existence of the gods, their activities,

²⁵ 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*).²⁶ 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).²⁷ Still,

²⁶ 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.

²⁷ 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.²⁸ However, in asking to what extent Plato’s considerations of religion resonate with an interactionist approach, it is instruc-

²⁸ 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,²⁹ 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.³⁰ 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-

²⁹ 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).

³⁰ 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.³¹

Although some contemporary interactionists have studied aspects of people's involvements in religion in more detailed and situated terms than Plato does,³² 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.³³

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).

³¹ 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."

³² 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).

³³ 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,³⁴ 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

³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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

³⁵ 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).³⁶

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.

³⁶ 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).³⁷ 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,³⁸ I would contend that Durkheim's EFRL not only is the closest sociological approximation to

³⁷ 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.

³⁸ 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*.³⁹ This is especially noteworthy because in addition to Plato's attentiveness to the functional, structural, and processual

³⁹ 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 16th 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.⁴⁰

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.

⁴⁰ 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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When Symbolic Action Fails: Illustrations from Small-Claims Court

Abstract This article extends the cultural-pragmatics model of symbolic action developed by Jeffrey Alexander and his associates, which observes that symbolic action has become difficult in contemporary, highly differentiated societies. When symbolic action succeeds, the cultural-pragmatics approach argues it does so by re-“fusing” the elements of social performance, which have been disaggregated by the effects of social differentiation. Fusion produces affectively charged shared interpretations with the power to reshape the social world in important ways. Drawing on an example from my own ethnographic research, I argue that the current articulation of cultural pragmatics is unable to apprehend instances when such affectively charged shared interpretations are produced even when the actor or actors in a performance fail to achieve their performative goals. In this article I introduce the concept of “meta-performance” as a tool for analyzing such instances, arguing that this enables us to consider interpretive vantage points that are not conditioned by the actor’s intent. I then apply my extended meta-performative model to the ethnographic episode that inspired it. This bitterly fought court case between an adult daughter and her family produced a shared feeling among those assembled of hopeless deadlock between the family members, drawing a series of sharp symbolic boundaries – *inter alia*, between the daughter and her family and between “love” and “money” – not only despite, but precisely because all the participants’ component performances failed.

Keywords Cultural Pragmatics; Cultural Sociology; Family; Litigation; Social Differentiation; Social Performance

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“\$3,500 or nothing!” barked the frail woman, surrounded by her family one spring morning in a New England small-claims court. According to Eleanor D’Agostino, her daughter Jill¹ had stolen twice this amount from Eleanor’s safety deposit box while she lay convalescing in Jill’s home. Jill had already given her mother the other half of the disputed \$7,000, essentially ad-

¹ All names in the ethnographic passages of this article have been changed.

mitting her guilt. Would the court please finally return the rest?

But, Jill claimed she stole nothing. Upon her sister Mary’s instructions, she spent all that money on her mother’s care, a time she beseechingly described to the court with an itemized list of not only expenses she paid for her mother, but also care she performed. The \$3,500 she had already paid expressed not her guilt, but her good-faith attempt to reconcile with her family. She was happy to forfeit some money. She asked only that her healing efforts be recognized – in the form, naturally, of a favorable verdict.

Judge Deluca was flummoxed. This should not be about money, she pleaded, but about love. “They all love you very much,” she told Eleanor. “They just have different ways of showing it. Heal your wounds.”

But no wounds healed that day; mother and daughter departed as deadlocked as they had entered. Deluca withheld immediate judgment, while the audience (including me) quizzically wondered whom to believe. Thus, the riveting and galling drama of the trial slunk out the door to a confusing and heartbreaking end. The final verdict, delivered weeks later, awarded the mother about half of her full claim. In the end, despite her all-or-nothing ultimatum, Eleanor received neither \$3,500 nor \$0, but a confusing amount in between.

This vignette displays several characteristic features of symbolic action in contemporary, highly differentiated societies. Multiple symbolic actors (mother, daughter, judge) pursue their own agendas while participating in and observing the others’ performances, enacting a drama interpretable from many vantage points, yet recognizably organized within

the distinctive genre of the trial. Propelled by the combustible mixture of economy and intimacy (Zelizer 2005), the drama asks: Who handled this dangerous mixture most appropriately? But, the trial limps to a confusing anticlimax rather than a clear answer, yielding an unmistakable hopelessness.

In this paper I use this vignette drawn from my own ethnographic research to identify and push beyond a major limit of the cultural pragmatics theory of symbolic action in contemporary, highly differentiated societies (Alexander, Giesen, and Mast 2006). A wide range of theorists have long noted that coherent and moving symbolic experiences are less common today than in the simpler, more centrally ritualistic societies of the past, although just how common remains vigorously debated (e.g., Benjamin 1968; Lukes 1975; Turner 1975; 1982; Jameson 1991; Phelan 1993; Baudrillard 1995; 2007; Weber 2001; Alexander 2003; Horkheimer and Adorno 2007).² Virtually all these otherwise diverse scholars attribute this symbolic thinning to social differentiation in one form or another. The cultural-pragmatics paradigm attempts to specify the causal links between the two phenomena by framing contemporary symbolic actions as performances that, if they are to succeed, must re-“fuse” the elements of performance that have been sundered by social differentiation.

In the terms of cultural pragmatics, the above vignette would typically be dismissed as a collection of unquestionably failed performances, since all the actors failed to portray themselves in the light they desired to their audience. Such an assessment would ig-

² Many scholars have rightly criticized romanticized and overly simplistic scholarly accounts of older societies (Said 1979; Mohanty 1991; Sherwood 1994; Legg 2005). It nonetheless remains uncontroversial that the enormous complexity of contemporary societies profoundly shapes, and usually frustrates, symbolic action’s possibilities.

nore, however, the significance of the clear collective feeling of dismay at the family's apparently permanent estrangement, one that warned of the dangers of mixing love with money. In other words, despite the performances' failures – indeed, because of them – a powerful symbolic experience was produced. Such a case presents a puzzle for cultural pragmatics as currently articulated, for in its current terms only successfully fused performances can produce shared interpretations. In this paper I redevelop and extend the cultural-pragmatics paradigm to make it capable of addressing such instances of fusion-through-failure. My intervention suggests that there always co-exist many interpretive vantage points from which social actors can and, more importantly, do interpret any given symbolic action. An action may achieve coherence from one or more of these vantage points even when it fails to achieve the actor's or actors'³ desired effect. I suggest reserving the language of performance for analysis from the actor's intent vantage point and introduce the new concept of "meta-performance" for analysis from other vantage points less directly conditioned by the actor's intent. I propose that these various vantage points are often interpretively linked in complex ways that demand greater understanding.

I begin by briefly summarizing the cultural-pragmatics model in the context of broader debates in cultural sociology. I then introduce the concept of meta-performance and explain its utility *vis-à-vis* the problem outlined above. In the subsequent section, I apply this expanded cultural-pragmatics model to a fuller account of the vignette that opened the article, analyzing in detail how the

³ For the remainder of this article I use the singular "actor" to refer both to individual actors and to groups acting together according to the same basic agenda, and the plural "actors" to refer to individuals or groups following distinct agendas.

case instilled a shared sense of hopeless deadlock through each performer's failure to symbolically dominate the proceedings and produce a more conventionally coherent narrative. Finally, I reflect on the model's application, suggesting directions for further development.

Cultural Pragmatics and the Contingency of Symbolic Action

It has become commonplace to note that contemporary symbolic action often falls short of coherence, to say nothing of transcendence. Miscommunication, mistrust, and cynicism are widespread (Alexander 2006a:30). Interpretations differ from one group or one individual to the next, often becoming embroiled in fierce contestation (e.g., Charlesworth 1994; Chesters and Welsh 2005; Pickerill and Webster 2006). As opposed to ancient societies' relative homogeneity and unity, contemporary societies are cross-cut by infinite social groups and elaborated into such distinct domains as religion, family, work, and politics (Walzer 1983), forcing symbolic action onto a profoundly more complex social terrain.

But, despite its relative retreat, meaningful symbolic action continues to lace through our collective lives. Families joyfully cry together at weddings and angrily attack each other at divorce hearings. Charismatic politicians inspire coalitions to hope and crowds to rage (Alexander 2010). While reflexive self-hood and proliferating interpretive communities virtually foreclose the possibility that any given symbolic action will identically move all people for the same reason, nonetheless symbolic action does sometimes find a shared audience, however partial. Thus, adequate accounts of contemporary symbolic action must accommodate both symbolic failure and symbolic success.

The Power of Cultural Pragmatics: Social Differentiation as a Not-Insurmountable Constraint on Symbolic Action

The cultural-pragmatics model of social performance is especially well-suited to this task. Alexander argues that, to project meaning into an audience, successful symbolic action must "fuse" social performance's different elements. Under contemporary conditions these elements include:

1. the systems of collective representation within which the actor's motivation and meaning are potentially intelligible by the audience, including both the deep background semiotic vocabulary and the more immediate script which a fused performance will be perceived to have followed;
2. the actor(s) whose actions encode these representations;
3. the observers who attempt to interpret the action;
4. the material objects (including the setting);
5. the actor's actions, which spatially and temporally order the narrative, called the *mise-en-scène* (literally, "putting into the scene"); and
6. the social power that conditions an actor's access to the symbolic and material means of production and the scope of permissible interpretations (Alexander 2006a:32-37).

A fused performance is one in which these various elements merge into apparent seamlessness and achieve "flow," as the audience focuses all its interpretive powers on the performance as intended by the actor (Csikszentmihályi 2000; Alexander 2006a).

Fusion's opposite – failure – is possible because the elements of performance are now relatively autonomous from one another. For example, actors may perform a familiar script in an unexpected setting, as in the numerous contemporary Shakespearean performances set not in Elizabethan England, but in war-

torn Vietnam or American suburbia. Such choices may not yield a moving and intelligible performance, but – importantly – they sometimes do. That such choices are not only possible, but also sometimes both coherently and movingly understood demonstrates just how autonomous the elements of performance have become. In extremely undifferentiated societies, by contrast, performative elements were often not merely interpretively linked, but completely identified with one another. The ritual dancer did not just *portray* a god, for example; he *was* that god (Lévi-Strauss 1963; Turner 1969; Mauss 1990). Performative failure was literally unthinkable.

Competing Models of Contemporary Symbolic Action: Total Success or Total Failure

One line of cultural theorizing tends to imply a similarly high success rate for symbolic action in contemporary societies, albeit for different reasons. The "tool kit" model of culture, most fully developed by Ann Swidler (1986), argues that culture provides a tool kit of "strategies of action" from which people select (albeit not usually very deliberately) those most likely to help them solve some problem. Importantly, not all people can succeed with the same strategies; a Wall-Street banker and a Queens auto mechanic cannot easily trade places, and they cannot easily use the tools in each other's kits. But, in most cases people will tend to choose from among the strategies that are available to and most likely to work for them, with almost intuitive pragmatism. Thus, in practice, we should generally expect most attempted symbolic actions to succeed.⁴

⁴ The cultural-pragmatics model resembles the tool kit model in assuming that actors choose certain performative elements from among an array of meaningful possibilities because of their perceived fit. But, the tool kit model implies that inapt components are usually eschewed preemptively, while the cultural-pragmatics model assumes such misfits are common.

A different line of theorizing suggests the opposite: Because our worlds are increasingly complex, they are now so bereft of true meaning that symbolic action always fails. Most prominently occurring under the banners of the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer and Adorno 2007) and of post-modernism (Jame-son 1991; Phelan 1993; Baudrillard 1995), this line of thought argues that the mediations wrought by contemporary social differentiation – often, more specifically, by capitalism in its various forms – have pushed authentic meaning off the stage entirely. One can play with meaning, but one can never deeply and authentically experience it in the way of our nostalgically remembered forefathers. We live in the age of disenchantment.

Cultural pragmatics counters the total-success and total-failure arguments with an emphasis on contingency. When the elements of performance align, successful symbolic action results. When they do not, it fails. By analyzing how such contingency actually plays out, cultural pragmatics promises to explicate social differentiation's influence on symbolic action more fully.

Extending Cultural Pragmatics: "Success" on Terms Other than the Actor's Own

As the name suggests, the cultural-pragmatics paradigm typically judges fusion or failure against the actor's desired outcome (even though this goal may not always be crisply defined or consciously articulated). For example, the Republican Party of the 1990's wanted the American public to see President Bill "Slick Willy" Clinton as a law-breaking womanizer, while the Clinton White House wanted them to see Republicans as a time-wasting, moralizing "vast right-wing conspiracy" (Mast 2006). South Africa's Truth

and Reconciliation Commission attempted to repair the trauma of apartheid and lay the basis for democratic solidarity (Goodman 2006). German Chancellor Willy Brandt may not have consciously planned to enact a newly penitent German identity when he knelt before the Warsaw Memorial to Jewish Holocaust Heroes, but his gesture undeniably embodied his apparent desire to express remorse (Rauer 2006).⁵

This focus on the actor's intent is extremely useful, especially given the cultural-pragmatics approach's central concern with the "ritual-like" subset of symbolic actions whose grand scale and transcendent experience virtually require at least a nominally intentional director. But, ritual-like fusion forms but a small part of the outcomes yielded by symbolic actions. What cultural-pragmatics scholarship has yet to engage is that large set of symbolic outcomes not directly indexed to the actor's pragmatic intent. This is not an inconsequential oversight. In purely quantitative terms, perhaps the bulk of symbolic interpretations that circulate in the world have little to do with the intent of those who performed the interpreted actions. At a minimum, this suggests that the category of "fusion" as currently articulated is leaving out a great deal of shared and consequential symbolic experience. If the category cannot be expanded to incorporate such experience, this raises doubts about the concept's utility.

I argue that the concept of fusion can be expanded if the associated model of symbolic action is complexified to incorporate attention to what I call the "meta-performance." A symbolic action is a fused

⁵ As this last example shows, often the most successful performances are those which do not appear to intend to be successful performances as such, because this apparent lack of intention creates a sense of authentic (*versus* self-serving, for example) motivation (Alexander and Mast 2006:4-7). But, this authentic motivation then becomes part of the performance's central meaning.

meta-performance, I argue, insofar as it achieves in at least part of its audience a shared, coherent, and often affectively registered understanding of the action's meaning, but when that meaning does not impute a direct identity between the actor's intent and the audience's experience. This is a more relaxed notion of fusion than that typically used in cultural-pragmatics scholarship, not only because it excludes the actor, but also (and relatedly) because it does not require quite the intensity of inter-subjective flow characteristic of pure, performative fusion. It nonetheless significantly exceeds the total lack of communication implied by "failure."

The language of meta-performance also better enables us to analyze overlapping performances by distinct actors touching on a shared topic. Examples range from the job interview and the blind date to more competitive situations, such as the political debate. Jason Mast's analysis (2006) of the Clinton-Lewinsky controversy considers the latter category, arguing that the success of the Clinton White House's performance helped congeal the overall battle between them and the Republican Party's counter-performance (Alexander 2006b) into an "event." Like "meta-performance," Mast's language of "event" recognizes multiple, interlinked interpretive levels, in Mast's case between the Clinton White House's performance and the Lewinsky episode's eventness. My proposal extends Mast's, however, by enabling inquiry into a range of possible articulations between the performative and meta-performative levels, beyond only that identifying meta-performative with performative success. For example, as I argue below, the central vignette of this paper links meta-performative fusion with all actors' performative failure. Exploring the range of possible articulations between performative and meta-performative levels of interpretation could be

the central project of the extended cultural-pragmatics model I advocate here, a theme to which I return in the final section. For now, I illustrate the utility of this extended model by returning to the vignette that opened this paper.

Applying the Expanded Social-Performance Model: A Case of Intimate Litigation

I first encountered this vignette as part of ethnographic research I was conducting into small-claims disputes among litigants with pre-existing, affective relationships – friends, family, romantic partners, exes, and so on. I wished to understand better the ways people translated the problems of their everyday lives into legal problems. Small-claims hearings were a good site for exploring this question because most individuals represented themselves in public proceedings without the assistance of an attorney. This allowed me to access and observe directly some processes of legal translation. I embarked on three months of observing the weekly small-claims docket in the courthouse of a small New England city. I sat unobtrusively taking notes in the audience each week, which was mostly otherwise composed of the participants in upcoming cases for that day.

Cultural pragmatics emerged as a useful paradigm for making sense of my observations, for the litigants' actions in the trials were quite readily understandable as performances, but also quite often clearly failed to convey the impression that the litigant desired. What was difficult to square with cultural pragmatics was the coexistence alongside this repeated performative failure of an often intensely and tumultuously emotional atmosphere. Upon reflection it seemed to me that such conjunctures between performative failure and shared emotional

experience occurred with some frequency even in settings beyond my formal research. Either these observations falsified cultural pragmatics, or the theory required further elaboration in order to be capable of apprehending such phenomena. It is this insight that led me to undertake the theoretical work outlined in the previous section.

I choose this particular vignette not only because it formed my most vivid reference point when thinking through my theoretical work, but also because it demonstrates my points with particular clarity. As such, it is by definition not a typical instance of the litigation I observed, let alone of fusion-through-failure more broadly. Many failed symbolic actions do not produce as intensely emotional and clearly shared interpretations as happened in this instance. More research on such instances will be necessary in order to explore precisely where the boundaries of meta-performative fusion lie, and how failed performances sometimes provoke such fusion and sometimes do not. In other words, while the example I use here is sufficient to demonstrate the need for complexifying the cultural pragmatics model and expanding its notion of fusion, this example alone cannot identify just how far that notion can and should be stretched. That limitation should be addressed in future work; for now, my theoretical intervention and the case that inspired it are useful precisely because they move cultural-pragmatics scholarship further in that direction. In addition to the theoretical limitations I outline above, existing cultural-pragmatics scholarship has been methodologically limited primarily to cases of performative success and overwhelmingly to grand events of national and international scale. In addition to its focus on performative failure, this case unfolds on a more everyday, intimate scale that deserves greater attention.

I argue that the case of the D'Agostinos entailed a series of performative failures that together composed a broader meta-performative outcome in which the improper mixing of love and money is perceived to have driven the family apart. The meta-performance re-separates love from money and, not coincidentally, differentiates one daughter, Jill, from the rest of her family into the status of stranger. The love-money mixture at the case's heart requires everyone to carefully balance their familial with their financial and legal roles, so all the courtroom performances intertwined both familial and legalistic background representations. While these background representations do not mandate complete separation between the intimate and the legal/financial realms, they do mandate that any intersections between these domains take particular, carefully managed forms (Zelizer 2005). Improper alignment with these background expectations was the major reason for each component performance's failure.

To recap, in this case Eleanor D'Agostino and her daughter, Mary D'Agostino Lawler, sued another of Eleanor's daughters, Jill D'Agostino, for \$3,500 of \$7,000 removed from Eleanor's safety deposit box while Jill cared for her. Jill countered that she removed the money on Mary's instructions and spent all of it on her mother's care. Judge Deluca presided, ultimately awarding the plaintiffs about half of their full claim in a judgment delivered later by mail. I first discuss each of the component performances, then turn to the meta-performance which they compose.

The Failed Performance of Defendant/Daughter Jill

Deluca spent about fifteen minutes reading the file before taking testimony, during which the elder D'Agostinos scowled at Jill and whispered amongst themselves (a scene I discuss at greater length be-

low). After her perusal, Deluca turned immediately to Jill with a series of questions, skipping the plaintiffs entirely. Attempting to portray herself as both a good daughter and a responsible financial and legal actor, Jill began by submitting an itemized list of care-related expenses on which she claimed to have spent the disputed \$3,500.

Thus far her performance drew primarily on legalistic background representations, deploying the trope that, in the legal world, paper is more credible than the spoken word (Ewick and Silbey 1998:100). Deluca immediately understood Jill's purpose in submitting it, but some of the listed items triggered her suspicion and ultimately derailed Jill's entire performance. These included not only expenses such as Jill's attorney's fee and rent for the time her mother lived with her, but also Jill's caring tasks themselves, ranging from bathing and feeding Eleanor to clipping her toenails. Importantly, Deluca's response indicated doubt not only about these items' legal relevance, but also about Jill's daughterly character. She became increasingly sarcastic as she interrogated the list. "How is hiring an attorney your mother's expense?" she asked. Because it could have been resolved more easily, "in two letters," Jill replied. Was the rent actually agreed upon in advance, Deluca wanted to know, or was it "just some arbitrary number?" Was Jill expecting compensation for clipping her mother's toenails? No, Jill replied. "Well I'm glad you itemized these so I knew what you weren't charging her for," snapped Deluca. Judge Deluca's questions are part of her own performance, of course. Here, however, their sarcasm indicates that, for her, Jill's performance had become de-fused. Jill's performative mistake occurred in the dramatic choices she made when compiling the list, choices best understood as a kind of *mise-en-scène* conducted in advance of the performance. As with conventional *mise-*

en-scène, Jill constructed the itemized list by spatially arranging signifiers, in this case on pieces of paper. While the overall technique of the itemized list was legible within the representational logic of the law, Jill's arrangement incorporated inappropriate signifiers, thereby de-fusing her entire performance.

Although legalistic in form, in content the submissions invoked more familial representations. Jill had included her attorney's fee, for example, because her mother and her sister had made this dispute excessively difficult. While she did not portray the alternative route they might have taken as particularly intimate ("two letters" rather than, say, one phone call) she was, nonetheless, blaming her excessively argumentative family for effectively forcing her to hire a lawyer.⁶ The legalistic list thus invoked a set of familial background representations portraying the legalization of intimate relations as driven by greed and unreasonableness (Engel 1984).

Whatever its performative purpose, the lawyer's fee was not recoverable and thus legally irrelevant. But, it was not this irrelevance alone that de-fused her performance, for small-claims litigants commonly request things not allowed by law, as one would expect in a court designed to assist non-expert litigants through the relaxation of procedural rules. Jill's more fundamental problem was that she sought legal credit for familial care, making her appear at least as greedy as her family. Within legalistic background representations the itemized list is most commonly read as a request for credit, as well as a legitimation of that request (Ewick and Silbey 1998). Judge Deluca clearly read it within this logic, dismissing Jill's de-

⁶ Indeed, almost all intimate litigants I observed, including plaintiffs (who by definition initiate litigation), portrayed themselves as in court against their will. As in Jill's instance, I interpret this as invoking background representations of the normative boundaries separating affective intimacy from the law.

nials of that purpose – at least for her care – as illogical. Why else would she list these items, if not to receive credit for them? In Deluca's eyes, the list of caring tasks disrupted the gendered familial script of the dutiful daughter Jill apparently intended to be driving the performance. Ironically, by attempting to demonstrate her daily sacrifice, she violated the very terms of that narrative as understood by Judge Deluca – and by members of the public audience assembled in the courtroom, who snickered as Deluca read out Jill's list. The work of a dutiful daughter is its own reward, not something for which one expects credit or compensation. She effectively appeared to be requesting financial compensation for acts of love, a mis-match (Zelizer 2005) that up-ended the delicate mixture of love and money lying beneath the case.

The Failed Performance of the Plaintiff D'Agostinos

While Jill's performative failure helped deliver a partially favorable verdict for her mother and sister, it did not ensure that their performance achieved fusion. Because the judge asked them few questions, their performance consisted primarily of non-verbal brio. During Judge Deluca's lengthy perusal of the claim at the beginning of the trial, Mary shook her fists in the air and grinned broadly at an audience member, while another sister scowled at Jill with half-lidded eyes. A friend of the family sympathetically rubbed mother Eleanor's back. Another friend, recognized by Deluca as an attorney, assured Deluca that she was there only as "amica," the legal jargon for "friend." Indeed, she was one of at least a dozen friends and family who accompanied the elder D'Agostinos to court, while Jill sat alone, but for her lawyer. The elder D'Agostinos' mutual support for each other, embodied in the caring gesture of the back-rub for the elderly mother, heightened the glare of their shared

disdain for Jill. While Deluca never really gave them an opportunity to advance a more legal argument, their familial tableau suggested that the main script they wished to enact was for the family to stand publicly with their wronged mother in publicly shaming the greedy and duplicitous daughter. Indeed, Eleanor's forceful insistence that she wanted "\$3,500 or nothing!" was a stark ultimatum whose echoes of Patrick Henry implied stakes of moral principle, not monetary compensation.

As it turns out, Eleanor would not receive the full \$3,500 she demanded, presumably because Judge Deluca credited Jill for some of the items on her list. Meanwhile, their familial performance appeared even less successful in the eyes of both Deluca and the assembled audience. We all seemed saddened by their vitriol rather than moved by their righteous battle. Deluca lamented that "this clearly family matter" had to play out in public – in other words, that the plaintiff D'Agostinos had dragged Jill into court, whatever her faults may have been. She closed the hearing with a lengthy monologue pitched entirely in the vocabulary of family and interpersonal intimacy. As paraphrased in my notes, she said:

[e]veryone at this table believes they are doing the right thing. Everyone loves their mother very much, and wants nothing more than to make the last years of her life as comfortable as possible. They all love you, they just show it in different ways. I hope that the rifts that this has opened up can be healed and that you can come back together as a family. Heal your wounds.

As with her reaction to Jill above, this monologue forms part of Deluca's own performance, whose ultimate failure I analyze below. Here, however, it indicates the failure in her eyes of the plaintiffs' performance. Indeed, it addressed them almost exclusively.

"[The daughters] all love you," she told Eleanor, despite her previously obvious contempt for Jill's purportedly loving behavior. Whatever Jill's faults, her family's obstinacy now threatened their intimacy. That they had moved it from the protected, private realm of the family where it belonged into the harsh, public world of the courtroom disturbed Deluca greatly (Lasch 1977; Merry 1990). Much as Jill's request to be credited for her care, the other D'Agostinos vindictive glee undercut their claim to the familial high ground.

The Failure of Judge Deluca

The D'Agostinos were trapped in a dyadic drama in which every actor appealed to familial representations (at times intertwining them with legalistic background representations) to argue that they were good family members and their opponent(s) bad family members, thus appealing to a common code of good *versus* bad familial behavior while sorting themselves into that code in diametrically opposed ways (Alexander 2006b). With the above speech Deluca attempted to break this impasse with her legally authorized control of the courtroom stage, speaking in the familial language both parties shared, but attempting to redefine the meaning of love so as to permit everyone to be seen as a good family member. Whatever the opponents may have thought of each other's behavior, Judge Deluca asked them to think instead of each other's intention. She appealed to the family as a place of understanding and forgiveness, to the concrete knowledge the D'Agostinos had of each other because of their longstanding intimacy. Yet, no dramatic scene of reconciliation followed. The litigants and their supporters sat quietly and unresponsively through the magistrate's monologue. At least one supporter let out a nasal sigh, apparently skeptical that Jill really did love her mother, or that love were enough

to justify reconciliation. Perhaps sensing the failure of her performance, Judge Deluca resignedly announced that the parties would receive her decision by mail, ending the trial with a whimper.

Fusion through Failure: The Trial as Meta-performance

While each party's legal performance can be said to have succeeded on some level – the plaintiffs' by winning most of what they requested, the defendant's by winning some of the offsets she claimed, the judge's by conducting the trial and ultimately issuing a decision without any doubts about her authority – none of these fused in anything beyond a very thin sense of the term. The familial performances of the three parties, meanwhile, were each in their own way obvious failures. Jill's good-daughter claim was undermined by elements of her *mise-en-scène* that were seen by the judge as inconsistent with the dutiful-daughter script. The elder D'Agostinos' wronged-mother claim was largely sustained, but, thanks to their vindictiveness, at the price of any good-mother claim. Instead, they appeared pettily eager to air dirty family laundry in public. Judge Deluca's attempts to play familial peacemaker failed largely because the elder D'Agostinos refused to play along.

But, despite the failure of each of these individual performances, I, and others in the audience, seemed to find the drama as a whole deeply affecting. My own reaction to the events as they unfolded was viscerally uncomfortable. At one point I put down my pen in embarrassment for the litigants. As the plaintiffs' gleeful performance dis-confirmed my fears, I resumed with continued unease. Around me audience members whispered to each other in quizzical tones, disbelieving the sad scene they were witnessing. There seemed so little cause for hope, each side so

insistent on vindication that neither seemed morally credible. When Deluca's hortatory intervention failed to produce a resolution, the outcome seemed settled.

Whatever may have happened among the D'Agostinos after their intimate litigation, at the end of their trial it seemed that all of us in the room – the audience, Judge Deluca, and both parties – all shared a sense that the relationship between Jill and her family was now fundamentally defined by estrangement, having replaced the intimacy of a familial relationship with the distance of public strangers. Judge Deluca sighed and stared at her makeshift desk, melancholy over her, and the family's, failure. "So sad," whispered one audience woman to her companion. Another man let out a long, low whistle of disbelief. The plaintiffs, meanwhile, were energetic, even celebratory, pumping their fists in the air and smiling broadly. The cumulative failures of the component performances resulted, ironically, in a shared understanding among all of us about the nominal meaning of the event we had just witnessed. Insofar as the celebrating plaintiffs assigned a different moral significance to the event, the meta-performative fusion they experienced diverged from that which the rest of us experienced. But, everyone in the room seemed to have experienced some variety of fusion on this meta-performative level, signifying some sort of deeply felt, apparently coherent understanding of the event. It was, in the end, a near-ritual of excommunication.

As discussed above, any given performance might achieve any range of meta-performative outcomes, either on its own or in interaction with other performances. Of the many meta-performances one might have noted in the courtroom that day, the most important is this perspective on the trial as a whole. For one thing, this perspective constitutes the terrain upon which the performances took place. The

genre of the trial, with its employment of adjudicated competition, is intrinsic to the courtroom setting. It leads one to expect resolution, one way or another. Such a perspective is further encouraged by the trial's triadic structure, in which the competition – the performance and counter-performance, in the terms of cultural pragmatics – is adjudicated by judge and jury, metonymically standing in for the broader public. Litigants would be familiar with this performative structure from countless courtrooms in literature, film, and television, perhaps especially from the mushrooming daytime court television shows whose format mimics small-claims court, with litigants representing themselves, and on which disputes among intimates comprise a notably large proportion of the docket (Kohm 2006). The familiarity of this performative architecture easily orients the component performances toward each other and encourages one to meta-performatively interpret the performances as a complete narrative with an ultimate outcome, in some sense independent of the individual performances while simultaneously composed of them.

The D'Agostinos' trial, however, produced not a clear winner, but a collection of undeserving ingrates. Instead of triumph, failure – of each of the participants and of the family relationship as a whole – became the meaning of the event. Of the three failures, Judge Deluca's most solidified the meta-performative fusion, her dramatic yet unsuccessful attempt at reconciliation narratively crystallizing the hopelessness of the situation. Meanwhile, the plaintiffs' failure is particularly interesting, for they got the estrangement they apparently desired, but in part through their performance's failure rather than its success.⁷ This suggests the link between pragmatic

⁷ A successful performance could also have expelled Jill, but performative success was unnecessary for doing so.

and performative success may sometimes be looser than often acknowledged in cultural pragmatics.

Conclusion: Toward a Research Program in Meta-Performance

Thus, even within this one episode, we see a range of articulations between performative failure and meta-performative fusion. Moreover, we see the importance of articulations among overlapping performances in shaping the meta-performative. By more fully embedding the symbolic contingency already emphasized by cultural pragmatics into this complicated inter-performative architecture, we begin to appreciate exponentially more complex forms of contingency. Many questions remain, of course, and we can imagine several lines of potential future investigation.

First and most simply, what is the range of relationships that can exist between performative and meta-performative outcomes? Among the D'Agostinos we saw performative failures either encourage (plaintiff and defendant) or condense (Judge Deluca) meta-performative fusion. Are other relationships possible? For example, might there be situations in which performative success or failure is basically irrelevant to the meta-performative fusion that emerges, rather than closely linked as they were here and in Mast's discussion of the Lewinsky affair?

Second, we might focus on the elements of performance, asking whether different elements have particular roles to play in linking the performative with the meta-performative. For example, do certain background cultural representations, especially those which situate a performance within a particular genre, tend to assimilate pragmatic performative failure into meta-performative boundary fusion? Perhaps the background representation of the "stage

performance" tends to invoke assumptions that the opera singer will attempt to perform as well as possible, an assumption which probably also attends the background representation of the "trial" genre. What specifically constitutes a "good" performance in each case would reference a genre-specific set of background representational criteria, of course, but these criteria will be meta-performatively confirmed when a performance in the given genre fails.

Relatedly, do particular architectures of overlapping performances tend to favor certain ways of linking the performance to the meta-performance? For example, when two or more actors compete with each other for communicative dominance, perhaps this architecture (as partially constructed, for example, by the background cultural representation of the "debate") tends to invoke meta-performative frames that closely identify one actor's failure with the other actor's success, so that there is a greater likelihood than in other situations that one performance will fuse and, by virtue of the meta-performative frame within which it occurs, to generate a more coherent meta-performative interpretation of the overall "event" (to use Mast's term).

Continuing with the theme of overlapping performances, we might ask how such situations generate meta-performative fusion even when all component performances fail, as happened with the D'Agostinos. This is an especially salient question given the high likelihood of performative failure that has been emphasized throughout this article. In the D'Agostinos' case, this link crucially turned on the background representation of deadlock: Within such a narrative, there is no reason to expect future reconciliation when parties appear unwilling to compromise – an unwillingness dramatically underscored by Judge Deluca's failed attempt at breakthrough. The trope

of deadlock actually assimilated the performative failures into an overarching narrative structure. But, a range of other meta-performative outcomes may be possible in a range of situations, of course, and these may relate to universal performative failures in distinctive ways as befit their own relevant background representations.

In short, by disaggregating meta-performance from performance proper, an extended cultural-pragmatics scholarship can examine not only each level's conditions of fusion and failure, but also these levels'

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inter-relation. This enables one to appreciate both the contingency of contemporary symbolic action and all its many complex consequences.

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Images of Crisis and Opportunity. A Study of African Migration to Greece

Abstract The economic crisis in Greece is becoming a way of life and it is affecting, among other things, the way the Greek society views immigration. Greek people are waking up to the reality that immigrants in the streets of big cities would not go back. The kind of economic state of emergency in need of all sorts of austerity measures the Greek society is entering, shockingly, brings about the fear even in liberal minds that the country cannot provide for all. In this paper I draw from my own newly conducted ethnographic study to explore two interconnected themes: the study of local aspects of integration of Sub-Saharan African migrants in the city center of Athens, Greece and the use of photographic images in ethnographic research. More specifically, the paper discusses the representations of difference via a series of contemporary street photographs depicting everyday life instances of African migrants in the city center of Athens. It thus creates a visual narrative of metropolitan life, which forms the basis for a discussion on three themes related to discourses on migrant integration in light of today's economic crisis: a) the physical and social environment of marginalization, b) the migrant body, and c) the fear of the migrant.

Keywords African Migration; Ethnography and Photography; Migrant Integration; Discourse

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This article formulates some considerations on how integration of migrants can be captured drawing on empirical material from street photography in modern-day Greece. The paper addresses this issue through a focus on the local aspects of integration of Sub-Saharan African migrants in the city center of Athens and specifically on three themes related to discourses on migrant integration in light of today's economic crisis: a) the physical and social environment of marginalization, b) the migrant body, and c) the fear of the migrant. On the basis of the findings, a synthesis is attempted of several parallel existing representations in discourses about African migration.

Broadly speaking, one could argue that social life is constructed through the ideas people have about it and the practices that flow from those ideas. People in a society interpret meaningfully what is around them and make sense of the world. These meanings may be informed consciously or unconsciously by common sense, everyday speech, rhetoric, space, social structure, the physical environment and different people will make sense of the world in different ways (Hall 1997a). This process, in turn, will structure the way any one of us will behave in our everyday lives. This is what we mean by representation and this is how it is involved in the production or consumption of any meaning. It becomes evident then how much meaning is conveyed in perceived images and that the visual is central to the cultural construction and representation of social life. We are, of course, surrounded by images and these images display the world in very particular ways and in a sense they interpret it since we interact with the world mainly through how we see it.

My concern, in relation to the visual material, is the way in which images visualize representations of difference. The social categories of difference can take a visual form. Initially, this point has been made forcefully by postcolonial writers who have studied the ways blackness has been visualized (Gilroy 1987).¹ I see the photographs I have collected as the sites for the construction and depiction of social difference. As Fyfe and Law suggest, "a depiction is never just an illustration," it is a representation and "to understand it is to inquire into the social work that it does. It is to note its principles of exclusion and inclusion, to detect the roles that it makes avail-

¹ A famous example is P. Gilroy's discussion of a conservative party election poster (1987:57-59). Gilroy here is concerned with the complex ways in which images visualize or render invisible social difference to picture social power relations.

able and to decode the hierarchies and differences it naturalizes" (1988:1). Looking carefully at photographs entails thinking about how they offer very particular visions of social differences to do with race, ethnicity, and social status. A critical understanding of them suggests that their meaning is not entirely reducible to their content, but rather they are visual representations of discourses. Discourse, here, has a quite specific meaning. Gillian defines it as "a group of statements which structure the way a thing is thought and the way we act on the basis of that thinking" (2001:136). In the same line of thought, it is possible to think of the visual image as a sort of discourse, too. The photographs, as sites of representations of discourses about social difference, depend on and produce social inclusions/exclusions, and their analysis in this paper needs to address both those practices and their cultural meaning. One assumption underlying the work of representation is that it is constructed in and through discourse (Hall 1997b). The photographs are taken to carry by themselves their own representational means, in that they are ready-made representations, which reveal discourses related to the social integration of migrants. The difficult social conditions of integration of the specific migrants of the study, for example, as depicted in the photographs, are implications of representations in discourses about prejudiced views on cultural and racial difference.

Typically, "there are three sites at which the meaning of an image is made: the sites of the production of an image, the site of the image itself, and the sites where it is seen by various audiences" (Gillian 2001:16). It is important, then, to keep in mind, aside from how images look, how they are looked at. It is useful to pay attention not only to the image itself, but also how it is seen by particular viewers. Berger, in his influen-

tial book about the way we look at paintings, makes the argument that images of social differences work not simply by what they show, but also by the kind of seeing they invite (cf. 1972). He makes clear that “we never just look at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves” (Berger 1972:9). Hence, another assumption underlying the work of representation is that what one makes out of an image is crucial ultimately to the meanings an image carries. Likewise, the ethnographer’s own subjectivity and use of the visual material is equally important as the content of the image itself. Usually, the analysis of the content of photographs is informed by the researcher’s intentions, how he/she is using photography to refer to specific discourses, the theories of representation that inform his/her practice, and how these combine to produce and represent ethnographic knowledge. Before I go on to present and analyze the material, I would like to discuss, briefly, these issues in the following section, while offering an account about the use of ethnographic photography as the research method.

How Are Particular Images Given Specific Meaning? Photography as the Research Method

This section examines the factors related to the basic analytical framework for understanding how images become meaningful. It provides a brief note about the potential of photographs for producing a particular kind of ethnographic knowledge, it offers the methodology that was considered best suited for the analysis of the visual material, while it also refers to the intentions and ideas that informed my practice taking each photograph.

Photographs are becoming increasingly incorporated in the work of ethnographers as representa-

tions of cultural knowledge and as sites of social interaction. These images and the processes by which they are created are used to produce ethnographic knowledge (Pink 2007). While images should not replace words as the dominant mode of research, they can be regarded as an equally meaningful element of ethnographic work. Just as images inspire conversations, conversation may invoke images.

Having, therefore, as sources, a number of street photographs, I am concerned with the discursive field related to the integration of migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa in the city center of Athens. Rather than gathering accounts so as to gain access to people’s views and attitudes about their lives – as would be the case in familiar ethnographic research – the exercise, here, takes the photographs as the topic of the research and the analysis is interested in how photographs construct accounts of migrant integration.

The key sources for the analysis are thus a range of photographs I shot in two specific areas of downtown Athens, assumed to be the field of this research topic, called *Kipseli* and *Platia Amerikis*, between September 2010 and June 2011. These areas are characterized by high levels of poverty and large migrant concentration, especially from Africa. In effect, to include some information on the background of the people of this study,² African migration to Greece is composed predominantly of economic migrants, students, refugees, and asylum seekers. Their country of birth includes fifteen Sub-Saharan African countries (Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Somalia, Congo, Senegal, Guinea, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Chad,

² The demographic figures included were taken from a larger study concerned with exploring the integration opportunities and prospects of African immigrants into the Greek society (2010-2012), co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Greek national funds, part of which forms the research for this paper.

South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Burundi, and Sudan), which are the ones with the largest percentage of immigrants in Greece. The years of stay in the country vary among the different nationalities, for example, the Ethiopians have a longer stay in the country with an average of 10 years of residence, followed by the Nigerians, 8 years, the Ghanaian and Congolese, 7 years, while the most recent arrivals are the Somali and the Senegalese with up to 4 years of residence. A more detailed account on their profile indicates that the family status of the majority of migrant men are unmarried, whereas the majority of female migrants are married. A large proportion of them have acquired a university degree at one point, often in the country of origin, while there is a significant percentage of them with postgraduate studies. If we include the number of those with some technical training and the ones who are currently students in Greek universities, it has been estimated that African migrants are fairly more educated than other migrant groups in the country. Regarding the place of residence, the vast majority of Sub-Saharan African migrants reside in the city center, and particularly in the areas mentioned above as the fieldwork site. As far as the type of housing is concerned, they are mostly in rented housing and often hosted by members of their family or friends. The percentage of home owners is limited, while significant numbers declare to be homeless, residents of abandoned houses or residents in NGO hostels. Many of them, especially those fleeing persecution from their countries of origin, have little or no use of Greek and arrive with poor or no documentation. Indeed, a large percentage resides with no legal residence documents. Few are the ones that have managed a successful economic and social integration, while many are those who hold a university degree and yet they are employed as unskilled workers.

Due to poverty, marginalization, and lack of access to the labor market many are involved in non-legal activities. We could say that a significant percentage of Sub-Saharan African immigrants are, in fact, in a difficult position in Greek society. The economic downturn has significantly affected them as well, and much of this population has serious financial difficulties. Furthermore, they seem to be the least integrated migrants into Greek society, reflected by their average income, which is estimated to be among the lowest among first generation immigrants.

As for the actual practice of taking the photograph, the first photographs I took formed a way of getting the research off the ground and establishing relationships with informants. I began the research by photographing the physical environment of the area of the city center I was interested in. I photographed buildings and locations to observe the goings-on of everyday life. This provided me with an entry point into the local interaction. Seeing a stranger photographing the town made many people curious enough to approach and ask what I was doing. I frequently took photographs while socializing. The photographic aspect of the project became a key point of communication between me and my informants. Quite often, in order to take photographs of the activities and/or the participants I was interested in, first I had to establish myself as someone who is trusted to take the photograph, and only then could I proceed photographing at more ease. Additionally, I found that showing photographs to the subjects of the research, other than providing feedback on the images and their content, was also a useful strategy for inciting conversations and narratives about their current lives.

During fieldwork, aside from the photographs, field notes were also produced, which bore their own sig-

nificance to the same fieldwork context from where they were extracted. Thus, the purpose of the analysis was not only to translate the visual evidence into verbal knowledge, but also to explore, to a certain extent, the relationship between the visual and the verbal knowledge. My analysis was not only of the visual content of the photographs, but also of the verbal material of the field notes. Images and words contextualized each other, forming a set of different representations of the complete fieldwork experience. Finally, in the analysis, there has not been any means of categorizing images determined by neither their temporal sequence nor their content, solely the images were not dominated by any other typology rather than the delineation of the research field.

After a decade of cohabitation between the Greeks and the Africans in the same neighborhoods of the city center, the social integration of the last would have been achieved. The fact that it had not is reflected both on the degraded social and physical environment of those neighborhoods, as well as on the discursive representations of the African migrant as someone who is marginal, inferior, even someone to be feared, or otherwise subjected to racialized treatment. These aspects are identified as key themes of the content of the photographs and they are later explored as discursive themes in the analysis of the material.

Let's see then how are the photographs used in the analysis. This type of analysis pays attention to the discourses, which are revealed and articulated through a range of images depicting the social practices in which the integration of the particular group of migrants is embedded. As a starting point, out of the many photographs at hand, I selected the ones that appeared to be particularly productive to the research topic in order to explore their meaning as discursive statements. Discourse analysis

depends, to a large extent, on what we call "common sense" rather than on explicit, rigorous methodological procedures for interpreting intertextuality (Gillian 2001), hence, my tactic was to look carefully at the photographs to apprehend those underlying principles which reveal basic attitudes of a society or of individuals about the issue under question. Since discourse is articulated through images in this case, I look to see how a particular photograph describes things, how it categorizes, how social difference is constructed and which is the social context that surrounds it. Starting with Clifford's argument that ethnographic truths are only ever partial and incomplete (1986), the approach in this paper is that equally the visual record of these photographs is inevitably partial and it is an (academic) interpretation of a subjective visual narrative. Simultaneously, the "reality" that is invested in these images varies according to who is the viewer. No matter how subjectively framed and selected these images may be, they are yet records of the visual and material detail that can be found in the context of the city center today. They do represent what the life of the migrant looks like and they do document real life events and processes that have occurred. To analyze these images, I thought it would be useful to examine how the visual content of photographs attaches the migrants in question to particular discourses, rhetorics, and identities. I found that photographs alone can, in fact, represent emotions, social relations, relations of power and/or marginalization. On this understanding, the photograph becomes not the content of the visual image, but the knowledge, institutions, subjects, and practices which work to define the visual image as discourse. Rosalind Gill uses "discourse" to "refer to all forms of talks and texts" (1996:141). To paraphrase her, the image

can be viewed as a form of text – a visual text – in the sense of the meaning carried by it. Since discourses are seen as socially constructed, the analysis is especially concerned with how those specific representations are socially produced as "truthful" and the effects they have on discourses about cultural and racial difference. More specifically, in the course of the study, I worked with the photographs I have collected to examine the apparently "truthful" ways in which the social integration of African migrants takes place, as well as the effects that various discursive themes, legitimated by that "truth," have on the residents of the fieldwork area. This led me to interpret the photographs as images that say a variety of different things and are keys to understanding social difference within a local culture.

A valid question can be, of course, how are particular images given specific meaning? Rather than assuming that the sociological significance of these photographs is in that they document a particular social "fact," I regarded instead the images as subjectively defined, ambiguous photographs that reflect the rhetoric on migrant integration. There is also another issue to be considered: When a photograph is situated in the present tense, it is often treated as if it is a realist representation, is seen as evidence of "what is really there." It becomes a photograph that could be taken anytime, a generalized representation of an event or activity. Hall is skeptical on such a use which tends to present images as "a literal visual-transcription of the real world" (1973:241) that exists independent of the text or the context, ignoring the possibility of other interpretations of what is depicted. In fact, Hall has alerted us early on about the danger in such an approach by famously saying that reality does not exist outside the

process of representation and that representation is part of the event itself. He significantly argues that images should be studied precisely as indicators of underlying discourses. He further suggests that the power of the photograph lies precisely in its ability to obscure its own discursive dimensions by appearing as evidence of an objective reality (Hall 1973:241). This is the reason why, he argues, in order to make a reading of an image we have to draw upon our stock of common sense knowledge and decide which connotation is valid (Hall 1973:231). Similarly, Bourdieu (2004) has argued on the practices of ethnographers as image-makers and the meaning of those photographs by saying that:

photography captures an aspect of reality which is only ever the result of an arbitrary selection. Photography is considered to be a perfectly realistic and objective recording of the visible world because it has been assigned social uses that are held to be "realistic" and "objective." (p. 162)

In relation to the interpretation of the photographs and the meaning that can be reasonably assigned to them, Bourdieu notes elsewhere, "the photographs' «function» is to give a narrative, to express a meaning which could constitute the discourse they are supposed to bear" (1990:173). In this sense, the particular photographs of the study can reveal a good deal about the assumptions governing the integration of African immigrants in the city center of Athens today, provided that the researcher is attuned to the fact that the topics covered therein have already acquired meanings, in the field of representation, through their earlier positioning within relevant discourses. I am not so interested, too, to discuss the reality of the specific ethnographic experience represented in each photograph, but I use the images as representations of discourses relevant to the themes of the paper.

The photographs in question are taken to be snapshots of representations of differences understood in terms of race, ethnicity, social status, with all the contentions and ambiguities that representations usually carry. They address questions of race, marginalization, violence to the degree that they are all articulated through the visual images themselves. After carefully looking at the selection of photographs with “fresh eyes,”³ I identified three key themes, while I started to think about connections between them, and those are: a) the physical and social environment of marginalization, b) the migrant body, and c) the fear of the migrant. They allow a nuanced and culturally oriented understanding of how the “difference” of the African migrants is actively produced and marked out with a view of making clear a synthesis of several existing representations in discourses about them. The synthesis betrays the on-going struggle between, on the one hand, the dominant structures – that is, the legal, socio-economic, and political tools that the state creates to deal with their presence – and on the other, the migrant strategies to cope with all these, which in turn sustains the mechanisms and form that integration takes in this context. To map and understand the parallel existence of multiple types of representation, these three themes are used to categorize them, which bear on the ways the African migrant is discursively constructed. In what follows, drawing upon the photographs, I recognize these representations of difference in operation, always in relation to the three key themes addressed in this paper.

³ A first well known step in ethnographic research in analyzing the material upon examination is to leave aside all pre-conceptions the researcher might have about it and approach it with “fresh eyes” (cf. Tonkiss 1998).

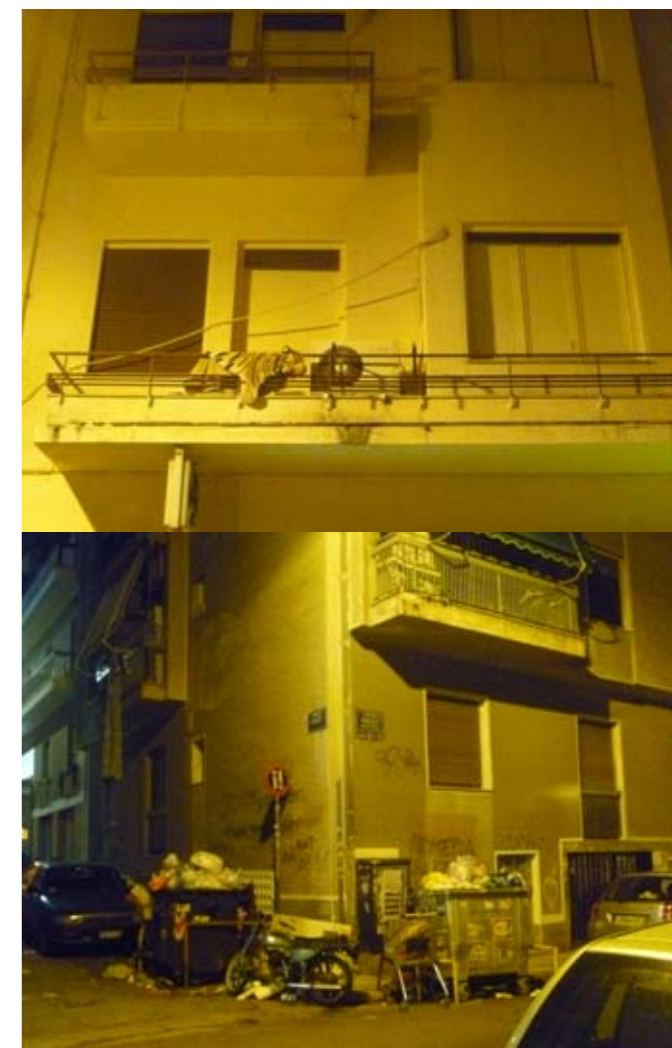
The Physical and Social Environment of Marginalization

Characteristically, the ways in which African migrants are perceived and constructed in the discursive domain demonstrate and highlight their position in society and their qualitative position of difference. For example, as part of popular Greek discourses, lately, the status of being a migrant implies some sort of an impairment that limits and defines the whole person. The focus here is on the failure of the individual to adapt to society as it is, and thus the impairment, that is being a migrant, is regarded as the cause of failure. Evidently, while the status of the migrant is one limited fact about a given individual, migrants have difficulties integrating into society because of the failure of the local social environment to adjust to the needs and aspirations of some of its members. Thus, the African migrants of the study meet the identity of the “other” quite significantly through the lack of provision of accessible environments, that is, work, adequate housing and schooling, welfare, and so on. This lack of provision can be visible in the photographs even in the physical aspects of the environment where the migrants built and confine their lives: low standards of living in blocks of flats, high densities of buildings, poorly-lit basement rooms with windows overlooking the pavement, overcrowded neighborhoods with subsequent overcrowding in schools and health services to crop up, burden on waste removal services, traffic congestion, less available space, cut off public parks bare of trees or plants, drug dealing on the street at night, frequent police patrols, and so forth.



Figures 1.1, 1.2, 1.3. Depressed neighborhoods in the city center where migrants live. Source: photographs by Author, 2010-2011.

In short, we observe a physical and social environment which contrasts sharply with the image of protected neighborhoods consisting of single family housing in leafy suburbs, which we find in segments of the city far from the center and where the presence of migrants is minimal. When we think of a public space in the city center like the one described above, its physical attributes provide visual and cultural cues and clues about its identity and the activities intended for that place. These clues are usually decodable by ordinary people and the decoding arises as a result of communal narratives and meanings. For example, a public place, which is marked by visual clues like drug needles, dirty streets, run-down buildings most probably will take on tainted meanings. The result is that metaphors are instantly formed in the mind that these places do not provide people with a sense that they are welcome and safe. Instead, they invite impressions which suggest that “respectable” citizens desert these places, while they become attractive to “less respectable” inhabitants. Hence, dominant structures and mechanisms of being made marginal is reflected in the physical and social environment where migrants live, work, and build their everyday lives.



Moreover, because of the specific socio-economic and political conditions regarding integration, migrants, and in particular African migrants, are becoming all the more “visible” in the everyday life of the city center.⁴ It is only since recently that people of Sub-Saharan African origin have been given visibility and emerged as a distinct population group, identified by the label “black African.” Over the last

⁴ Integration policies in Greece have been shaped, literally, into migration control tools, helping, in effect, the state to drastically restrict the entry of unskilled and “non-adaptable” migrants and, as a consequence, to deny or ignore their actual presence in society and, hence, the need to take up measures for their social integration in employment, education, health, and other structures. Furthermore, African migrants experience additional discriminations on the grounds of their color, race, and ethnic origin since the connection between migration and race remains critical in Greek society, which is a society with few experiences in this domain.

decade, the collective dimension of the identity of Africans in the area has increasingly come to the forefront. An important event that transformed the position of this group and gave them public attention was that they concentrated their living and working in certain specific impoverished neighborhoods in the center. The Greeks meet the Africans face to face in all aspects of everyday life in these neighborhoods and they also grant them the status of a social category, especially since they are seen there in big numbers. Despite the fact that there are

many migrants living and working out and about in the city center, local Greek people have not learned ways to interact with them. They retain their own separate ways of life, that is, they have their own shops with their own special products and their own clientele, addressing predominantly the needs of their own community. The Africans themselves remain marginal within these neighborhoods, yet not in number, and in fact it is the whole issue of “seeing them,” that is, of them being present but distinct, which is part of the problem.



Figures 2.1, 2.2, 2.3. Natives and migrants: Same neighborhoods – separate lives. Source: photographs by Author, 2010-2011.

a liability. Physical marginalization is part of that and it leads to social inaccessibility as well. It can be assumed that if there was physical and social access to migrants in the form of decent housing, a clean and properly looked after public environment, work possibilities, and so on, it could lead to less social prejudices towards migrants in many areas of social life. The way that the physical and social environment is structured is, in turn, linked to discourses about ethnic and/or racial difference that may sustain or conversely undermine the position of the targeted social group.

The inequality in life conditions and possibilities between migrants and natives is not caused by the condition of their migrant status, but by the social structures, which allow this condition to become

The Migrant Body

I paid attention to the metaphor of the “migrant body” precisely as far as it gives rise to prejudiced representations of difference. It is as if being a migrant is the defining feature of a person to such an extent that it determines the conditions of his/her life and makes his/her character as a whole. It reduc-

es him/her from a personality – that is, of a person with will, purpose, and potential – and undermines his/her status simply as a bearer of a foreign culture. Everything that can be known about them is determined by the fact that they are migrants. Migrants become the recipients of others’ peculiar attitudes, such as, on occasion, hostility, exclusion, special attention, and/or good will (charity).



Figures 3.1, 3.2. Publicly organized charity structures for migrants under police surveillance. Source: photographs by Author, 2010-2011.

The nature of these attitudes lies in the existence of prejudice and the exemption of responsibility for this prejudice. Appropriate social conduct is then an issue. Local Greeks, on the one hand, act as if there was a mental and social gap between the native/the donor and the migrant/the recipient of charity, of exclusion, of hostility, of special attention, and so on. Migrants, on the other hand, do not feel entirely free to behave in a certain manner they would wish and take up actions that would express their own identity. One has only to consider the discomfort that it causes to the native population when migrants do things that are not necessarily what it is assumed to be the normalized standards of social behavior. That seems to be hard for native people to deal with and it evidently encompasses not only behavior, but also identity features.

Loosely based on an essay of Deleuze and Guattari entitled “What can a body do,” the same question is posed here to address issues of migration, race, and prejudice. On how to conceptualize the relationship between individuals, their bodies, and their social context, Deleuze and Guattari said that the physical, emotional, and social relations of a body together comprise the limit of a person’s subjectivity. A person’s subjectivity is socially and culturally determined, with little potential to resist the structures that impinge on it. By asking the question “What can a body do?” we assess the capacity of the body-self to actively construct itself and the world about it, and the opposing dynamic of a social world which constructs and determines subjectivity. According to Deleuze and Guattari, a body can do this or that in relation to the situations and settings it inhabits, or else, it does this

or that because of how it is “territorialized.”⁵ In this perspective, people have relations which are proper to their environment and to their aspirations. People are identified by the countless relations they retain: to their culture, to their family, to their work, to their homes, to their past networks. All of these relations together make the body and establish the limits of a body: what it can do. In this sense, migration can be a further limitation of these relations. There is the social structure of the host society, which, in effect, deprives migrants of their potential capabilities or effectiveness and, in that sense, impairs their social abilities to integrate in the wider society. In migration, as a political issue, we can detect a distinction between personal disadvantage (limitations on the person because he/she is in an unfamiliar cultural environment and he/she struggles with personal, social, and economic adjustments) and social repression (limitations on work opportunities, welfare benefits, housing options, and so on). Sadly, the combination of the two is seen to bring about a certain cultural aversion to migrants, which comes about because their body does not conform with the ideal standards of presentation set by the locals, that very often boils down to how people act in everyday situations.

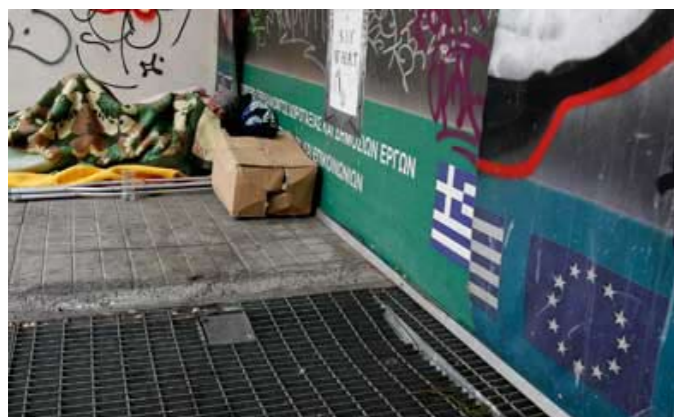


Figure 4. Familiar scene in the city center. Source: photograph by Author, 2010-2011.

⁵ Deleuze and Guattari discuss the concept of “territoriality” from the position of the body to defend a set of fixed relations that contains it as a way of socially organizing itself (1994:68).

A typical example of this is, of course, the basic argument that certain migrants have by and large been cast into an ethical territory of exclusion because they have failed to comport themselves ethically. They have been constructed as unethical because they are cast as lawbreakers – their illegality being attributed to the fact that they have no legal papers to be in the country. Consider familiar phenomena when the representations of asylum seekers and/or economic migrants are usually based on generalized inaccurate judgments attributed either to their inability to exercise responsible management of their own lives or to their culture, which are then used to justify these peoples’ inferior symbolic and material social status in a given society. Here are some such prejudiced representations based on particular negative characteristics attributed en masse to their culture/race by the dominant group: Nigerians are drug traffickers, Senegalese are street vendors, Cameroonians are eternal students, Burundians are bogus asylum seekers, and the list continues. We can trace numerous kinds of such representations which find the African migrants at the receiving end of racialized treatment which depicts them, on occasion, as criminal, dirty, unhealthy, insufficient, incompetent, unreliable, or, at best, exotic. The conjunction of these representations treat African migrants as posing a threat for the Greek civilized life and thus makes them a target for enhanced surveillance, whether this is at the borders of the country or in everyday interaction in the context of the neighborhood. These persistently unfair assessments are determinative in “fixing” the identity of the discriminated group and they are then used to validate the social status of this category of people, the social structures that are fit to accommodate them, the stringent immigration poli-

cies, and so on. A consistent pattern of prejudiced representations concerning African migrants focuses on the risks of crime, bodily and cultural contamination, and so on. These representations



Figures 5.1, 5.2. Representations of migrants as non-ethical subjects. Source: photographs by Author, 2010-2011.

In this respect, one wonders how can it be that the way that one person acts on their own within a given society could engender the desire to some to be hostile to that person. It may be that for many people nowadays the prejudice and the hostility against migrants exists a lot in the reminding of people of the distress to do with economic insecurity, reduced economic resources, political instability, unpredictable future, and so on. There seems to be a challenge in individualism that happens in the moment when some people in society are asking for some extra assistance and rights in order to fit in and integrate. This challenge could be decided on as a social issue rather than a personal individual issue of the one turning against the other in a condition of a crisis.

The Fear of the Migrant

In the midst of the economic crisis, in Greece, when the society is entering a new era in which a kind of economic state of emergency, with its attendant need for all sorts of austerity measures (making jobs more temporary, cutting benefits, diminishing health and

are then mobilized to justify their social exclusion, as well as random violent initiatives against them, resting on the construction of them as unworthy of equal treatment.

education services), becomes permanent, some of the issues involved which mobilize people is through fear: the fear of the excessive state (with its burden of high taxation and control), the fear of crime, the fear of immigrants. With regards to the latter, the issue is typically represented as immigrants’ integration posing problems to society’s culture, which is threatened by too many immigrants maintaining their cultural identity, to society’s health, which is contaminated with old and new diseases, to society’s economy, which is overburdened as it is, even without the immigrants assumed to cause further unemployment to the local population. Lately, the increasing anti-immigrant populist sentiments are accompanied by recurrent actions of overtly racist far right groups. And further, a closer look reveals that even those with liberal views who are against such populist racism are even themselves wary of not keeping proper distances with cultural difference. In today’s city center neighborhoods of Athens we find more and more Greek owners leaving their homes and businesses to move to less culturally diverse populated areas while renting their own properties to immigrants.

What is increasingly emerging as a central feature in popular discourse is the extent to which anti-immigration beliefs find their way into people's consciousness and, moreover, they are readily available to a lot of people in society, including the liberal-minded. This is the main point Žižek makes, in a recent essay of his, where he suggests a clear passage in liberal political thought from a liberal cultural agenda, which encompassed tolerance towards ethnic minorities and migrants, to a covert dislike, "a masked barbarism with a human face," as he calls it (2010). He describes how in today's liberal multiculturalism the experience of the other must be deprived of its otherness. In the new spirit, he says, of buying products deprived of their harmful effects (decaffeinated coffee, fat-free dairy, etc.) we think that the best way to deal with the "immigrant threat" is to detoxify the immigrants from their dangerous qualities. It seems that this same attitude is at work in the way Greek residents abandon their neighborhoods to organize their defensive, anti-immigrant protection or stress their pride in their own culture and historical identity, saying that immigrants are guests who have to accommodate themselves to the cultural values that define the host society. This vision of the detoxification of one's neighbor, or alternatively to keep others at a safe distance, is no doubt an aspect of prejudiced representations of difference that focuses on the alleged incompatibility of values between the dominant and the migrant subjects of a society, which, in turn, justifies the political, social, and cultural exclusion of the latter.

Within this whole climate of fear, the next step is to examine which are the implications of these representations for the life of the African migrants themselves, in view of the critical economic climate in the country? How is the current condition going to

impact their chances of making a life in the city, but most importantly the way that they are going to be represented against the backdrop of the economic crisis? Answers to these questions are not easy to come by, primarily because there has been no analogy to the current situation. Nevertheless, one can look at experiences and trends to suggest how the levels of representations might play themselves out. The majority of the black African migrants are already economically and culturally marginal in the city. They are positioned as low wage, flexible labor on the margins of an economy that is itself situated in a downward spiral. This on-going economic crisis, and the related adjustment policies, has imposed a particularly high cost on the already poor, with absolute poverty increasing sharply. On average, most of African migrants share the demographic characteristics of the workers who are usually most vulnerable during recessions. Additionally, they are highly overrepresented in many of the most vulnerable economic sectors – construction, commerce, manufacturing, leisure, hospitality, support, and domestic services – and in many of the most vulnerable jobs within these sectors. They work without a written contract, paid by the hour. This recent period since the official public proclamation of the country's economic downturn was marked by a sharp increase in job loss for the African migrants. Such conditions combined with lack of access to public social safety nets often force Africans to go to extraordinary lengths to remain employed or find new employment, pushing them even to illegal and/or dangerous working arrangements. They also speak of outright racism: the pain of ethnic slurs, employment discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, spats-on, not being served at shops, verbal assaults, and so on.

Shockingly, in Greek society, during today's critical downturn, few issues are proving to provoke more fear among the domestic population than immigration. Fear of immigrants, stirred up by right-wing parties and people's discontent over economic malaise, has deepened already profound problems with tolerating difference in the city center. While European neighboring states have criticized the Greeks for their poor handling of immigrants and asylum seekers, interior politics are criticized as not being tough enough on the immigration situation. The presence of tens of thousands of migrants from Africa, who live in

depressed neighborhoods in the center of Athens, fuel rather often nationalist backlashes on behalf of right-wing Greek locals. Meanwhile, the pattern of equating African immigrants with criminality continues unabated. On a daily basis we read press coverages that capture precisely the aspects of fear and irrationality in the center of Athens, a recent example being the three days of attacks by ultranationalist mobs against Africans (and in general against dark-skinned residents) in Athens where dozens of immigrant-owned shops were attacked or looted, set off by a fatal mugging (Associated Press 2011).



Figure 6. Attacks by mobs against African migrants. Source: photograph by Author, 2010-2011.

Migrant Coping Strategies

Let's turn now to look at how African migrants represent their identity themselves and negotiate, modify, and actively counter these prejudiced representations of themselves with other alternative ones and with varying degrees of success. To a large extent, it is the dominant cultural group that makes the migrants what they are in the host society, but also prevents them from doing what they would with themselves in many instances. During fieldwork it became clear that there are moments when the social stigma enters into their thinking and they feel condemned by the way they are stereotypically constructed in society. Despite their refusal to be victimized, they rightfully ask themselves: Will this kind of portrayal condemn me to social exclusion, will this destroy my passion?

The slogan of the Tanzanian community of Greece, written across the walls of the building they are renting for their community meetings, signals precisely these feelings of distress, and it loosely translates: "We will overcome."



Figure 7. Tanzanian community of Greece; "We will overcome." Source: photograph by Author, 2010-2011.

Definitely, migration is a field of ambivalence. The ambivalent role played by these migrants as to their cultural distinctiveness is more evident in the creative use of their cultural difference to offer a message of integration and stability. While, on the one hand, African migrants feel culturally misrepresented by the negative portrayal of themselves in the host society, which eventually contributes to their marginalization, on the other hand, they seem to acknowledge the potential benefits of mobilizing a clear and distinct cultural identity. This may prove a useful strategy when it

is used in order to help community members in seeking to restore their misrepresented and misrecognized identity. The point here is to diversify the prejudice and rejection they encounter because of their cultural difference. Without really negating their differences, the final goal is to seek to contain them within confines that are taken to be “safe” and acceptable. In other words, they try to tone down the perceived threatening qualities of difference by emphasizing the folkloric aspects of it, such as food, dress, music, traditional and cultural artefacts, cultural festivals, and so on.



Figures 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.4. Cultural festivals in the city. Source: photographs by Author, 2010-2011.

It is a strategy for claiming some positive representation as a means to gain acceptance by the dominant community. Indeed, it is often the case that Greek people would easier endorse building common spheres of engagement and interaction with their African neighbors through festivities, which involve tasting their good food and enjoying their lovely music. In effect, on occasions like that, where difference appears to be celebrated, as opposed to marginalized, and both people seem to commonly enjoy similar taste and interest in traditions, a closer look reveals that this folklorization of difference does not extend to a more profound recognition nor does it render a difference in the condition for acceptance. Difference, therefore, is not accepted as such, but rather diversified through focusing on identity aspects composed by traditional customs and practices. It is indeed the case that this portrayal of African migrants, through their past traditions, highlighting the “ethnic” and the “exotic” elements of their culture, does appear rather superficial and idealized versions of difference, and yet, at some level, it also works as a means for diversifying problems of co-existence and recognition in this case. In this scenario as well, the dominance of the Greek culture is still pertinent, but the difference is somehow neutralized, or at least is not posing as a threat, and the reasons of controversy between the natives and the migrants – fears of loss of “purity” and demands for recognition respectively – are temporarily ignored. Another element which seems important in this scenario is that in a context where negative representations of identity by the dominant culture have consistently misrepresented African migrants, they now attempt to restore their misrecognized identity in their own terms, with pride, as a result of their own initiative and not being called to action by others

and/or by dominant social structures. Although this last aspect of African self-representation gives the impression of a more hopeful scenario of race relations in the city center, we also have to look at what can be made possible in this context given the circumstances. For instance, one cannot fail to notice that emphasizing the folkloric dimensions of African migrants’ identities can act as a way to render their difference quaint, picturesque, irrelevant in the modern world and thus not taken seriously and excluded (Siapera 2010). Hence, coming back to an earlier point, notwithstanding the fact that self-representation may contribute to the empowerment of the disadvantaged African migrants’ identities, there is little doubt that, within Greek society, cultural difference is represented predominantly by those understood as the dominant group, which in turn guarantees the systematic marginalization of it.

Conclusion

This paper discussed visual representations of difference that engage with the question of cultural diversity and migration from a three-key-themes perspective. Or to be more accurate, visual representations of local aspects of integration of Sub-Saharan African migrants to the city center of Athens emerge as the reading of photographs builds up, categorized on three themes, which correspond to discourses on African migration to Greece. An important argument here is the centrality of the visual aspects in the representations of our social life, and so, looking carefully at photographs entails thinking about how much images articulate discourses as much as producing them.

In the face of insecurity due to the economic crisis and the subsequent intensified fears among the

population in Greece, one may ask is the economic downturn going to turn people against each other more than ever before: citizens against migrants, neighbors against neighbors, citizens against citizens, migrants against migrants, and so on? Or is it, in fact, that the root of the problem might be sought elsewhere and instead we should start to question what the relation is between the dominant culture and its, often discriminatory, behavior and the marginalization of difference. We wonder why cultural alterity is so upsetting to some people that they would feel that they must negate the people that represent it, they must stop them no matter what, and they must eradicate the possibility of these people from ever being culturally different again. It seems to me that we are talking about an extremely deep panic or fear that pertains to cultural norms which makes it possible for someone to say you must comply with our cultural

norms otherwise you will be attacked one way or another. Appiah (2005), from the viewpoint of ethics and philosophy, poses some key questions in relation to this: To what extent does alterity, in this case migrant identities, felt to constrain the freedom of those understood as the dominant group, affect their "life scripts," and make disenable their ability to make an individual life? We could ask ourselves, in these in-between moments, between economic sustainability and economic crisis, when does a person still count as a human? When are people treated in terms of their individuality and humanness and not in terms of consistent patterns of rigid, generalized, simplified, negative characteristics? The question being how can we figure out the challenge we need to acknowledge, that we are collectively responsible for each other in a society despite of our differences and the diverse values we are guided by.

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How does it feel to be a problem? The Diasporic Identity of the Homeless

Abstract In this paper I uncover the identity response of the homeless to structural constraints that are facilitated through objectively produced and mass mediated culture. After an initial period of “liberation,” physical deprivation leads the homeless to seek institutionalized help. The “homeless” category constructed by the shelter industry absolves the system of blame and obfuscates the systemic roots of homelessness. In their picking and dropping of identities, and negotiations of meaning without any referential space to root themselves in, the homeless reveal to us the cultural tragedy of the present that affects us all due to rapid social change inherent in advanced capitalism.

Keywords Homelessness; Capitalism; Culture; Identity; Inequality; Poverty

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The stranger is by nature no “owner of soil” – soil not only in the physical, but also in the figurative sense of a life-substance which is fixed, if not in a point in space, at least in an ideal point of the social environment. (Simmel 1908:1)

This article is a story about the homeless. It is also a story about immigrants, those in (virtual) exile as “strangers” within a foreign land, just as it is a story about the indigenous exiles, the everyday people, those whose minds are unable to keep pace with rapid societal change. Most of this entire article is a story about the human condition

of mental homelessness (Berger 1974) and identity ambivalence in the 21st century, the physical, both material and cultural manifestation of which are the homeless. It is within the identity negotiations of the homeless that we see the varied faces of humanity in the current epoch, the many dimensions of human existence: the immigrant, the alienated worker, and the impoverished. The homeless are the sages of the present, it is through their negotiations of their environment and their breaching of boundaries that trajectories for social change can be located. In their picking and dropping of identities, in their negotiations of meaning without any referential space to root themselves in (Said 1999), and in their early death through deprivation, both physical and social, the homeless reveal to us the human tragedy of the present. This article is, therefore, primarily a story about us all¹ living within, what is a bureaucratized, identity determining, societal structure.

The homeless “social type” is a boundary violator. As all boundary violators, the homeless are part of the out-group, but this out-group eludes easy classification (Järvinen 2003:217). In other words, the homeless status is one of ambivalence, both for the homeless and for the wider society within which they exist. Instead of an “either/or” classification that functions to maintain clear boundaries, the homeless are a “neither/nor” type, neither among the *normals* (Goffman 1963) nor the (abnormal) *outsiders* (Becker 1966), they occupy a region that is a structural and therefore an identity vacuum,

¹ “Labor and participation in the market constitute a primary contribution to society while being housed represents economic independence and rationality. Given the polarities of self/other, citizen/noncitizen, native/foreign, and so on, this dynamic implies a simple dialectical opposition when in fact, just as there are varying degrees of citizenship; there are various versions of homelessness” (Arnold 2004:47).

and in studying their adaptations to deal with such a vacuum, we are offered a unique opportunity to study and locate trajectories for social change. The homeless can, therefore, be pictured as our potential liberators. Boundaries in postmodern societies are maintained through “tribalism within modernity” (Hagedorn 2007:61), the hall mark achievement of functional rationality (Marcuse 1991), that has, as part of the functioning of organic solidarity (Durkheim 1997), introduced mechanical type bonding through massification (Mills 1951) and a national ethos, a form of civil religion (Bellah and Tipton 2006:228) that serves to legitimate oppression. The management of alienation and anomie in this manner prevents social discontent and upheaval while maintaining the *status quo*.²

The homeless who breach these rationalized boundaries (much like certain immigrants do national boundaries when they cross politically defined borders) are a matter of serious concern for the authorities (Susser 1996:412). Unlike immigrants, the homeless do not have a set social space to which they are assigned within a social structure. They cannot be criminalized with ease because they have not broken any laws, they cannot be deported (or “alienized”) because they already reside in the country of their origin and they cannot be ethnically enclaved like immigrants because they are all without homes, no space and no property seems to be theirs. In the raw state of absolute deprivation

² Describing the homeless as the “lumpen proletariat” or the dangerous class is an erroneous reading of Marx. *The Communist Manifesto* states: “[t]he «dangerous class» [lumpen proletariat] the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue” (Marx and Engels 1848). The homelessness that is structurally caused by advanced capitalism does not represent the “old society” with its feudalism as the dominant mode of production.

coming together unchecked and uncontrolled (as is a potential possibility regarding the homeless) can lead to collective action and mass mobilization. As exiles with a “diasporic” identity, where a conflict brews between “continuity and discontinuity” (Shreiber 1998:277), the homeless are en route to a form of essentialism about themselves and their kind, what Marx would define as “class consciousness” that can lead to resistance and revolution. Therefore, problems are anticipated by the authorities and, as a result, a controlled and controlling space is manufactured for them in the form of the shelter (Lyon-Callo 2004) and its ethos of personalized solutions through imputation of moral and physical inferiority on the victims. Part of these “solutions” is to make those that are so treated politically voiceless and held-in, and much like enclaved immigrants; a disheartening existence is imputed on them, they either do not exist or do so as social scum, the essence of which is captured by Edward Said in his autobiography, *Out of Place* (1999):

[t]he life of an Arab Palestinian in the West, particularly in America, is disheartening. There exists here an almost unanimous consensus that politically he does not exist, and when it is allowed that he does, it is either as a nuisance or as an Oriental... (p. 27)

Citizenship in the modern nation state is framed within a dual definition of national identity and economic independence. When people lose their economic independence, they become similar to non-citizens in that through fact they become politically voiceless and dependent. Homelessness is, therefore, a political condition as much as it is an economic condition (Arnold 2004:4). The economically dependent (or the politico-economic homeless) lose their privacy and autonomy in both the private and public arenas of interaction so that even occupying what are generally public spaces

becomes very difficult for them. The loss of citizenship in this manner has serious consequences for those who become politically powerless since only citizens are given the status of human being through individual identity, everyone else is judged more or less categorically. Through economic dependence the system robs the homeless of their civil rights. Those that as a result become non-citizens by virtue of their economic deprivation; much like the immigrant non-citizens are dehumanized in that they are not considered to be on the same level of “humanity” as the citizen (Arnold 2004:10).

The “personal defect model” of homelessness describes the official damage control strategy of imputing character defects on the homeless and using “personal-troubles” (Mills 1959) based explanations (devoid of structural contexts) of boundary violation by the homeless. The personal troubles of the homeless are explained through the narrow circuits of their own life or through character defects and psychological ailments rather than as public issues rooted within the operations of a capitalist social structure. In other words, the homeless are portrayed as victims of “disease and dysfunction” (Lyon-Callo 2004:51).

Such a personalized model of homelessness is culturally promoted by the elite and their media to divide the citizenry against each other, much like natives are pitted against immigrants or whites against blacks. As a manifest translation of these cultural discourses we see the crystallization of the shelter industry that entraps the pseudo-revolutionaries who have broken their shackles of bondage to a confining social structure by experiencing homelessness. I consider the provision of the link between the homeless and the mass so-

ciety whose identity is remanufactured through bureaucratic processes, together with the image of the homeless person as consciousness creator (a pseudo-revolutionary) in an unjust society, to be my main contributions in this paper to sociological knowledge.

Theoretical Framework

[S]trangers are not really conceived of as individuals, but as strangers of a particular type: the element of distance is no less general in regard to them than the element of nearness. (Simmel 1908:3)

The homeless are “internal” strangers, analogous to external strangers, the immigrants; they defy classification through preformed categories because they don’t fit into the social dichotomy of the normal/other. The host society and its members have difficulty in imputing a personal social identity to them. As strangers they are part of a group of strangers for whom a new virtual identity (Goffman 1963:2) is hastily constructed during social interaction. In a society based on ownership, where cultural themes of individualism, workmanship, and family abound (Loseke 2003:64-65), leading to norms of “economic independence, autonomy, and self-sufficiency” (Arnold 2004:5), the homeless are socially constructed as deviants who are “problems.” It is in such a response to the initially ambivalent social identity of the homeless that a stigmatized social identity is constructed and applied in all official solutions and explanations of homelessness which gets ingrained in the culture of the homeless shelter (Lyon-Callo 2004). As strangers they are not seen as part of the group, the homeless are “homebred aliens” in Veblen’s terms

(Veblen 1997:45),³ through ascription, they are assigned a specific position in the social structure.

The shelter, as a collection point of diverse individuals who, through varied circumstances, have lost their homes, creates an associative space, it imputes the “informing character of a «with» relationship” (Goffman 1963:47) that acts as a source of information for categorical generalizations about the homeless. This “with” categorization is how ethnic/immigrant enclaves are formed and stereotypical generalizations about them mainstreamed. The homeless are typified as “deviant” through medicalization of their troubles or through implied personal character defects, standardized to reflect a particular social type (Simmel 1908), they are not evaluated on the individual level rather they are judged categorically. Categories once formed predispose those that are categorized to relationships with members of their own category leading to group formation and the self fulfilling prophecy that the homeless are a uniform personality type based on group stereotypes (Goffman 1963:24).

My purpose in this paper is to explore how identity is negotiated by the homeless in response to their condition of homelessness. In other words, I want to uncover the identity response of the homeless to structural constraints mediated through objectively produced mass mediated culture. The individual, when he or she experiences homelessness for the first time, has an idea of the stigmatized category that they now enter because it is literarily predefined by the media of mass communication (Goffman 1963:25). Such objective cultural constructions by cultural entrepreneurs through the

³ Veblen describes master-less men as opposed to (enslaved) citizens as “...any human material that does not fit into current use and wont” (1997:45) and as “institutional misfits” (1997:45).

corporatized cultural apparatus that is composed of the mass media and formal education (Mills 1956) and through which a particular culture attains hegemony,⁴ serve a social control function through cultural indoctrination, binding the “normals” to the system (Schneider and Ingram 2005:ix) while alienating all that challenge the *status quo* through “otherization.” It also, overtime, results in the formulation of norms that allow some to be “... at home politically and others to be excluded, or homeless” (Arnold 2004:35).

Methodology

The theoretical framework I use in analyzing my data relies primarily on C. Wright Mills and Hans Gerth’s elaboration of the psychology of social institutions (1964). I also use Simmel’s elaboration of the stranger as social type to reflect on the identity ambivalence faced by the homeless during their transition period to homelessness. Goffman’s work on the management of “spoiled identity” in his *Stigma* (1963) was also conceptually used because of its explanatory richness. Denzin’s (1989) “interpretive interactionism” that differentiates between transitions and adaptations was utilized in differentiating the pre-shelter transitions and post-shelter adaptations by the homeless to their condition. The life history method that I used in conducting interviews allowed me to capture the relationship between the individual and society based on C. Wright Mills’ *Sociological Imagination* (1959). How the individual’s beliefs are a reflection of the wider culture (Pinder 1994:210) that exists within which his/her biography is enacted, as well as the social structure in response to which the wider culture arises was captured through use of similar

⁴ In Gramsci’s rendition of hegemony (Boothman 1995).

methodology. Use of the life history method also informed me how people living within the narrow milieu of their daily existence can become falsely conscious of their troubles as personally caused (Mills 1959) due to barriers constructed between the individual, the conditions of his or her life, and its link to the beliefs and values that he or she is able to acquire, that often serve to legitimize inequality for the purpose of systemic reproduction of advantage for the very few through oppression of the very many. This is a form of ecological or systemic power (Abrahamson 1996:27) possessed by the elite. The internal-exile concept that I apply to the homeless is based on Edward Said’s extension of the term exile to refer to those that develop a moral alternative to “the massive institutions looming over much of modern life” (Said as cited in Shreiber [1998:275]).

I analyzed the data based on broad transitions and adaptations. Transitions are defined as turning points that lead to in between phases, “the no-man’s land betwixt and between the structural past and the structural future” (Turner 1986 as cited in Denzin 1989:212). Adaptations are interpretive processes concerned with “social forms that can assist in reconstructing the self and eliminating threats to it” (Denzin 1989:214). The state of well-being where values espoused by people are constantly confirmed by the material reality of their existence is threatened by collapse and a state of panic (Mills 1959). The resulting vacuum and anomie (meaninglessness) leads to adaptation based on social reproduction through the latency function (Parsons 1951) assigned to the social group the person is categorized into. It is for this reason that Goffman states, “...what an individual is or could be derives from the place of his kind in the social structure”

(1963:112). When a person facing the transition into homelessness is institutionalized through the shelter industry and adapts to that role and adopts the identity due to coercion both implicit and explicit and due to the lack of any verifiable alternative, his or her fate is tied to the structure of opportunities available to homeless people, which means that he/she will forever remain at the bottom of the stratification hierarchy. There are also the “hidden homeless” (Pinder 1994:206), those that remain at the level of enlightenment they achieved because they did not seek to be institutionalized through the shelter. They negotiate their environment and survive in a state of liberation from a social structure. They represent the “stranger” that Simmel talked about, those that “come today and stay tomorrow” (Simmel 1908:1) rather than those that come today and leave tomorrow (through the shelter) by adopting a preformed identity, which ensures perpetual failure.

For those homeless that “come today and leave tomorrow,” that is, they get institutionalized, I used Edwin Lemert’s (1951) distinction between primary and secondary deviance and apply that to the experience of the homeless within an institutionalized setting, like the shelter. The definition of the situation based upon labeling by the authorities at the shelter leads to adaptation (by the homeless) that involves adopting both the label and the character traits that are packaged with it. The homeless individuals due to their transitional experience with homelessness develop an identity vacuum, which ensures, as the “self” abhors vacuums, that what is authoritatively ascribed as their identity by influential authorities will be adopted by them. The culture shock that dislodges a person’s identity (and links to a social structure) in times of catastrophe,

the death of a loved one, the immigrant experience, retirement, job loss or becoming homeless leaves a vacuum like condition that gets filled based on social interactions and experience that temporally follow those conditions. Secondary deviance, as Edwin Lemert pointed out, refers to “the social interaction between the deviant and his community” (1951:75). What determines secondary deviance is the time period involved and adaptation that results in adoption of the deviant role.

Those among the homeless who have not spent long enough time on the streets and have not adopted the discredited deviant role of the homeless person, in other words, they have not “role embraced,” would try passing and role distancing (Goffman 1963:102,109), including “fictive storytelling” (Snow and Anderson 1987). As the material facts of their existence as a homeless person ensures that even though they haven’t role embraced, the validation of their identity that has not yet been discredited through “information management” (Goffman 1963:100) is always precarious because it is in continuous danger of being discredited. Through perpetual (social) “trial,” everything the stigmatized say (in this case the homeless) is scrutinized and interpreted with reference to the categorical stereotypes that go with their group membership. Eventually, this information becomes too overwhelming for the person to manage effectively who over time resigns to the fate of adopting the discredited stigmatized identity.

Primary homelessness as a result of this perpetual trial over time evolves into secondary homelessness and through self imposed and externally imposed social isolation results in network-based social deficit. The homeless, thus, prefer associating only with people similarly

discredited; the homeless enclave (within the confining space of the homeless shelter) crystallizes for the purpose of identity verification and self worth maintenance (Goffman 1963; Mills and Gerth 1964). A necessary consequence of adopting the discredited, stigmatized identity is self-blame and low self-esteem, depression, and substance abuse (La Gory, Ritchey, and Mullis 1990). These process-causes ensure chronic homelessness and early death through physical and chemical “mutilation” as a natural consequence of identity “mutilation” by the elite who dominate through ownership, sourcing, advertising, and funding (Herman and Chomsky 2002) the cultural apparatus and produce caricatures of categories of types of people for the purpose of structural reproduction of their advantage. This is a form of structural violence perpetrated on people oppressed within a social structure that then in the form of social scripts attains mass circulation. Such social scripts lead to self-enactment of their own oppression by the victims for the purpose of social reproduction as they “do” what is structurally dictated to them (West and Zimmerman 1987).

I interpret my data using the *Sociological Imagination* (Mills 1959) that involves situating biographies within their social structural roots, based on the themes listed below. These themes, if supported by the data, confirm various parts of the model that I have presented diagrammatically (see Figure 1), the culmination of which is either chronic homeless on the part of the institutionalized homeless or enlightened, revolutionary and (relatively) “objective” existence among the “hidden” or non-institutionalized homeless (the liberated homeless) who con-

struct their own pseudo communities (Wasserman and Clair 2010).

- The (new) homeless as “strangers” can view objectively the contradictions within the functioning of a society and as a result are “wiser” and more conscious (Simmel 1908). The “stranger” can evaluate comparatively (Goffman 1963:29) and the “stranger” is a skeptic or critical evaluator (Simmel 1908).
- Identity displacement and acquisition of the stigma. A two-phase process: learning and incorporating the point of view of the “normal” and learning in detail the “consequences of possessing” the stigma (Goffman 1963:32).
- The vacuum created by a displaced identity is filled through objectively produced culture that acts as a barrier between structural reasons for homelessness and the actual experience of homelessness. This “filling,” in function, is performed by the shelter (Simmel 1900:484; Real 1977:33; Habermas 1987:155).
- The process component of structural segregation of the homeless (via the shelter): a) self-segregation due to negative social judgment (Mills and Gerth 1964:86) and b) external segregation: avoidance by *normals* due to fear of “courtesy stigma” (Goffman 1963:30).
- The institutional mechanism through which disadvantage is reproduced through ascription- the route to chronic homelessness (Mills and Gerth 1964:88-89).

The Data

For the purpose of this paper, an exploratory research into the homeless identity, I conducted in depth interviews of ten homeless people chosen from homeless shelters across Southern Illinois. I also conducted ethnographic field research through passive and semi-participatory observation of various shelters across Southern Illinois. Candidates for interviews were selected from the shelter’s roster of adult candidates based on convenience and availability. The interviews were voluntary and confidential and lasted approximately 35 minutes on average. This research project was reviewed and approved by the Southern Illinois University, Carbondale’s Human Subjects Committee.

I coded the interviews based on the above mentioned themes using a deductive theory to data approach. The ethnographic part (of field research) involved observation of the shelter and interactions between shelter management and the residents, the physical setup of the shelter, analysis of their rules, social artifacts located therein, as well as semi-participation in eating with the homeless, observing them during meal times and spending time around their living quarters. The data generated from these observations was interpreted based on the emergent role of the shelter in the context of the wider literature and the shelter’s functions. This, when cross-read with various interviews, revealed varying levels of internalization of shelter norms by those at various stages of homelessness based on time spent on the street and in various shelters.

I want to clearly state that my data is neither sufficient nor exhaustive to come up with explicit generalizable conclusions. My conclusions were not arrived at using the grounded theory method “from

scratch.” To make use of the data in the best possible way, scientifically as plausible empirical evidence, I used existing concepts to understand the data based on certain themes that are critical nodes within my constructed model of varying outcomes of the homeless identity, and the homeless personality type. These nodal points, when confirmed empirically, provide plausible support for the basic structure of my model deductively. I used my data not as a beginning point for typification, but rather as empirical evidence to support (or refute) my proposed model’s main nodal points based on logically transposed theoretical constructs, thereby contributing to the building of (plausible) social theory on the homeless.

This study is unique in linking the homelessness experience in identity formation and transformation to both the immigrant experience, as well as the life-fate of the mass society within rationalized/bureaucratized social structures, this massification is inherent in the standardization and homogenization inherent in bureaucracy (Mills 1959; Mannheim 1960). My claim is that homelessness as an identity based condition is rooted within advanced capitalism’s social structure and affects us all to varying degrees, the cognitive manifestation of which is an alienated homeless mind. I also propose the link that the physical manifestation of this “cognitive” homelessness is the actual homeless people, a way for the socio-structural “organism” to physically reveal social problems. This does not mean that their physical homelessness is caused through a “homeless mind,” but rather that in their identity negotiations through their explicit experience of homelessness, the condition of mental homelessness of the general mass of people within advanced capitalism is clearly revealed.

The Model

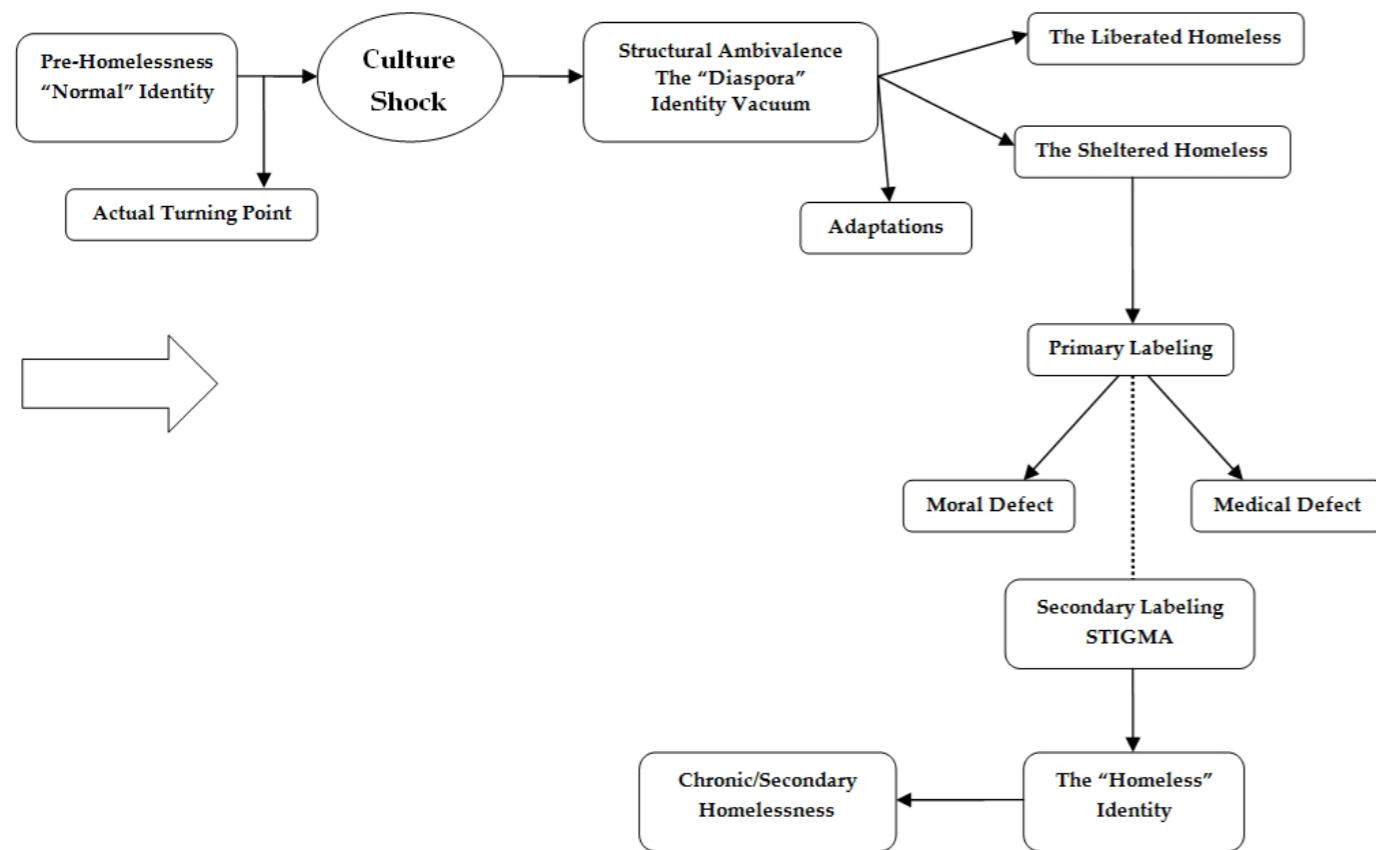


Figure 1: The Homeless Identity: Diaspora and Entrapment.
Source: self-elaboration.

Data Analysis

The broad transitions and adaptations theoretically elaborated above and empirically grounded below can be traced in Figure 1.

The Event of Homelessness

The “event” of homelessness results in a dislodging of the structural anchor, which means that the system’s rationality does not define reality for the person anymore. The culture shock that precedes such dislodging is a well-known phenomenon among immigrants:

I negotiated the no-man’s land between the country of my past and the continent of my present. Shaped by memory, textured by nostalgia for a class and culture I had abandoned... (Mukherjee 1997:34)⁵

In analyzing the data, I expected to find anger rather than sadness in the narration of the recently dislocated, those that have not yet been socialized through the shelter, given the above theoretical elaboration. This was evident in one of the interviews I conducted with a thirty-year-old white

⁵ Kathleen Arnold argues that immigrants are homeless in two other ways besides the identity response: a) politically as they are ignored by the mainstream citizenry and b) poverty and sharing “problems and situations” with the homeless (2004:6).

male with some college education who had in the previous week been released from prison. He was angry at the condition that he was now being forced to face. After having dropped him off at a homeless shelter with only \$20,88 in his pocket, he was expected to make it on his own based on the prison’s “lifestyle adjustment” training. When I asked him if he had questioned the prison authorities (and their indoctrination) about making it on the outside in his situation with \$20,88 in his pocket, were he to follow the rules, he replied:

I think it’s one of those deals where the grass is always greener on the other side. When you’re locked up, you’ve got this idea in your head of what it is gonna be like when you get out... When you get out you find out in reality that, when they say life’s a bitch, they say that for a reason, you know what I mean? And especially for somebody that doesn’t really have anybody, it’s hard...

Compare this to the resigned withdrawal of Jonathan, a 56-year-old white male who had been homeless for four years: answering my question about whether he felt the experience of homelessness had made him a better person, he responded:

[i]t made me better, I’m not cynical anymore. I thought things were personal; I didn’t like people talking to me. I am not like that anymore. I am not suspicious of people, and I don’t care anymore, that’s the whole thing.

The homeless individuals I talked to expressed a feeling of liberation when they first encountered homelessness, one even mentioned that in the beginning “it wasn’t much of a problem.” Jonathan comments on his initial experience upon my inquiry if being homeless translated into a feeling of freedom:

[o]h yeah, sure. You get the feeling that you can do whatever you want, if you can tolerate the cold. Yeah, but it doesn’t last long. It is kinda lonely because

I have never been alone for a long period of time...the not being cynical part comes in, the understanding comes in that these people there is something wrong with them...

Keith a 63-year-old white male, ex-Marine, homeless himself, reflected on this heightened sense of freedom among the homeless while commenting on shelter rules:

...[the homeless] don’t like [the rules], from what I’ve gathered, being homeless, you know, you can pretty much come and go where you will, do what you please...

Melvin, a 44-year-old white male responding to a question about how he coped with homelessness when he first experienced it, said:

[w]ell, when I first became homeless, it wasn’t really much of a problem, but overtime it really frustrates me, I can’t find a job, can’t find me another place.

Ties to the Economy and Family

Most of the homeless I interviewed had unstable employment before they became homeless. Their ties to structured employment were sporadic, temporary and even where stable they were in the low paying, low skill, service sector. Having weak ties to the most primary institution within a capitalist structure means that cultural adaptation would result in a cultural outcome different to the mainstream in values and orientation, which would facilitate transition into physical homelessness through initial mental homelessness, what Emile Durkheim defined as a condition of anomie. Melvin, a 44-year-old white male, described his employment history to me as:

[f]or five years, I basically volunteered, after five or six years, my grandfather gave me a pickup truck, that

is when I went to work, first job was pizza delivery... After Katrina...I moved in with [friends] hoping to join the workforce, and then that didn't work out and I have been looking [for a job] ever since.

Craig, a 30-year-old white male, recounted his work with the Carnival after he ran away from foster care with his friend. Recently out of jail, he plans to work for the same Carnival again:

I did it before actually, when I ran away from foster care, I was sixteen, and I lied about my age and a buddy of mine, because we were in a foster home in East St. Louis, and it was just horrible, we lied about our ages and we traveled a whole summer with the Carnival. It was in Illinois, we thought we would stay on with them, but then we both went to Florida, me and him, we were both young and scared so we called on case workers and ended up turning ourselves in.

Jonathan, a 56-year-old white male from Chicago, stated about his work experience:

[d]ay labor, I worked for Jewel foods. Before that I did dock work, I worked for freight, I worked for Boeing...

Together with weak links to the economic institution most of the people I interviewed had weak family ties and/or abusive relationships that formed the immediate context of their experience of homelessness. Weak family ties together with weak links to the economy through insecure employment ensure that primary and secondary socialization outcomes are going to be inadequate, resulting in a reproduction of their initial loose connection to a structure. This loose connection that results in anomie (that is, the cognitive aspect of homelessness) then translates overtime into a greater probability of actual physical homelessness. Jonathan describes his path to homelessness as:

I was visiting my brother, got divorced, that was four years back. We didn't get along, my second wife. That is when it happened. Actually, my first wife of thirty three years passed away...around eight years ago, died of cancer. I went through a lot, you know.

In response to why he did not stay with his brother rather than become homeless, he responded:

...well, he hasn't invited me to come stay over at his place. If it wasn't for his wife, I won't call her his wife because they are not married, if she wasn't there, I'd stay with him.

Keith described his reason for becoming homeless as:

I bought a house...several years ago, eight years ago, and it was a brand new home when I bought it...[my wife] decided to run with her daughter, act like she's twenty one again...and I said enough is enough...

Craig, in response to whether he had any relatives in the area, responded:

I have an older sister, but we lost touch... She moved to Louisiana and got hooked on drugs real bad. I haven't talked to her in years now. My dad, he's dead...but my mom, like I said, I went to foster care, when I was twelve because my step dad was real abusive towards me. I used to go to school beat up... May 8th, pretty much the day I went into foster care and lost contact with my family.

Karen, a 53-year-old white female, in response to a question regarding friendship and ties, replied:

I feel that when I meet people they will either lie on me or do something like my boyfriend...I was with him for thirteen years. He was abusive...

Structural Loosening and Re-entrenchment

Once the transition is made into homelessness and the person's identity is displaced due to cul-

ture shock in that previous role's disintegration, the person's attachment to a structure is loosened; this results in open mindedness and objectivity. This phenomenon is similar to the depiction of Simmel's stranger who can view things objectively from a distance that his/her loose incorporation within a structure allows him/her. This also leads to personal growth due to the expansion of the "I" in Mead's (1967) equation (the subjective part of the personality), since new experiences are encountered for which the memory image based generalized others (the "Me" or the objective part of the personality) are an inadequate guide. All of these changes in personal freedom and objectivity, of course, happen within a context of great pain and difficulty for the homeless through both cognitive and physical deprivation. Those that cannot cope with the "pain" seek help through institutionalization and enter the shelter system. The shelter's "personal defect model" (the "dominant ideology perspective" [Lee, Lewis, and Jones 1992]) of dealing with the homeless, blames the individual for the condition of homelessness either through the imputation of physical defect (through medicalization) or through imputation of moral (or value based) defect.

During my visit to one of the shelters (for the purpose of this study), I noticed a tiny coffee table midway down the main hall of one of these shelter on which were several pamphlets. One was titled "Wellness Ways," informing people how to guard against food borne illnesses. Since the residents at the shelter cook their own meals, the assumption was that they were "at risk populations" for food borne illnesses, in other words, as a total institution, the shelter management ascribes an identity of the "other" to these otherwise everyday people

and tries to re-socialize them into what they deem are good values and hygienic living. One factor often involved in "otherizing" is to consider those that are different to be untouchables and a factor in such shunning is to assume that the "other" is unhygienic and unclean, in other words, "at risk" for illness and disease. Next to the "Wellness Ways" pamphlet was a flyer about an out of school, cultural indoctrination program where the values emphasized were directed towards the lower to lower middle class with the claim that those that go through such cultural training will have stable families and will avoid "teenage pregnancies" in order to lead "wholesome lives." The assumption here was that the homeless (and others among the lower classes) are incapable of parenting (children brought up by them are "un-whole" individuals), just as they are incapable of looking after themselves, that not only are they hygienically defective, they are morally unclean as well.

The resulting low self-esteem due to "otherization" and forced interaction with the shelter staff is revealed clearly through the perpetually apologetic gaze.⁶ Case work and not structural adjustment is the preferred solution to their condition by those that offer "help," preferred both by those that dominate the privately incorporated economy and the public officials in charge of system management. The primary assumption held by case-workers is that the homeless, if they don't work (and many do), don't work because of their personal laziness and inadequacy and not because of structural reasons or economic downturns and recessions. Within such an assumption, the case manager gets to work on fixable "problems"

⁶ Which I noticed among many of the residents of the various shelters I visited for this research.

that he/she can supposedly fix rather than seeking structural change over which he/she has no control.

The Western liberal tradition, having its origin within bourgeoisie manipulation, situated within the relationships of production of industrial capitalism, is reform and not revolution oriented. As a result, managing the system generated problems at the individual level, the privatized non-profit sector, as a stabilization sector within a capitalist mode of production, manages the system disruption potential of public issues that are related to the operations of social institutions (Mills 1959). Almost all of the institutionalized homeless people I interviewed blamed themselves for their condition of homelessness with the greater emphasis on self blame as against structural causes of homelessness coming from those that had been institutionalized the longest.⁷ Melvin, who had been homeless for 4 years, stated:

[t]he fault is all mine, the main reason, at this point, that I am homeless is, when my friends went down after Katrina, I was working at KFC at the janitorial thing, I just quit there and lost my job. If I hadn't quit and went down there, I would be alright.

Jonathan (homeless for 4 years) stated:

I'm speaking for myself now, you know, not for anybody else. I can't just get...I fucked it up, you know. I did everything wrong, you know. Between you and me, it is nobody else's fault...

In contrast to the above two who had been homeless for 4 years, Craig, who had just got out of

⁷ As my parting thought after each interview, I did suggest to the people I interviewed that they know others around the shelter who have had vastly different experiences, yet have arrived at the same end result of homelessness so maybe it is not "personal fault" alone that is the cause.

prison and experienced the shelter for the first time, imputes self-blame, but with an exception:

I think now, everything that I did is a direct result of my actions, it is all my fault, and that I'm here right now is my fault. I think that when I was younger, there were things that happened to me, circumstances that weren't my fault that were out of my control and they probably helped me become the person I am today, but now I can't blame anybody but myself...

As a result of this adaptation undertaken in order to resolve the conflict between imputation/ascription of blame towards the homeless by the shelter and their own actual condition of homelessness (that is recognized as relatively extrinsic by the newly homeless), self-blame is internalized and a stigmatized "peace" is achieved, what I describe as secondary homelessness based on adaptation of Edwin Lemert's (1951) "secondary deviance." The interim period where this conflict is ongoing and a stigmatized identity has not been internalized, is marked by a period of depression and psychological anxiety (La Gory et al. 1990).

The Path to Medicalization

Many homeless folk complain of depression, usually those that have been homeless for a long time. While the shelter industry imputes middle class values, it is powerless to create structural opportunities, which leads to frustration and a lack of identity verification through jobs and opportunities (Stets and Cast 2007), leading inevitably to low self-esteem where the homeless person is forced to see himself/herself as the problem and worthless because he cannot verify a "normal" identity. As a result of internalization of blame and the resulting low self-esteem, many of the homeless people

I talked to complained of depression, which for some leads to alcohol and drug abuse.

When I asked Melvin if the condition of homelessness had affected his health in any way he stated: "Definitely mental, possibly physical." He linked it to the "frustration of not being able to find a job." The emphasis on jobs at the shelter is linked to personal self worth with those not having a job or not being able to find one get the message of personal worthlessness leading to frustration, depression and low self-esteem, which then translates into poor physical health. This is reflected in the higher mortality rates of those that are impoverished compared to those that make a middle class income.⁸

Keith, the ex-Marine, who was role-distancing and didn't consider himself homeless even though he was staying at the shelter, stated:

I'd like to stay [at the shelter], at this stage of the game, I'm going through a divorce...I am a recovering alcoholic; I deal with depression, anxiety, and PTSD...

Craig stated:

I've been here five days now, and actually for the first two days, ah, I get stress related migraines, so Thursday night I went to the hospital since I was having such a bad migraine...

Karen said:

[w]ell, I get a little depressed sometimes, so I went to get some meds yesterday, anti-depressants...

Among the institutionalized homeless, there are those (based upon how long they have been insti-

⁸ See: <http://healthcare.zdnet.com/?p=973>, retrieved March 28, 2010.

tutionalized) to whom an initial label has been applied. In adapting Edwin Lemert (1951), I suggest that they are the primary homeless. These people have not internalized the homeless identity and even though they are homeless, the second phase of the acquisition of the stigma (as suggested by Goffman [1963:32]) has not been accomplished yet. Here, fictive storytelling in order to "manage information" (Goffman 1963:100) is the dominant strategy to protect and salvage the "self."

Keith, the ex-Marine, was a classic case of someone using fictive storytelling (Snow and Anderson 1987; 1993) in order to separate himself from other shelter dwellers. Part of the "passing" (Goffman 1963) as a "normal" strategy is to confirm all the stereotypes that *normals* have about the stigmatized, in other words, validating the caricature of the stigmatized while distancing himself/herself from that role and personality type. Here Keith presents his stay at the shelter as a personal choice rather than a necessity:

...[my brother and kids] don't have a problem with me [living at the shelter]. I have a \$100,000 house sitting there in the country...and I am walking away from all of it, it don't bother them.

In response to my question about why he thinks the homeless in general do not have a place to stay, he responded (confirming the widespread stereotypes against the homeless and at the same time role-distancing):

[y]eah, they're strung out on them goddamned drugs, you know. There are girls in here that are eighteen years old, mentally she acts like she is about ten... from doing cocaine or crystal meth, ah, yep...and a lot of them get pissed off at a guy like me, well you got this and you got that...yeah, I worked all my fucking life to get it...

Craig, who had recently been released from prison and was experiencing shelter life for the first time, was similarly role-distancing when he responded:

I think [homelessness] happens to a lot of people who try to change their lives. I mean if I went back to _____ I probably wouldn't be homeless right now, but I'd probably be back in prison within six months. I mean, I've got friends there, but you know, in prison they are real big about change.

For those that role-distance, eventually their "discreditable" personality (Goffman 1963) is discredited, which leads to internalization of the stigma, imputation of self-blame and chronic homelessness. However, previous identities are not completely displaced and always leave traces, the marks (or "scars") of biographical history. New events similar to past ones that evoke memories can reconstitute those traces and can temporarily lead to a relived experience of the past life. The reconstitution of past identity was clearly evident in my interview with Patrick, a 54-year-old ex-Marine (who had spent three years in the military), who lived at the shelter. Our conversation, which lasted a little over 5 minutes, ended abruptly because Patrick asked me to leave stating that he didn't like "mother-fucking foreigners."

In our preliminary conversation, Patrick asked me where I was from. When I informed him that I was from country X, he responded:

...[w]hat the hell are you doing here...and us military is fighting your asses back there and you're here... I'm a full-blooded American, I don't like you mother fuckers, okay...go.

The fact that Patrick referred to the military as "us military," told me that he was using his past

memories of three years spent in the military to reconstruct his identity as a military man even though now the shelter displaced his identity that becomes salient only when confronted by what he sees as "the other" or the enemy. On other occasions he is a very nice person, as the other residents told me, in other words, he was well adjusted to shelter life. Also evident in his words was the identification of his military identity with being a "full-blooded American." When patriotism gets defined in terms of the military's hegemonic male construct, women, as a consequence, get excluded in the most part from the public arena of decision making that involves the nation-state (Enloe 1993).

The relived-past through a mediating memory event is the stigmatized individual's only route to de-stigmatizing himself or herself. However, since ongoing shelterized roles suppress and control such momentary infractions or veils this now subordinated part of the person's "double consciousness" (Du Bois 1995) as the institutional hold of the shelter on the individual seldom loosens, leads to chronic homelessness as a near permanent condition. Jonathan alluded to this idea of "getting comfortable" with shelter life when he said:

[w]ell, you're grateful to have a place, yeah, if you've been out there, you're grateful. Then you start getting comfortable...that is how it works.

Conclusion

In a functionally rational society, most people pass their entire lives "living" through mass mediated constructions. Sunk in detached routines in their "real" lives, such mass mediated informa-

tion provides the much sought after context that helps people make sense of their otherwise anomic lives. Lives are anomic (or meaningless) because of rapid social change that describes advanced capitalism, where rapidly changing material conditions through technology never allow a lagging culture to "catch up." The fact that meaning and context are provided by the mass media ensures that stereotypes that it perpetuates for ulterior political motives that will become the grounds for all human interaction. Such stereotypes ensure that selective observation, a logical fallacy is set into scripted circulation and stratifies people based upon class, race, gender, religion, and nationality. That the shelter management judged the homeless based upon such mass mediated stereotypes was evident in the general interactional environment in the various shelters that I visited, as well as the rules through which these adults were infantized and discredited for the purpose of resocialization.

Within a structure that determines personal worth through pre-formed personality types, selected and given status based on their expediency in the economic sphere, all other personality types are denigrated. The social control of those deemed disruptive to an existing order necessitates control of identity because identity mediates between structural coercion and social action (whether confirmatory or revolutionary social action). Since identity formation and its verification through social action depends on access to resources (Stets and Cast 2007), this gives those that control those resources enormous power in making people become what they want them to become.

In a societal structure based upon extreme inequality, regardless of the identity one adopts or

prefers, it is always under threat. Resource dependency and rapid societal change, two processes that ensure that people relate not to themselves or each other, but to the system were outlined in this paper in terms of the displacement of a "normal" identity of the homeless by a stigmatized identity, through interactional transitions and adaptations. Further, the structural link to such altered interactions was also outlined in that it is the societal structure that not only causes such transitions (the event of homelessness) in the first place, but subsequently offers, through the path of self-blame via the shelter industry, a stigmatized identity as the only verifiable alternative. Identity manipulation in this manner can be broadly seen as the general process of bureaucratized (implicit) social control within advanced capitalism.

We can all relate to the homeless: Not only is our separation from the homeless extremely subtle within a crisis prone economic structure, the homeless are in their identity negotiations, the manifest representation of what latently occurs to us all within advanced capitalism: the displacement of a sovereign identity by a robotized subservient identity through necessity of existence within a controlled and controlling social environment. C. Wright Mills asked a question in the 1950's which we are now in a position to answer:

...[b]ut we must now raise the question in an ultimate form: Among contemporary men (and women) will there come to prevail, or even flourish, what may be called the Cheerful Robot? (1959:171)

The answer to Mills' question, in our age, is an emphatic "yes!"

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Book Review

Taylor, Yvette. 2012. *Fitting into Place? Class and Gender Geographies and Temporalities*. Surrey, Burlington: Ashgate

In *Fitting Into Place*, Yvette Taylor undertakes an ambitious study of the intersectional relationship among social class, gender, race, geography, and temporality, utilizing a multi-methods approach (map drawing, focus groups, interviews, and performances). Taylor challenges the recent trend in sociological thought that regards post-modern understandings of identity as fluid, flexible, multifaceted, and deterritorialized. She points out that social class hierarchies still exist in twenty-first century Great Britain (and elsewhere), and that such enduring inequalities foster the retention of “old” identities. While she acknowledges that new theories of assemblages, affects, and networks have their place, Taylor cautions sociologists not to be so quick to dismiss social class or gender as relics of the past. Against a contemporary context of post-industrialism in which individuals are increasingly expected to transcend economic and social constraints in pursuit of self-regulation, she asks, “which social subjects are able to mobilize and spatialize their interests in order to achieve legitimate subject-positions in these new landscapes?” (p. 2). This challenge to Foucault’s concept

of “governmentality” is the central organizing principle of Taylor’s project, which she artfully weaves throughout this book. Taylor gives due credit to others who share her perspective (Adkins, Skeggs, Reay and colleagues) and adds further complexity to the intersectionality conversation (the usual suspects being social class, gender, and race) by adding geography and temporality to the equation.

In the first chapter, “Fitting into Place? Class and Gender Geographies and Temporalities,” Taylor raises several insightful questions with regard to postmodern identity theory including: (1) What or who is worth losing or gaining?, (2) Who do we want to “fit in”?, and (3) How might classed and gendered pasts, presents, and futures collide rather than cohere in everyday places? Taylor is critical of discourses, which relentlessly individualize opportunity, choice, responsibility, and aspiration. As such discourses relate to gender, she points out that they share a propensity to emphasize “new times” for womankind alongside a so-called “crisis” for men, thus masking the myriad ways in which gendered assumptions are still frequently reproduced

in everyday life. Taylor notes that recent research reveals younger women continue to internalize heteronormative paradigms that influence their current plans relative to their projected future commitment to their families, while older women act on family commitments as mothers and grandmothers (differently from men). She draws upon Bourdieu to support her argument that while “new choices may be available to some...inequalities resurface as people go about investing in their future selves according to logics of choice, attainment and embodied accomplishment – where some cannot and/or will not invest or «appear» in place” (p. 2) and utilizes his concept of *habitus* to explain why certain people inhabit place as their own while others seem not “meant to «become» or arrive in place” (p. 49). When Taylor speaks of “place” she uses the term both literally and figuratively to refer to the geographical locations affected by post-industrialization, as well as the people who inhabit those spaces and their response(s) to expectations that they should aspire to middle-class lifestyles. As the concept of “place” applies to gender, Taylor highlights the tension between “old” expectations that a woman’s “place” is in the domestic sphere and “new” paradigms that assume all women can/should attain successful identities in the public sphere.

Taylor outlines her methodological approach in the second chapter, “«City Publics» and the «Public Sociologist»,” in which she emphasizes that while her fieldwork site is situated in the North East of England, her case study can neither be read as an abstract *everywhere* nor should it be dismissed as *nowhere* because of its specificity. Rather, Taylor calls upon us to think of continuations and parallels in and beyond the case and place of her study, recognizing how different material, emotional, cultural, economic, and embodied distances can

“reveal what, where and who is rendered proximate or remote” (p. 21). Taylor explains that she selected the North East of England because like other UK regions it has undergone major transformation in response to global economic changes in recent decades. Shipbuilding, coal mining, and heavy engineering kept the region bustling up until the 1980’s, when the coal mining industry (once one of the UK’s largest employers) began closing pits and laying off workers in droves. Taylor notes that by the close of the twentieth century, only one percent of coal mining jobs remained nationally, plummeting from 700,000 jobs in 1947 to 8,000 jobs in 1997 (p. 24). Today, the major components of the North East economy are service and knowledge-based employment, with manufacturing, business services, and the public sector dominating the field. As a result, many rural areas in the region continue to suffer economic hardship, “lagging behind” their counterparts in the South of England, as it is framed pejoratively in public discourse.

Taylor is an effective qualitative researcher, mining her interviewees’ empirical accounts (she interviewed both residents and public officials in the North East region) to demonstrate how class and gender are bound in “negotiations and reclamations of the past, present and future even as they are disguised as personal «choice,» individual extensions and regional expansions” (p. 71). She points out that, in the wake of globalization, people in the North East region have been re-branded as “consumers” and “citizens” (in contrast to their previous roles as “workers”) in public discourses on transformation and regeneration. Here Taylor takes issue with the idea of “regeneration” itself, a term used to symbolize a “coming forwards” and the transcending of place, gender, and social class. She argues that postmodern discourses

of “regeneration” speak primarily to the middle-classes, while marginalizing working-classes is justified by the perception that they are “lagging behind.” Taylor pointedly asks, “what does it mean for an area, and its inhabitants, to be deemed in need of «place shaping» in order to become part of a future and saved from a failed past of social-spatial «death»?” (p. 31). Her answer to this question lies in her empirical findings, which reveal that rather than problematizing the regeneration of such spaces, public officials instead wonder why working-class subjects are not “coming forward” and participating in regeneration initiatives more readily. Indeed, one’s participation in consumer culture has come to be viewed as a pre-requisite to active citizenship. Hence, middle-class tastes and behaviors are deemed superior, while “working-classness” is pathologized in twenty-first century public discourse.

Taylor makes a strong case for reconsidering the ways in which social class, gender, and race intersect across time and place. While her project focuses mainly on class and gender, she does ad-

dress the issue of race in chapter six, “Geographies of Excess,” where she emphasizes that she found no singular racist geography or narrative. Rather, her informants expressed different types of racism, which were influenced by economic factors, as well as their own sense of belonging. A major strength of this book is that Taylor’s theoretical claims are supported by her substantive empirical findings. However, her final chapter fails to drive home the points she so powerfully articulates throughout the rest of the book. Rather than offering specific policy solutions or conclusions to tie together her ideas, Taylor is deliberately brief, inviting the reader to review the themes outlined in her first chapter. Aside from this minor flaw, the book is superbly researched and crafted. Taylor reminds us that as sociologists we must rethink the interconnection between tradition and futurity, and remain alert to what avenues are closed when we rely solely on postmodern theories of identity. This book is a valuable resource for anyone interested in public policy, urban planning, as well as contemporary class and gender theory.

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