

## EUTHYPHRO'S "DILEMMA", SOCRATES' *DAIMONION*, AND PLATO'S GOD

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**Abstract.** In this paper I start with the familiar accusation that divine command ethics faces a «Euthyphro dilemma». By looking at what Plato's Euthyphro actually says, I argue that no such argument against divine-command ethics was Plato's intention, and that, in any case, no such argument is cogent. I then explore the place of divine commands and inspiration in Plato's thought more generally, arguing that Plato sees an important epistemic and practical role for both.<sup>1</sup>

### I.

The commonest use that most philosophers today make of Plato's *Euthyphro* is as the citation for what they call "the Euthyphro dilemma", which is supposed to be "an intractable difficulty" (to quote one of many instantly-googable sources) or "a fatal objection" (to quote another) to "divine-command morality", which is said to be the view that what is good or right is what God loves or wills or commands. The usual story is that the sceptical Socrates meets the credulous Euthyphro, a rather sanctimonious divine-command theorist, and sets him this question: "Is what is good, good because God wills it? Or does God will it because it is good?" But Euthyphro—so the usual story goes—cannot take the first alternative, that what is good is good because God wills it. For then the

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks for comments to Robert Audi, Chris Belshaw, Sarah Broadie, Peter Cave, Nicholas Denyer, Chris Emlyn-Hughes, John Gingell, Jakub Jirsa, Derek Matravers, Michael Morris, Mark McPherran, Jon Pike, David Sedley, Malcolm Schofield, Nigel Warburton, Robert Wardy, James Warren, Naoko Yamagata, and other members of audiences at the B Club in Cambridge, March 2009; at a departmental research conference in St. Edmund Hall, Oxford, April 2009; at the Open University Summer School in Bath, August 2009; and at the British Society for Philosophy of Religion in Oxford, Sept. 2009.

content of the good would be set by God's willing it, which would make the nature of the good arbitrary. Nor can Euthyphro take the second alternative, that God wills what is good because it is good. For then the nature of goodness is already set before God's will comes into the picture, and so God is not sovereign but subordinate to morality, and we do not need God's commands to know what goodness is.

This interpretation, it seems to me, has just two flaws. First, "the Euthyphro dilemma" is not in the *Euthyphro*. Secondly, "the Euthyphro dilemma" is not a dilemma. Let me take these flaws in turn.

"The Euthyphro dilemma" is not in the *Euthyphro*, because Socrates and Euthyphro are not talking about "what God wills". They are talking about "what the gods love": two crucial differences, since willing is obviously different from loving, and since, as Socrates points out (7b), different gods might love different things. Also, they are not talking about "what is good", but about "what is holy (*to hosion*)"; a crucial difference because, as Socrates points out (7e), "the holy" is only one kind of goodness or virtue. There are other kinds, "the just" and "the honourable" for instance, and the relation of "the holy" to these and to the good or virtue itself is central to Socrates' inquiry (see, e.g., 12a). (Still less are Socrates and Euthyphro talking about "what is morally right". Their argument is not concerned with the *orthotês*, rightness, of Euthyphro's prosecuting his father, but with its *hosiotês* or *eusebeia*, holiness or religious propriety. As many commentators have pointed out, it is anachronistic to read our concept of "the morally right" back into Plato.) Finally, Socrates is not arguing that "what is holy" is *not* "what the gods love": at *Euthyphro* 10e-11a he explicitly allows that it can be, provided the gods agree, and at *Euthyphro* 11b1 he calls "being loved by the gods" a *pathos* (a true description) of "what is holy". The point of his argument is that the mere description "what the gods love" cannot serve as a *definition* of "what is holy". But then, Socratic definition is a notoriously demanding business, so this may not be a very great restriction. In any case, it is certainly not a restriction that prevents it from being true that what is holy is loved by the gods.

And "the Euthyphro dilemma" is not a dilemma, an insoluble problem, because theistic ethicists can and do take either horn, or else refuse both horns. They can affirm with some plausibility that God's will (or, better, love) determines the nature of the good, provided they do not also

say that God's love is what we would call arbitrary (which any intelligent and civilised theist is hardly likely to say anyway). On this view it is true that *if* God had willed that infanticide be a good thing, then infanticide *would* be a good thing. But it doesn't matter: though we are in a way very much at the mercy of his divine pleasure, God is good and trustworthy, so we may be sure that infanticide is *not* his will. Or theists can with equal plausibility affirm that the nature of the good determines what God loves, provided they do not also say that this makes God subordinate to morality in some sense that undermines his sovereignty. On this view it is true that God has no more freedom to make infanticide a good thing than he has to make  $2 + 2$  equal 5, or create a stone so heavy that he cannot lift it. But it doesn't matter: God is not in the least impaired by these formal restrictions from doing anything that he actually wants to do.

Better still, theistic ethicists can refuse both horns: they can reject the whole idea that they need to choose between the God-to-good and good-to-God orders of determination.<sup>2</sup> If someone asks "Does equilaterality in triangles determine equiangularity in triangles, or is it the other way around?", we do not expect geometricians to accept this as the first line of a proof by dilemma that equilaterality and equiangularity cannot be connected features of triangles. Rather, we expect them to reject the question. One shouldn't imagine triangles *first* being equilateral, and *then*, as a result of this, somehow becoming equiangular too. We could say something parallel here: one should not imagine God's will existing *first*, and *then* shaping or creating morality; or morality existing first, and then shaping God's will. All such conceptions are misconceptions. When they put them aside, theistic ethicists will probably come to agree with

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<sup>2</sup> Another possibility: Robert Audi has suggested (Audi 2007) a distinction between the *commanded* and the *commandable* right. All sorts of things might be possible commands of God because they are *prima facie* morally right, while only some things are actual commands of God and therefore morally right *sans phrase*. The nature of the good determines the commandable right; God's choice determines the commanded right. This is not my picture, since it does seem to involve us in accepting antecedent determinants of God's will; but it is another way out of the dilemma. Again, could theists resist the dilemma by reading "because" in different senses of "because", e.g. constitutive vs causal, in "It's right because God commands it" and "God commands it because it's right"? Perhaps, though I find this combination hard to make sense of.

the “dilemma’s” proponent that, in truth, neither horn can be affirmed. But not for the reason he thinks.

## II.

“But surely there is *some* dilemma about divine commands and ethics in the *Euthyphro*, even if it isn’t the one that is usually supposed to be there. Doesn’t *Euthyphro* 10a1-2 set a dilemma? And can’t we call that the Euthyphro dilemma?”

We can *call* it what we like. But Socrates’ famous question at 10a1-2 (“Is the holy loved by the gods because it is holy, or is it holy because it is loved?”), while it certainly offers Euthyphro two options to choose between, is not very well described by calling it a dilemma. A true dilemma is, so to speak, a *modus tollens* with a disjunction in it: if p, then either q or r; but not q; and not r; so not p. But there is no suggestion that both the alternatives in front of Euthyphro are impossible for him to accept. On the contrary, Socrates shows Euthyphro which horn of the alleged dilemma to grasp. What Euthyphro should say—and confused and disgruntled though he is throughout the discussion, and ultimately discomfited at its end<sup>3</sup>, he never shows any clear sign of disagreeing with this—is that the holy is loved by the gods because it is holy, and not *vice versa*.

If we insist on speaking of a dilemma, we should say that Socrates here<sup>4</sup> grasps its second horn, “subordinating” (if that is the word) the gods to what is holy. So neither Euthyphro nor Socrates is at a loss as to how to choose between these two alternatives, as we would expect in

<sup>3</sup> Mark McPherran (2003: 32-5) interestingly raises the question where Euthyphro goes at the end of the *Euthyphro*. He departs in a hurry (15e4-5): to proceed with the prosecution of his father? He does not say so, as we might expect him to. Rather it seems that Euthyphro, so to speak, gives up his ‘place in the queue’ at the door of the court: unlike Socrates, he no longer *diatribei peri ten tou basileôs stoa*n (1a2-3). Evidently he lacks the constancy of character to bring an unjust prosecution—while Socrates does not lack the constancy to face one. So part of the irony of Socrates’ *Hoia poieis, ô hetaire?* (15e6) is that Euthyphro’s flight may be bad news and a big disappointment for one old gentleman, but is good news, and an unexpected reprieve, for another.

<sup>4</sup> Contrast *Republic* 597b, where we are told that God (*theon*) makes the Forms: an apparent subordination of the Forms to God. Perhaps Plato solves the “dilemma” in different ways for the gods plural and for God singular.

a true dilemma. Nor does Socrates suggest that his argument has refuted the whole idea of a divine-command ethics. Certainly it has refuted Euthyphro's attempted definition of the holy. But as already observed, Socrates does not argue by dilemma: he does not force Euthyphro to choose between two equally unpalatable alternatives, where the impossibility of both disproves Euthyphro's initial claim. Rather he refutes Euthyphro's definition by insisting, not entirely explicitly, on two familiar Socratic doctrines, both closely connected with his own rather specialised notion of definition. One is what we might (with what I hope is a harmless anachronism) call the logical priority of essence over accident and of activity over passivity (10b-c). The other is the doctrine that definitions must refer to the essences of things, not merely to their accidents or affections:

And it looks, Euthyphro, as if—when you were asked, about the holy, exactly what it is (*ho ti pot' estin*)—you were unwilling to make its essence (*ousia*) clear to me. Instead, you told me about some affection (*pathos ti*) pertaining to it—something that this “the holy” has undergone, namely to be loved by all the gods. But its *being* (*ho de ti on*) you have not yet spoken. (*Euthyphro* 11a8-b2; I use my own translations throughout)

The point is not the downfall of any possible system of divine-command ethics. The point is not even that what is holy might not be truly described as “what the gods love”. The point is simply that what is holy cannot be *defined* as “what the gods love”, because “what the gods love” is a term in the wrong logical category to do this defining work. If we know only that the gods love something, we still need to know *why* they love it. It is only as we begin to get answers to that sort of question—if we do—that we can begin to get any sense of the real nature of what is holy.

Naturally, if the gods disagree on what they love (8d-e), then they will be little better as authorities about what is holy than Euthyphro's own warring family (4d-e). Taking views about what is holy will then be no more than taking sides in a feud, and our interactions with the gods will remain at the lowly level where Euthyphro's clearly are—the level of an *emporikê technê* of bartering temple-sacrifice for protection, perhaps even protection from other gods. The implied critique of Euthyphro's own beliefs about what the gods command, and of the popular religious

ethics of Socrates' own day that they no doubt represent, is obvious.<sup>5</sup> It is much less obvious that we are being told by Plato that *any* ethical beliefs based on divine commands, or *any* religious ethics, should be rejected. On this evidence, the moral of the *Euthyphro* might equally be the very different point that, in order to formulate an adequate divine-command ethics, we need a more adequate theology than Euthyphro's.

### III.

There is another obvious reason why it was paradoxical to follow the usual reading of the *Euthyphro* and see Socrates as an opponent of divine-command ethics. This reason is that, as Euthyphro himself reminds us right at the start of the dialogue, Socrates himself lives by divine commands (*Euthyphro* 3a10-b5):

- EU. What things does [Meletus] say you are doing that corrupt the young?  
 SOC. My fine fellow, they are absurdities, or at least they sound absurd. For he says that I am a maker of gods; that I make new gods, and do not respect the old ones. He has indicted me on behalf of the old gods, or so he says.  
 EU. I understand, Socrates; it is because of the daemonic sign (*to daimonion*) that you say comes to you every now and then.

What is this "daemonic sign"? As Socrates very famously puts it in the *Apology*:

The explanation of this [Socrates' way of life] is what you have so often heard me tell you about in so many contexts: it is that something divine and daemonic (*theion ti kai daimonion*) comes to me, the very thing that Meletus makes fun of me for in his indictment. From my childhood on it has come to me as a sort of voice (*phônê tis*), and whenever it comes, it always holds me back from something that I am about to do—it never pushes me forward... (31c10-d6; cp. 40b, *Phaedrus* 242c1, *Euthydemus* 272e)

<sup>5</sup> Though Xenophon manages, with even more than his usual obtuseness, to present Socrates as a conventionally-minded *defender* of this *emporikê technê: khrê oun mêden el-leiponta kata dunamin timan tous theous tharrein te kai elpizein ta megista agatha* (*Memorabilia* 4.3.17). It is quite an achievement to make Socrates' views sound so dull.

We may contrast the directness of Socrates' "voice" with the most direct way in which, so far as we know, Euthyphro hears from the divine (5e-6b):

- EU. See, Socrates, what a great proof (*mega tekμήrion*) I give you that the law really stands this way—one which I have given others already... The fact is that men themselves believe that Zeus is the best and most just of the gods, and they agree that he chained up his father because he [Cronos] devoured his children, contrary to justice, and Cronos had mutilated *his* father [Ouranos] for other crimes of this sort. Yet they find fault with me for prosecuting my father when he has acted unjustly! So they are contradicting themselves in what they say about the gods and about me.
- SOC. And isn't this, Euthyphro, the very reason why I am being prosecuted—that when someone tells me this kind of story about the gods, I find it rather hard to accept?<sup>6</sup>

Euthyphro's rather boastful claim (5a2) to a unique level of accurate (*akribôs*) knowledge about everything to do with holiness is quite shown up here. Despite his confession of ignorance, it is clear that Socrates knows more about holiness and the gods than Euthyphro does.<sup>7</sup> Euthyphro is a sort of fundamentalist of the Greek myths. The basis of his belief that the gods command him to prosecute his father is that the myths

<sup>6</sup> Compare *Phaedrus* 229e-230a, where Socrates rejects the (Anaxagorean?) project of seeking rationalising explanations for stories of the gods, and even says that he does accept traditional theology: "I cannot yet know myself, in compliance with the Delphic inscription, and it seems ridiculous to me to inquire into unrelated matters when I am still ignorant about that. And so I pass by these questions about the gods, and accept the conventional view about them (*peithomenos de tōi nomizomenōi peri autōn*); as I said just now, I don't investigate them myself". Similarly he says at *Apology* 35d7 "I believe in the gods as none of my accusers does": *nomizō... hōs oudeis tōn emōn katēgorōn*. There is an obvious *double entendre* in *hōs*: Socrates' theism differs from Meletus' not just, as it were, in quantity, but in quality too. (Thanks for discussion to Mark McPherran. For his views on this issue see further McPherran 1997a.)

<sup>7</sup> *Cratylus* 396d ff. has Socrates claiming to have been inspired by his recent conversation with Euthyphro. But this is obviously ironic. The *Euthyphro* says nothing about etymologies, which is what Socrates is here claiming to speak about with inspiration. Nor is there any sign in the *Euthyphro* that Socrates learns anything at all from his conversation with Euthyphro. The passage proves little except that the *Cratylus* was written after the *Euthyphro*, which presumably we expected anyway.

say that Zeus did something horrible to his father because his father had done something even worse. And Euthyphro just accepts these myths as providing him with examples to justify his own actions by. It is hard to imagine a more rickety and second-hand basis for ethics. The central problem with Euthyphro's way of thinking is not so much that it commits him to relying on divine commands, as that he cannot give us any reason to agree with his belief that the bizarre and savage myths that he mentions here should have anything like the status of commands or examples for anyone. Of course Socrates too is not above appealing—in a rather more controlled fashion—to the Greek myths while considering ethical questions (see e.g. *Apology* 28c-d, praising Achilles' fearlessness of death). However, Socrates in the *Republic* explicitly and directly bans his hearers from providing a pretext for their own misdeeds by appealing to the gods' misdeeds, in a passage where Plato quite clearly alludes to *Euthyphro* 4b: "When a young man is listening, it is not to be said that it is nothing special for someone to do the very worst kind of injustice, or again to punish his father's injustice in the extremest possible way, because it is no more than what the greatest and first of gods have done already" (*Republic* 378b1-5). Moreover, Socrates also knows something directly of the gods, by inner experience.

Does Euthyphro too hear directly from God in his inner experience, as well as being an expert in the myths? Apparently he would claim that; he certainly claims to foretell the future, at 3c, and it looks as if such claims were at least often based on claimed direct experience of a 'divine voice' or some such experience. However, notice this: at *Euthyphro* 3e Socrates invites a prophecy of how his and Euthyphro's cases will go, and Euthyphro (3e3) replies "Well no doubt there will be no big deal, Socrates; you will contest your case according to wisdom (*kata noun*), as I think I will mine". So the only time in the dialogue that Euthyphro actually gives us a prophecy, he apparently gets it spectacularly wrong—certainly about his own case, and probably about Socrates' too. Since (we might say) Socrates will indeed conduct his case *kata noun*, perhaps Euthyphro does have hold of something genuine. But that something genuine is also something Delphic, and Euthyphro misunderstands the ambiguous phrase *agônisthai kata noun*.

The evidence could hardly be clearer that Socrates' report of his *daimonion* is a report of a direct religious experience of being divinely

commanded. We should not follow some recent writers in attempting to naturalise the *daimonion* into no more than a moral or rational hunch (so Vlastos), or the voice of reason within him (Nussbaum 1985: 234), or into the voice of Socrates' own subconscious (Weiss 1998: 19)<sup>8</sup>. Of course, if you are a philosophical naturalist, then (from an external, *de re* standpoint) you will want to naturalise Socrates' *daimonion* somehow. Be that as it may, there are no grounds for the corresponding internal, *de dicto* claim that *Socrates himself* saw his own *daimonion* this way. As Vlastos (1999: 57) puts it, we have here to face

a fact about Socrates which has been so embarrassing to modern readers that a long line of Platonic scholarship has sought. . . to explain it away: Socrates' acceptance of the supernatural. . . . If we are to use Plato's and Xenophon's testimony about Socrates at all we must take it as a brute fact—as a premiss fixed for us in history—that, far ahead of his time as Socrates is in so many ways, in this part of his thought he is a man of his time. He subscribes unquestioningly to the age-old view that side by side with the physical world accessible to our senses, there exists another, populated by mysterious beings, personal like ourselves, but, unlike ourselves, having the power to invade at will the causal order to which our own actions are confined. . . how they act upon us we cannot hope to understand. But the fact is that they do and their communications to us through dreams and oracles is [*sic*] one of the inscrutable ways in which they display their power over us.<sup>9</sup>

Vlastos speaks here of Socrates' supernaturalism as "unquestioning" and wholly traditional. But even the earliest evidence, as far back as Meletus' indictment as cited above, says clearly that Socrates' theism had become

<sup>8</sup> "The *daimonion* is not. . . a voice independent of Socrates' own thinking and intuition that instructs him to contravene their guidance but rather a voice inspired by Socrates' thinking and intuition, by beliefs that are for the moment "subconscious"—if the reader will forgive the anachronism—a voice that gives him the strength to implement these "subconscious" beliefs when he is tempted to do otherwise. Indeed, when there is no tension between Socrates' imminent act and his deeper sense of what is right, when Socrates has no reservations, no qualms, about the course he is about to pursue, his *daimonion* is silent."

<sup>9</sup> Cp. McPherran 1997: 6: "by [Socrates' religious language] he is [on one line of interpretation] simply referring surreptitiously in the language of 'the many' to the 'divine' inner promptings of his utterly secular, completely human powers of ratiocination. . . . In my judgement, this portrait of Socrates is the result of slighting and misinterpreting the evidence of our texts."

in important ways very untraditional, precisely as a result of Socrates' own questioning. (Contrast *Phaedrus* 229e-230a, cited in Footnote 5, for Socrates' willingness to leave traditionalism alone on grounds of ignorance, with *Timaeus* 40d7 ff., cited below, for Plato's much less eirenic attitude to traditional beliefs.)

At the level of Socrates' own self-understanding it is perfectly clear, both from Plato's evidence and from Xenophon's (*Memorabilia* 1.2-5), that Socrates takes the voice of the *daimonion* to be a form of supernatural guidance quite separate from the guidance that any of us might get, and that Socrates himself obviously sometimes gets, from doing some careful reasoning, or from trying to plumb the depths of our own minds. For if the *daimonion* were not, on Socrates' own conception of it, explicitly supernatural, what could be the point of his argument at *Apology* 27c that, since he believes in *daimonia*, he must also believe in *daimones*, and so cannot be accused by Meletus of atheism?

This restraining voice is not "virtually worthless" from a rational point of view;<sup>10</sup> and in any case, the restraining voice is not the only supernatural voice that Socrates hears. If we take *au pied de la lettre* his last remark just quoted, that his *daimonion* always speaks negatively, to forbid, and never positively commands, then the voice that Socrates talks about a little later in the *Apology*, as positively commanding him to philosophise, must be a different voice, or voices:

This task [of philosophising], as I say, has been commanded for me by (the) God (*tôi theōi*), both by oracles, and by dreams, and by every way there is of commanding a divine destiny (*theia moira*) for any man. (*Apology* 33c5-8; cp. 37e6)

<sup>10</sup> Pace Brickhouse and Smith 1989: 253-4: "once we notice how little information Socrates gets from a daimonic alarm, we can see why Socrates could never be made wise by his *daimonion's* alarms. After all, when the *daimonion* tells Socrates that he should desist from what he is about to do, he can be completely certain that he must not continue what he was about to do. But this information tells him nothing about what it is that is wrong, when it is wrong, why it is wrong, and what it is to be wrong. The god does not lie to Socrates, but does manage to tell him next to nothing through the *daimonion*. What Socrates gets from his sign, therefore, is virtually worthless for the pursuit of the sorts of truth Socrates seeks philosophically—truth that explains and defines, and which thus can be applied to judgments and deliberations required for the achievement of the truly good life for men." More about this implicit contrast between seeking truth *philosophically* and in other ways towards the end of this paper.

("For any man": notice the generality of this. Socrates tells us at *Republic* 496c2-4 that he doubts that many others have experienced *to daimonion sêmeion*—though perhaps a few have. Even if the *daimonion* is almost unique to Socrates, the other sorts of religious experience and divine guidance that he also claims to have had hardly are. So I doubt we should infer, with Pierre Destrée (Destrée and Smith 2005), that Plato depicts Socrates as uniquely divinely guided because he is the only true philosopher. For one thing, Plato does not think that Socrates *is* a true philosopher: what Socrates has is the right way in to the true philosophy, Platonism, but not Platonism itself.)

It is not obvious that this *theos* who commands Socrates is straightforwardly Apollo, whose ambiguous oracle Socrates interprets as telling him to begin his quest for a wiser man than himself (*Apology* 21a-23b). For one thing, texts like *Euthyphro* 6a6-9 show us good reason to doubt that Socrates believed in the traditional Apollo at all, hence would have seen oracular utterances from an "Apollonian" source as really messages not from that Apollo, but at least from Apollo non-traditionally conceived, and/or from the being whom Socrates calls *ho theos*, which we may translate either "God" or "the god". Thus at *Apology* 21b7 Socrates asks himself what "the god can mean" by the oracle, and takes it for granted that the god cannot be lying—"for that would be against his nature". But a host of texts and traditions which Socrates must have known prove that lying and deception, like the rest of the anthropomorphic characteristics condemned in the *Republic* (e.g. at 378d, 379e), are not against *Apollo's* nature, not at least on the traditional conception of Apollo: Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1228 ff. for a start, where Cassandra recounts how she double-crossed Apollo, and he double-crossed her back. Again, it may have been Apollo's oracle that started Socrates' quest, but we have no decisive evidence that Socrates thought that the many other portents that he mentions here were from Apollo, not at least if that means an Apollo anything like Aeschylus' Apollo.<sup>11</sup>

What Socrates did think is that these dreams, visions and voices came (more or less directly: perhaps the *daimonion* is an intermediary) from God, and that they came to him as divine commands. That makes it as

<sup>11</sup> For a different view see McPherran 2005. As McPherran has reminded me, Socrates is at least orthodox enough to compose a hymn to Apollo in prison (*Phaedo* 60d ff.)—though both Cebes and Euenus seem rather astonished to hear that he is doing this.

certain as it could be that, whatever else the *Euthyphro* is meant to be about, it cannot be intended as an attack on divine-command ethics. It is better understood, I suggest, as part of Plato's campaign against contemporary Athens' dominant theology of (as we might call it) chaotic polytheism, and in favour of something more like the ethical monotheism that is familiar to those of us who live in cultures shaped by the Abrahamic religions. Thus even when Socrates speaks of gods plural in the *Euthyphro*, what he says of them is that *ouden gar hêmin estin agathon, ho ti an mê ekeinoi dôsin* (15a1; cp. *Stm* 273b8)—almost like the Anglican Eucharistic affirmation that “all that we have comes from you, and of your own do we give you”. The dialogue's deepest moral is not that divine-command ethics should be rejected. It is that Plato's ethical theism is preferable to chaotic polytheism, because it gives us the only possible context in which divine-command ethics can be sustained. For only if God is good can it be reasonable to hope that what God commands will converge with what is morally right.

“But surely Plato can't give any respectable place in his thought to anything like Socrates' daimonion! Whatever the historical Socrates (or any other Socrates distinguishable from Plato) may have thought, Plato's sarcastic dismissal of *manteia*, inspiration, prophecy, and the like is one of the most frequent themes in his canon. How could Plato of all people, austere rationalist as he is, possibly retain such a relic of primitive religious irrationalism in his philosophy? Mustn't there be too much irony in his reports of Socrates' supposed religious experiences for us to take them seriously?”<sup>12</sup>

Briefly, my answer is No. I explain that answer in the next section.

<sup>12</sup> Or in Vlastos' words (1999: 69): “For Socrates diviners, seers, oracle-givers, poets are all in the same boat. All of them in his view are know-nothings, or rather, worse: unaware of their sorry epistemic state [unaware that they don't have the requisite sort of understanding], they set themselves up as repositories of wisdom emanating from a divine, all-wise source. What they say may be true; but even when it is true, they are in no position to discern what there is in it that is true. If their hearer were in a position to discern this, then *he* would have the knowledge denied to them; the knowledge would come from the application of *his reason* to what these people say without reason.” Note the conflict between this Socrates-as-rationalist and the Socrates-as-traditionalist of the Vlastos quotation on my p.6.

## IV.

At *Apology* 22b2-c8 Socrates is explaining to the judges at his trial how he discovered, to his surprise, that the poets were not wiser than him:

... pretty well anyone present could explain those poems better than the very men who wrote them. I soon recognised that the thing about the poets was that they too [like the orators] did not do what they did by wisdom (*sophiai*). Instead they did it by some sort of natural instinct and by divine indwelling (*physei tini kai enthousiazontes*), like prophets or soothsayers (*theomanteis kai khrêsmôidoi*): who also say many fine things, but do not know anything of what they are talking about (*isasin de ouden hôn legousin*)... Their poetic gifts made them think that they were the wisest of all men in other things besides poetry as well; but mistakenly.

This is just the sort of passage that is easy to read as Plato engaging in a "sarcastic dismissal", as I called it above, of the claims of any sort of inspiration or revelation. There are plenty of other passages like it: *Ion* 533c-534e, for instance. The most strikingly similar—at times it is almost a doublet of the *Apology* passage—is in the conclusion of the *Meno* (99b-e):

... it was not by wisdom (*sophiai*), nor by being wise, that men like these led their cities—men such as Themistocles and his circle, and those whom Anytus here mentioned just now... So if it was not by knowledge (*epistêmêi*), it must have happened by the only alternative, well-founded opinion (*eudoxiai*). That is what these politicians used to direct their cities; in respect of rational understanding (*pros to phronein*), their condition was no different from that of soothsayers and prophets (*khrêsmôidoi kai theomanteis*). For these too say many true things, but do not know anything of what they are talking about (*isasin de ouden hôn legousin*)... those soothsayers and prophets whom we have just mentioned—and all who are artistically inclined (*poiêtikous*) as well—succeed in many great things in what they do and say, even though they lack mind (*noun mê ekhontes*). For this reason, we could rightly call them divine (*theious*). And we should say that the politicians are no less divine and divinely-indwelt, being inspired and possessed by god (*theious, enthousiazein, epipnous, katekhomevous ek tou theou*)... So [virtue seems to be] something that comes upon us by a divine dispensation without mind (*theiai moirai paragignomenê aneu nou*).

It is easy to read passages like these two as constituting clear and decisive evidence that Plato (or Socrates?) has no sympathy at all for the idea that anything might be learned from special experiences of apparently direct inspiration or revelation, whether those supposed revelations are religious, or ethical, or aesthetic. Since inspiration is just a kind of stumbling around in the dark, the “praise” of Themistocles and his circle that Socrates offers here is obviously (on this reading) no more than a veiled condemnation of them and their methods. They do not work by knowledge but at best by true opinion—and as the *Republic* shows at length (the reading continues), there cannot be a clearer condemnation of their ways than that. One deservedly influential recent interpretation of Plato, Nussbaum’s in her celebrated 1986 essay “Madness, reason, and recantation in the *Phaedrus*”, takes as read this early hostility to claims of inspiration, and assumes that it is Plato’s uniform and consistent attitude until the time of the dialogue she focuses on, the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates’ famous “recantation” (242d ff.) introduces a rather less austere and rationalistic approach to such claims.

But in fact even the earliest evidence is much more equivocal than such a reading suggests. For instance, the two passages I have cited above, one from a central early-period dialogue, the *Meno*, and the other from what may be Plato’s very first philosophical publication, the *Apology*, are not, on a closer reading, merely “sarcastic dismissals” of the claims of inspiration. There are passages in Plato where it is right to hear sarcastic dismissiveness as the tone of the text (for instance Socrates’ exchanges with Thrasymachus, Callicles, and Polus). But the sense of these passages from the *Meno* and the *Apology* is more nuanced.

Consider first these passages’ contexts. Socrates at *Apology* 22b-c cannot be concerned only to dismiss with sarcasm the very idea that divine inspiration or revelation could have any authority. For Socrates himself appeals to inspiration throughout the *Apology*. Note his own prophecy of Athens’ future at 38c. Of course this could be Plato retrojecting words into Socrates’ mouth in the light of hindsight. But even then Plato is still committed to the claim that this was *the sort of thing* that Socrates said. Which we see anyway from the other most notable appeal to inspiration in the *Apology*, which introduces this very passage: at 22a4, he tells us that his examination of the poets was prompted by a divine command.

Similarly, Socrates' aim in *Meno* 99b-e cannot just be to mock politicians, poets, and priests for their dependence on the illusions and fatuities of supposed divine inspiration. For the deepest and most important teaching of the *Meno* is introduced by a passage in which it is possible to see Socrates himself as being overcome by a divine inspiration (81a ff.). Even on the most modest interpretation of this passage, Socrates here appeals to the authority of certain priests and priestesses "about divine matters" (81a4-5). It is quite impossible to square this way of proceeding with Plato's alleged "austere rationalism". (These wise ones have, intriguingly enough, succeeded in their studies of their own enterprise to a point where they are able to "give an account" of it. Tantalisingly, however, this is an account which Socrates does not pass on to Meno and us.)

Similar structural and contextual remarks can be made about other early-period texts which ought, on a reading like Vlastos' or Nussbaum's, to be straightforward exemplars of a high-minded rejection of the claims of inspiration. Euthyphro's initial attitude to Socrates (3c) is to see him as a kindred spirit; if Euthyphro is laughed at for offering prophecies in the *ekklēsia*, the kind of things that bring Socrates too the Athenians' derision and slander do not seem to him very different. Even the *Republic* has at least one myth in it (614b ff.), and even the *Crito* (44b) reports a prophetic dream of Socrates', while the *Phaedo* (60e-61b) reports multiple dreams and a divine command to him—a command, what's more, to practise poetry.

Again, in the *Apology* passage, notice Socrates' embarrassment (*aiskhynomai*, 22b6) at relating his discovery about the poets. Is his talk of embarrassment here mere affectation of what he does not actually feel, a clumsy attempt to make what he is saying more acceptable to his listeners? That is how we must read it if we think (like Vlastos) that Socrates' real point here, ironically concealed, is merely that poets talk a lot of irrational rubbish, which true philosophers in their superiority will shun. On that reading, similarly, when Socrates says that the poets *legousi polla kai kala* (22c4; cp. *Euthyphro* 13e12), we will have to take these words as nearly the opposite of his real view. It is more natural to take both remarks at face value. Socrates really is embarrassed, and the source of his embarrassment is that he really does think the poets' works fine productions—yet cannot square their admirable qualities with the chaotic and irrational way in which, it seems to him, all poetry comes to be.

Similarly with *Meno* 99b-e, the point of equating poetry (and the political and priestly arts) with *eudoxia*, well-founded belief, as opposed to equating them with *epistêmê*, knowledge, is not to dismiss poetry, politics, and priestcraft as completely worthless. Rather, the point is the same as the point of the famous comparison between knowledge and true belief—the image of the road to Larisa—that Plato’s Socrates has just offered us at *Meno* 96e-98b. Knowledge and true belief can produce the same good results; the difference between them lies not in their results, but in the *unaccountability* of the good results of true belief. With mere true belief, there is by definition no explaining how we get the good results we do; we just *do* get those results, and that’s all we can say (*Symposium* 202a4-9). This difference between knowledge and true belief may have grave consequences in some areas—for example, as the *Meno* and *Protagoras* and *Laches* all stress, it is a difference that makes true belief impossible to convey to another by teaching, or at any rate by rational teaching. But it does not abrogate from the genuine admirability, indeed the divine quality, of the good results that true belief can have. Both Socrates’ mission in the *Apology*, and Themistocles’ political skill in the *Meno*, come *theiai moirai*, by divine allotment. So when Plato’s Socrates describes politicians such as Themistocles as *theious* he is not merely being snide. His admiration for their achievements is perfectly sincere. What complicates his attitude to them is not an undertone of sarcasm, but of puzzlement at how they can be so divine in their achievements, and yet so innocent of any touch of real understanding of what they are about.

Compare Socrates’ puzzlement, in the *Ion*, about how Ion can be (532c) so expert in understanding and expounding *Homer*, yet so dozy and incompetent when it comes to *Hesiod*. The answer is that his understanding of Homer is a *theia dunamis*, not a *tekhne* or *epistêmê*, *Ion* 533d2 (it too comes *theiai moirai*: *Ion* 534c1). And the present point generalises in a way that shows up something wrong in W.R.M. Lamb’s comment, in his introduction to the *Ion* in the Loeb edition (p.403), that in that dialogue Plato insists “that no art... can be of real worth unless it is based on some systematic knowledge.” The point is rather that art like Homer’s clearly *is* of real worth—there is no irony in Socrates’ description of Homer as *aristos kai theiotatos tôn poiêtôn*, *Ion* 530b10—even though it isn’t based on systematic knowledge. The puzzle, and it is a deep one, is how this can be.

We might feel the same puzzlement about Socrates himself. How can Socrates' philosophical inquiries have such remarkable results, when he himself knows nothing? Famously, Socrates' own explanation is that he is a sort of midwife of ideas: he produces no children of his own, but helps bring others' conceptions to the light (*Theaetetus* 148c-151d). Mightn't something similar be true of Themistocles' sort? Mightn't they too be able to bring about in others a knowledge or expertise that they cannot attain to themselves? The trouble with this suggestion is that Socrates, for all his looking, never finds anyone who actually possesses any such *politikê tekhnê*. Come to that, we never in the early dialogues see Socrates' midwifery bring about any successful labours. Given that so many of those dialogues end in *aporia*, it is hard to see who Plato thinks are Socrates' successful patients. (Perhaps he has his own philosophical school in mind: see Sedley 2005. More about that suggestion later.)

Given the scant results of Socrates' own rationalistic endeavours, the dialogues' attitude to politicians like Themistocles is generally not one of simple denunciation. The attitude is summed up by the question posed by the *Meno* quotation above: how can they be so "divine" (*theious*) when they are also "lacking in mind" (*noun mê ekhontes*)?<sup>13</sup> And this use of the word *nous* seems not to be an accident, since both for Socrates in the *Phaedo* (97c1), and for Plato in the *Timaeus* (39e8) and *Laws* (897c6, d9), Mind, *Nous*, is apparently a name of God. Its use here presses what struck Plato as a forceful paradox.

## V.

What is the paradox? The parallel may seem outlandish, but it is almost Pascal's: *le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point*.<sup>14</sup> It is that inspiration or revelation or intuition seems to be a possible route to the truth—as it clearly is for Socrates, for instance. Yet we cannot rationally explain *how* it gets us to the truth. By all the stern rules of philosophical

<sup>13</sup> In the *Ion* God not only bypasses but actually *takes away* the *nous* of rhapsodes: *dia tauta de ho theos exairoumenos toutôn ton noun*, 534c9-10.

<sup>14</sup> *Le coeur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connaît point. On le sent en mille choses. C'est le cœŕ qui sent Dieu, et non la raison. Voilà ce que c'est que la foi parfaite, Dieu sensible au cœŕ.* – Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, IV.277 (p. 458 in Brunschvicg).

rationality, that can only make inspiration suspect. Plato (and Socrates) can be read as regarding its directness and certainty as a kind of *cheat*: when we should be earning our certainties by the long and arduous road of the dialectical education that the *Republic* lays out for us, simply to claim to *see* the truth has all the advantages of theft over honest toil. We might say, with a second and even more outrageous parallel, that it is as bad as getting a computer to find the meaning of life for you:

“You just let the machines get on with the adding up,” warned Majikthise, “and we’ll take care of the eternal verities, thank you very much. You want to check your legal position, you do mate. Under law the Quest for Ultimate Truth is quite clearly the inalienable prerogative of your working thinkers. Any bloody machine goes and actually finds it and we’re straight out of a job aren’t we? I mean what’s the use of our sitting up half the night arguing that there may or may not be a God if this machine only goes and gives us his bleeding phone number the next morning?” (Adams 1979: 129-30)

Unlike Majikthise, Plato takes no pleasure in prolonging intellectual struggle and bewilderment for its own sake (still less for cash). But he is convinced that we cannot claim real knowledge unless we can not only see the truth, but also explain what makes it the truth, and how each truth connects to the others. If we are so lucky that intuition or revelation or inspiration *gives* us the truth, we should not be ungrateful for that; but we should not be satisfied either. Beyond true belief, there is still the long road of justification to travel. And what we are likely to have by the end of this journey is so different from what we started with, that we should not speak of knowledge as simply an *upgraded* version of true belief at all. Most obviously in the *Republic* and *Theaetetus*, knowledge is apparently so different from true belief or perception that true belief and perception are not even ingredients of it.

However, there is a further twist of paradox in the tale. The ultimate aim of the *Republic*’s dialectical education is itself a sort of direct, revelatory perception, acquaintance, or intuition: “True Being... is visible (*theaté*) only to *Nous*” (*Phaedrus* 247c8; cp. *theôrôn* at *Symposium* 210d4). Hence we find Plato apparently denouncing this-worldly perception in almost the same breath as he exalts the perception of the Forms (*Rep* 517b1-9). Knowledge, as the *Theaetetus* insists, is not perception in any ordinary or mundane sense. And yet at the end of the philosopher’s laborious ascent,

by way of reasoning and hard thought and logical work, what we find is that the ultimate knowledge is itself something so like perception in its directness, immediacy, and non-discursive simplicity that Plato never finds a better or more illuminating image to describe it by.

The worry underlying Socrates' Dream (*Theaetetus* 201e-202d) is about this similarity. The worry is that, for all the disanalogies between Plato's own view and the empiricist theories that (on my reading, which is controversial, but not to be defended here: see Chappell 2005) the *Theaetetus* is devoted to attacking, still there is a deep structural parallel between empiricism and Platonism. Both rest all discursive, propositional, rational knowledge on a foundation of non-discursive, non-propositional, surd acquaintance. Hence both raise the paradox that the ultimate objects of what we would like to call knowledge are themselves not *reasoned about* or *known*, but *perceived* (202b6-7).

Of course, given the differences between physical and intellectual perception that Plato also stresses, these parallels between the two kinds of perception would not amount to a revalidation of physical perception and other less-than-ideally-rational forms of intuition, such as inspiration and religious experience, were it not for this small point about the vision of the Form of the Good: it's impossible. Or at least, that vision is an ideal limit of the understanding. It is what all our mortal, body-imprisoned attempts at knowledge and wisdom strive towards. But we have little reason to think that any of us can actually *reach* the godlike state of contemplation of the Form of the Good that Plato urges us to imitate (*Theaetetus* 176b2, *Timaeus* 90b-c) so long as we remain in this life; or that we can know beyond all possibility of error that we have reached it, even when we have.

Certainly *Socrates*—whether that means the historical one, or Plato's character—makes no claim to have attained this state. On the contrary, he explicitly disavows any such knowledge (*Rep* 506c1):

"What then?" I said, "do you think it justice for someone to speak about what he doesn't know, as if he did know? ...Have you not noticed that all opinions without knowledge are things of shame? The best of them are blind. Or can you see any difference between blind men who take the right road [surely an allusion to *Meno* 96e ff.], and those who have a true belief without *nous*?"

The highest and most metaphysically ambitious doctrine—that of the *Republic*—that the wisest of all men—Socrates—can offer us: even this is not knowledge, but only true belief, an image (*eikona*, 509b1), a comparison or analogy (*apeikasia*, 514a1). It is not the good itself that he offers us, but only *an interest-payment* on the good. (The Greek word is *tokos*, literally ‘child’ (507a2); Plato means something derived from the good, by way of the good’s own generative powers, which shares its properties and reveals them in small compass.) Even at his highest pitch Socrates is not a knower but a true-believer, with all that that implies. So in the *Euthyphro* he possesses, unwillingly, an even scarier skill than Daedalus’, destabilising not only his own products but others’ as well (11e2). Very commonly in Plato anything like positive doctrine on Socrates’ lips is presented as a dream, or a vision, or a mere image, or the report of some inspired prophet or *sophos*. No doubt too it is Socrates’—or indeed Plato’s—lack of knowledge that answers the old question why Plato writes dialogues rather than treatises like, say, Plotinus’.

The moral is clear.<sup>15</sup> Since creatures of imperfect knowledge like us cannot hope to attain perfect truth by the rational route of knowledge, we should not neglect the possibility of attaining truth by routes of less rational purity. In fact, if *Phaedrus* 244a8-10 is to be believed, we should actively *court* madness: for “the greatest of goods come to us through madness, provided it is given by divine gift” (*theiai dosei*; cp. *theia moira* above).

In that famous speech Socrates goes on to distinguish three kinds of *mania*: *mantikê*, foretelling of the future, a name which he etymologically connects with *mania* (244b); *prophêteia*, divining of *miasma* (244e);<sup>16</sup> and poetry (245a). He then argues (245b8 ff.) that *erôs* should

<sup>15</sup> Vlastos (1999: 66) explicitly opposes my reading: “however plausible it may seem”, the view that Socrates “would look to the intimations of his *daimonion* as a source of moral knowledge apart from reason and superior to it” “is unsupportable by textual evidence and is in fact inconsistent with it”. However, Vlastos’ chief argument against the reading is that what Socrates gets from his *daimonion* (and other supernatural sources) is not *knowledge*. But that is not in dispute: my claim is only that Socrates gets true beliefs and reliable guidance from such sources. Anyway, Socrates does not get knowledge from his reasoning either.

<sup>16</sup> Is the diagnosis of *miasma* what is meant? 265b suggests rather a sort of religious transport that lifts its subject out of a sense of *miasma* and other kinds of trouble in the soul—perhaps a little like the sense of relief or forgiveness of sin sometimes reported by

be distinguished as a fourth kind. This catalogue of kinds of madness is open-ended: there is nothing to stop Socrates from adding the voice of his *daimonion* as a fifth kind, or the positive commands that he hears through dreams as portents as a sixth kind, or indeed more than one kind, of *mania*. Perhaps Socrates also thinks that he already experiences the first three kinds of madness anyway. We have already noted his claim to tell the future at *Apology* 38c (cp. *Phaedrus* 242c), and his practice of poetry in *Phaedo* 603-61b; and maybe finding the hole in a bad argument (or character) is as much like divining a *miasma* as it is like the activity of a midwife (notice too the reference to the *daimonion* at *Theaetetus* 151a3, helping Socrates to decide whom to associate with). In all of these ways and others we can hope, by the gift of the gods, to attain truth. How churlish to refuse that gift, where we cannot hope to attain perfect knowledge anyway.

## VI.

Something like this, we might conclude, must be the “more adequate theology” on the basis of which Euthyphro—and Socrates—might have constructed their divine-command ethics. On the Platonic conception (we might now suggest), Euthyphro’s crude exchange-and-mart cultus is replaced by *homoiōsis theōi*, the project of becoming God-like by getting as close as we can to God’s or *Nous*’s own activity, the philosophical contemplation of the Forms, perhaps even of the Form of the Good itself. We might suggest that one way in which this getting-close can happen—and always the best—is by way of philosophical understanding and reasoning. Where that gives out, however—and it gives out frequently—we are not entirely without resource. Inspiration and revelation is possible too. And this can be a way to the truth, even when it cannot, on its own, be a way to the understanding that goes with knowledge. Such forms of insight may not come rationally, *by way of* reasoning, but that does not make them irrational, contrary to reasoning. *Pace* Vlastos (1999: 56), there is simply no clash between the Socrates who describes himself as

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Christian revivalists, e.g. in Wesley’s journals. The lack of match between the two lists may just be an anomaly.

a follower of divine commands and the Socrates who describes himself as “the sort of man who is persuaded by nothing in me but the proposition which appears to me to be the best when I reason about it” (*Crito* 46b). After all, the proposition which “appears best” to me can easily be: “Obey the god”.

More generally, there can be perception of truths that we cannot arrive at by reasoning.<sup>17</sup> We can have reason, as Socrates has reason, to trust and obey what we take to be a revelation of God’s will for us—even where we do not fully understand that revelation. *Timaeus* 70d-72b tells us that alongside the part of the soul that deliberates, and the part that only cares for food and drink and other bodily desires—indeed, physically in between them—there lies the liver, which receives confusedly, a little like a mirror, the clarities of the rational mind, and conveys them to the appetites in a vivid form that they will understand. That, Plato tells us, is why the liver is the bodily seat of divination, and a rational man should take its promptings seriously, as the indirect evidence that they are of the dictates of reason (*Timaeus* 71e8-72a2): “no one who is in his right mind (*ennous*) attains true and divinely inspired divination, but only when the power of his understanding is fettered by sleep, or when he is disinhibited through illness or some divine visitation (*dia tina enthousiasmon*). But it is the part of a sane man (*emphronos*) to remember what has been spoken and what has been recollected by divination”.

The conception still needs a bit more refining; for even though (as this *Timaeus* passage shows) it has some support in Plato’s own writings, still, in Plato’s own terms, this conclusion has something importantly unsatisfactory about it. At least we have—I hope—shaken off the prejudice that anyone who claims to hear God speak is “simply insane or seriously deluded” (Long 2006: 65). Still, on this conception, divine commands, inspirations, and revelations turn out to be a kind of *pis aller*, a quick and dirty route to truth that is permissible for us only because we cannot manage the longer and purer route of dialectic. Perhaps we should hold such revelations at arm’s length if we can; perhaps we should “investigate the concept of God” “no further than is needed to bring it in line with” our ethical views (Vlastos 1999: 60)? But recall the final message of Soc-

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<sup>17</sup> See Chappell 2008 for an argument that the reasoning and perceiving alternatives may both be available, in principle at least, in ethics.

rates' palinode in the *Phaedrus*, which is not merely that inspiration gets you where reasoning would also have got you—less logically and rationally, but faster—but rather that there are many places that *only* inspiration or ecstatic vision can get you to, places that reason alone will be no more able to arrive at than a frigid speech like Lysias' or Socrates' first will win a lover worth winning.

For complex-psyche-d creatures like us—it might be different for the Demiurge—a purely calculative or ratiocinative grasp of the Form of the Good, with no wonder or joy or love or exaltation involved in it, would not be a *grasp* of the Form of the Good at all; no more than Mary the Colour Scientist can know everything that there is to be known about redness, just by fully understanding the physics of redness. The fourth kind of madness is the madness of the lover *and* the philosopher (*Phdr.* 249a1, d5), the man whose vision of beauty “down here” (*têide*) causes him to recollect the *true* beauty: “he sprouts wings and longs to take the upward flight, but when he cannot, he gazes upwards like a bird, neglecting things below” (*Phdr.* 249e7-9).

Having once achieved (some measure of) an experiential grasp of the good, it is not just natural, but irresistible, to try and rationalise the experience, to try and make sense of it or spin a theory out of it. Of course this effort can bear fruit, by helping us to understand what has happened to us; and of course experience needs to be subject to the jurisdiction of reason, because experience can, and notoriously often does, lead us astray when we misinterpret its frequently ambiguous oracles.

When experience leads us astray, a dilemma can certainly emerge. This dilemma is a genuine one, but the problem it poses is not (just) theoretical but practical—about whether to follow the experience, or the reasoning that suggests that the experience is misleading—and it would be better called Abraham's dilemma than Euthyphro's. And anyway, in our enthusiasm to register the truth that experience can lead us astray, we should not miss the equal truth that reasoning can lead us astray too—as William James points out, in a different context:

Personal religion will prove itself more fundamental than theology or ecclesiasticism. Churches, when once established, live second-hand upon tradition; but the *founders* of every church owed their power originally to the fact of their direct personal communion with the divine. Not only the superhuman

founders, the Christ, the Buddha, Mahomet, but all the originators of Christian sects have been in this case [as too, we can now add, was Socrates]; —so personal religion should still seem to be the primordial thing, even to those who esteem it incomplete. (William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p.30; quoted from Hedley 2008: 103)

No doubt experience without rationality is (that word again) blind. But it is equally true that rationality without experience—rationality bereft of the kinds of roots in a foundation of experience that Socrates' Dream describes—is empty. What Plato at his best (e.g. in the *Phaedrus*) points us towards is not merely the slightly condescending moral that revelation or inspiration or divine command has its part to play, given our unavoidable cognitive deficiencies, in getting us towards truths which are, however, *best* grasped by systematic reasoning. Rather the moral is *experience first*; for it is only once you *have* experienced that you can have anything worth systematising.

How far such systematising should go, and how much it can in fact add to the cogency of the original vision (whether religious, or artistic, or intellectual, or ethical), is a question for another occasion. My own growing conviction is that most contemporary philosophers, in their understanding of religion, of ethics, and indeed of Plato, tend to try and persuade each other and us of the cogency of a theory or a generalisation, when what is really cogent—what really persuaded them—is not the theory or the generalisation at all, but the particular experience from which the theory is an extrapolation, the generalisation an *over-generalisation*. They tend, in short, to overrate the value of system, and to under-rate or even ignore the value of epiphany.

To seek our Divinity merely in Books and Writings, is to *seek the living among the dead*; we do but in vain seek God many times in these, where his Truth too is not so much enshrined, as entomb'd: no; *intra te quaere Deum*, seek for God within thine own soul; he is best discerned... as *Plotinus* phraseth it [*Enneads* 5.3.17], by an *Intellectual touch of him*... the soul itself hath its sense as well as the Body. (John Smith, *Discourses*, Cambridge 1660, quoted from Hedley 2008: 93; cp. Taliaferro and Teply 2004: 158)

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