June 2020

This, or Something like It: Socrates and the Problem of Authority

Simon Dutton
University of South Florida

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd

Part of the Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity Commons, and the Philosophy Commons

Scholar Commons Citation
Dutton, Simon, "This, or Something like It: Socrates and the Problem of Authority" (2020). Graduate Theses and Dissertations.
https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/8190

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.
This, or Something like It:
Socrates and the Problem of Authority

by

Simon Dutton

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Philosophy
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Co-Major Professor: Joanne B. Waugh, Ph.D.
Co-Major Professor: Joshua Rayman, Ph.D.
Michael Morris, Ph.D.
Mor Segev, Ph.D.

Date of Approval
June 29, 2020

Keywords: Plato, Justice, Dialectic, Soul

Copyright © 2020, Simon Dutton
Acknowledgments

The story of how I found myself working on a PhD in the Department of Philosophy at the University of South Florida is either a short one about filing some paperwork or one that would require relating a strange, painfully convoluted, and unlikely series of events, the telling of which would massively outstrip the length of the dissertation to which these acknowledgments are attached. I shall hence tell neither story here. It will be acknowledged, however, that I appreciate the existence of a place like this, where a person like me could find an academic home. I recognize that such an existence does not emerge accidentally, and I would like to thank all the people I know, and those I do not know, who helped make this department the place that it is—and by name, I would like to thank Roger Ariew for building this home and letting me stay here for a while.

During this time, I have benefitted from advice, instruction, and support from numerous faculty members, staff, and fellow graduate students. Resisting the urge to recite a Homeric catalogue of names, I thank here but a few, but to those not named, I thank you too. To all the professors from whom I have learned. To Darlene for correcting the many administrative errors I insist on continually committing. To colleagues from my early years and the new students who have helped me through. I am especially grateful to those with whom I shared my struggle. Thank you to Dwight Lewis for the late-night breaks. To Zachary Purdue for the time and the absurdity (hands on clockfaces, both broken and those ticking ever on). To Zachary Vereb and Raman Sachdev for reading and responded to parts of my dissertation, who would do such a thing? And a
special thank you to Matt Eckel and Laura Wells for bestowing on this dissertation the peculiar honor of having been read in full by anyone other than those who are paid to do so. It is terribly encouraging to feel as though all this work was not typed directly into the abyss.

I do offer my sincerest gratitude to my committee, regardless of renumeration. Thank you to Michael Morris and Mor Segev for staying with me through the many changes in my project and my projected timeline—and thank you for your careful reading. Thank you, Joshua Rayman, for the consistent ADVICE AND CRITICAL FEEDBACK over the years. My endless gratitude, of course, to Joanne Waugh. It is a common refrain to convey to one’s advisor that a project would not have been possible without their help. In my case, this is true beyond the tutelage, the critique, and the discussion (though I thank her for this too). If Dr. Waugh had not devoted so many years to reading Plato in ways that make people mad, I could not possibly have written this dissertation. I consider it a very special honor to be one of your last students. While I know there are parts of my argument you disagree with (I know because you have told me this many, many times), I hope this was a decent last stand—and I promise to continue reading Plato in ways that make people mad.

I must continue to thank those whose support made all of this possible. Thank you to my family: David, Susan, and Adam. You have conspired well, in your outrageously unflinching support, to fool me into believing I am smart. Not once have you told me not to follow any of the ludicrous paths upon which I have long been wont to embark, and surely pursuing a PhD in philosophy must count as such a path. On a path similar, but distinct, thank you also to my kindred, Tom Bramhall.

Finally, thank you, Danielle Smith. Thank you for the love and support. Thank you for being there for me and here with me. In many ways, all this has been an expensive and protracted
way to receive a certificate of proof that I am at least half as intelligent as you are. I do not know that I would have signed up for this, or continued through, if not to impress you. Not that you make these demands of me—I suspect you love me the way I am. But I continue to strive to be the person I think that you think I am.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................................... iii

Introduction: The Authority of Origins........................................................................................... 1
  Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 1
  Ἀρχή and the Origin of Authority .............................................................................................. 10

Chapter One: The Socratic Ἀρχή .................................................................................................. 21
  Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 21
  Origins in the Frame ............................................................................................................... 23
  The Authority of the Forms ...................................................................................................... 28
  The Greatest Aporia ................................................................................................................. 34
  The Power of Dialectic ............................................................................................................. 38
  Έξ Ἀρχῆς (Slight Return) ....................................................................................................... 44
  The Crisis of Origins ................................................................................................................. 48
  Destruction of Dialectic ............................................................................................................ 50
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................................... 54

Chapter Two: Knowledge of the Divine ....................................................................................... 57
  Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 57
  Authority in the Frame .............................................................................................................. 59
  Plato’s Euthyphro..................................................................................................................... 64
  Euthyphro’s Case ...................................................................................................................... 68
  The Demotic View .................................................................................................................... 70
  Justice in Parts .......................................................................................................................... 75
    I. Ἀρχή: ................................................................................................................................. 75
    II. Ἔξ Ἀρχῶν: ........................................................................................................................ 78
    III. Second Sailing: ................................................................................................................. 83
  Aporia .......................................................................................................................................... 86
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................................... 88

Chapter Three: The Remainder of the Just ................................................................................... 90
  Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 90
  The Piraeus............................................................................................................................... 94
  A Tedious Prologue ................................................................................................................ 98
    I. The Festival of Bendis: ....................................................................................................... 100
    II. The Estate of Cephalus: ................................................................................................. 105
  Justice at the Beginning .......................................................................................................... 108
  The Ἀρχή at Our Feet .............................................................................................................. 113
  The Ἀρχή of Thrasymachus .................................................................................................... 119
  What Remains is Justice .......................................................................................................... 129
Abstract

This dissertation is a study of the intellectual practice of the Platonic character, Socrates, with emphasis on the presentation of dialectical engagement with authority. I argue that authority, conceptually and in practice, constitutes a serious problem for Socrates. On my reading, the problems of authority are indicative of an inappropriate understanding of the soul and the ailing condition of the sociopolitical practices of Athenian culture. I suggest that Plato’s Socrates is devoted to the personal and political improvement of his fellow citizens, and society at large, through dialectical engagement which seeks to undermine authority. I investigate Plato’s characterization of the Socratic practice of philosophy, taking seriously his frequent claims to ignorance and his reluctance to commit to clearly positive doctrine. I suggest that these problems can be collapsed into an analysis of the question of authority, and that the questioning of authority constitutes a positive force in dialectical practice. I attempt to develop an interpretive strategy of Plato’s work that commits us to neither wholly dogmatic nor wholly skeptical readings of Plato.

There is an apparent dichotomy in the scholarship suggesting that Plato’s dialogues must be understood as either constructive (offering positive doctrine) on the one hand, or aporetic (purely refutational) on the other. In my reading, I lean closer to an aporetic interpretation; however, I attempt to show that Socrates is presented as anti-doctrinal because a hard commitment to doctrine establishes the conditions for aporia. I maintain that Socrates’ antiauthoritarian characterization is evidence of his dedication to the continued pursuit of wisdom. True knowledge would be ideal, but knowing nothing is preferable to false-positives. While I develop a picture of
an antiauthoritarian Socrates within the nonauthoritative genre of Plato’s dialogues, I hope to retain the view that the Socratic pursuit of wisdom is aspirational. Through the discussion of the select dialogues in this dissertation, I hope to show that a Socratic progress towards knowledge requires a dedicated questioning of authority.

In my reading I give special attention to the historical context in which Plato writes, and this includes the choices Plato makes in presenting the character of Socrates. I attend to questions of time and place in the narrative, the historical persons presented as *dramatis personae*, and the potential reception by the immediate audience. I take the position that the dialogue form itself is a challenge to authority, and that the format of a written dialogue is underscored by checks to authoritative grounding. Those who engage in dialogue, and those who write dialogues, enter into an agreement to challenge authority—and to enter into this agreement in good faith, one ought to be willing to suspend one’s own claims to authority.

In my discussion of Plato’s choice to develop a characterization of Socrates at odds with the problems of authority, I hope to open the possibility that my reading identifies important consequences for understanding certain philosophical commitments expressed in the Socratic dialogues. My hope is that I have presented a reading of a selection of dialogues that draws out an image of an antiauthoritarian Socrates, and in so doing sketched a framework that might tentatively contribute some insightful, if nuanced, perspective to Platonic scholarship.
Introduction: The Authority of Origins

Introduction

My claim is that Plato presents Socrates as a profoundly antiauthoritarian character.¹ This dissertation is a study of the intellectual practice of the Platonic character, Socrates, with emphasis on the presentation of dialectical engagement with authority. I suggest that authority, as it is understood, and as it operates in late fifth and early fourth century Athens (the period spanning Socrates’ life and Plato’s career) constitutes a serious problem for Socrates. Socrates is frequently depicted as targeting authority as the crux of a range of problems, and Plato means for us to read this as fundamental to practicing philosophy. Socrates believes that claims to intellectual authority will (as a best-case scenario) impede any pursuit of knowledge; the more serious consequence of such claims is the potential for mortals to assume a degree of knowledge of the gods, an act of hubris. The problems of authority, on my reading, are indicative of an inappropriate understanding of the soul, and the ailing condition of the sociopolitical practices of Athenian culture. I suggest that Plato’s Socrates is devoted to the personal and political improvement of his fellow citizens and society at large through dialectical engagement which seeks to undermine authority. To explore this thesis, I present a test case through an examination of the form of justice. I begin by discussing the authority of the theory of the forms itself (as presented by the young the Socrates in

¹ Even when Socrates introduces what is often interpreted as “positive philosophical doctrine,” the larger project of which it is a part is, on the whole, anti-authoritarian, as his conception of philosophy is aspirational. The link between this aspirational conception of philosophy and the anti-authoritarian stance of Socrates is discussed further below.
the *Parmenides*), where I hope to isolate the problem of authoritative commitments to positive doctrine as the cause of a potentially devastating (intellectual) aporia that would force one to either abandon all hope for knowledge, or to illicitly assume oneself possessed of divine knowledge. It is my suggestion that Plato depicts Socrates as having chosen neither; rather, he chose to reject the authoritative commitment to positive doctrine. This antiauthoritarian characterization of Socrates is derived from the account of the young Socrates of the *Parmenides* (and the autobiography of the *Phaedo*) established in Chapter One.² The remainder of the dissertation is intended to draw out the consequences of such a characterization through a reading of his dialectical engagement in the *Euthyphro* and Book I of the *Republic*.³ I hope to show that the state of aporia is a direct symptom of authoritative claims to knowledge, and that the antiauthoritarian power of dialectic can be used to develop an understanding of even the virtue of justice—or, at least, something like it.

By focusing on Plato as an author of *Sokratikoi Logoi* (to use Aristotle’s term),⁴ I mean to take seriously Plato’s choice to write philosophy as he did. In the *Apology*,⁵ Socrates makes his famous claim to ignorance, and informs his judges and prosecutors that he has been charged by divine providence to be a voice of political dissent.⁶ It is surprising, then, that in other dialogues, Socrates appears to advance doctrine and pledge allegiance to state authority. This problem can

---

² Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the *Parmenides* are from Mary Louise Gill and Paul Ryan, Hackett 1996, and all translations of the *Phaedo* are from G. M. A. Grube, Hackett 1997.

³ Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the *Euthyphro* are from G. M. A. Grube, Hackett 2002 (John M. Cooper revision), and all translations of the translations of the *Republic* are from G. M. A. Grube, Hackett 1992 (C. D. C. Reeve revision).


⁵ *Apology* 21b-d, 23b. See also: *Phaedrus* 230a, 235c; *Theaetetus* 150d. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the *Apology* are from G. M. A. Grube, Hackett 2002 (John M. Cooper revision); all translations of the *Phaedrus* from Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, Hackett 1995; and *Theaetetus* from M. J. Levett, Hackett 1992 (Miles Burnyeat revision).

⁶ *Apology* 30c-32d, and in the *Republic* it is maintained that the true philosopher despises authority (for one instance, *Republic* 521b).
be, and traditionally has been, addressed by appealing to Socratic irony, and by ascribing doctrinal commitments as proper to Plato. While effective, this approach is not entirely satisfying. Rather than attempting to reconcile the apparent contradiction by recourse to textual engagement, approaches that read Plato’s dialogues as either advancing hard doctrine or as purely refutational are successful largely because they decline to take Plato’s Socrates seriously (or only when so doing is convenient). I will investigate Plato’s characterization of the Socratic practice of philosophy, taking seriously his frequent claims to ignorance and his reluctance to commit to clearly positive doctrine. I suggest that these problems can be collapsed into an analysis of the question of authority, and that the questioning of authority constitutes a positive force in dialectical practice.

I hope that my reading will contribute to a developing field in the study of Plato that Francisco J. Gonzalez describes as a “‘third way’ between oppositions or dichotomies that have traditionally divided Platonic scholarship.” In Gonzalez’ edited collection, *The Third Way*, a number of scholars argue for interpretive strategies of Plato’s work that commit to neither wholly dogmatic nor wholly skeptical readings of Plato. In the introduction, Gonzalez provides a concise and well documented overview of the history of Platonic interpretation, laying out the standard assumption in the scholarship that Plato must be interpreted in this polarizing way with positive doctrine on the one hand, and pure refutation on the other. Gonzalez asks, “must a dialogue be interpreted either as ‘aporetic’ in the sense of containing only refutations, questions, and problems

---


8 Gonzalez, *The Third Way*, 1-22. For a similar overview of the scholarship as polarized and in need of a “third way,” see the introduction to Gonzalez’s *Dialectic and Dialogue: Plato’s Practice of Philosophical Inquiry* (1-16), where the discussion has a more specific interest in defending the scholarly need to find new interpretive framework for understanding the dialectic.
or as ‘constructive’ in the sense of defending doctrines?“ His answer (and the alternative strategy adopted by the contributors to that volume) is to “give more importance than usual to the literary, dramatic, and rhetorical aspects of the dialogues.” My reading will appear closer to aporetic, however, I attempt to show that (in the dialogues discussed) Socrates is presented as anti-doctrinal because a hard commitment to doctrine establishes the conditions for aporia; and when Socrates leads his interlocutors towards an intellectual impasse, it is not for the sake of exposing ignorance, but to show how it is that an authoritative assumption of knowledge blocks the path towards anything even resembling wisdom.

As the grounding principles for the method assumed in this dissertation, I offer the following two statements: 1. The problems of philosophy are contingent (and not perennial)—hence, the history of philosophy must be read contextually; 2. That Plato’s philosophy is presented as dramatic dialogues demands that our readings acknowledge the literary qualities of these works. These principles are not my own, but I adopt them as such. In “The Contingency of Philosophical Problems,” Joanne Waugh and Roger Ariew argue for the necessity of reading philosophical texts within their historical contexts. The second principle is by no means settled, but I consider it to be reasonably derived from the first. Plato’s dialogues form a part of an emergent literary

---

9 Gonzalez, 1.
10 Gonzalez, 1.
11 Joanne Waugh and Roger Ariew, “The Contingency of Philosophical Problems” in Philosophy and Its History: Aims and Methods in the Study of Early Modern Philosophy. In the introduction to Plato’s Earlier Dialectic, Richard Robinson voices a similar caution against what he considered a common problem of “insinuating the future, that is to say, of reading into your author doctrines that did not become explicit until later” (3).
12 A century ago, in his Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato, Schleiermacher exclaimed that “form and subject are inseparable, and no proposition is to be rightly understood, except in its own place, and with the combinations and limitations which Plato has assigned to it” (14). Others who insist on reading the dialogues as drama include James A. Arieti, Robert S. Brumbaugh, Paul Friedlander, Mark Gifford, Eric A. Havelock, Andrea Nightingale, and Joanne B. Waugh.
tradition, situated and in a lineage with dramatists—both tragic and comic—poets, fabulists, authors of prosaic treatises on nature, historians, sophists and speechmakers. As Andrea Nightingale argues:

It should be emphasized that Plato targets genres that have currency in classical Athens—genres which make some claim to wisdom or authority...Plato uses intertextuality as a vehicle for criticizing traditional genres of discourse and, what is more important, for introducing and defining a radically different discursive practice, which he calls “philosophy” (Andrea Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy*, 5).

With all of these various kinds of writing available, Plato chose to present his philosophy in the dialogical format of the tragedians. Eric Havelock submits that, “if the stage was the earliest vehicle of what could be called moral discussion, it would be natural to develop such discussion by depicting characters with antithetical opinions, whose repartee would amuse an audience, and might incidentally develop a point of view. As the interest in ideas increased, the dramatic purpose was gradually forgotten.” I intend to recall the dramatic purpose. Hence, in my reading I will consider the choices Plato makes in presenting the character of Socrates. I will attend to questions of time and place in the narrative, the historical persons presented as dramatis personae, and the potential reception by the immediate audience—an audience of which Plato must have been sensitive, and a reception to which he presumably tailored his literary choices.

---

13 Havelock is to be credited for his extensive work establishing the case that the rise of Athenian literacy is fundamental to the practice of philosophy. The development of this theory spans his career, but it is available for interested scholars in *Preface to Plato* (1963); *The Greek Concept of Justice: From its Shadow in Homer to Its Substance in Plato* (1978); in the essays collected in *The Literate Revolution in Greece and its Cultural Consequences* (1982); and in *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (1986).

14 Havelock, “The Evidence for the Teaching of Socrates,” 284

15 For discussion on this point see: Arieti “Reading the Dialogues,” in *Interpreting Plato: The Dialogues as Drama*, 1-18 (and in particular, the notes (11-17) provides discursive reference to literature in this debate); Gifford, “Dramatic Dialectic in Republic Book 1,” particularly the framing remarks (36-52) justifying the literary reading and contextualist commitment; Waugh, “Socrates and the Character of
In addition to attending to the literary choices Plato makes in the dialogues, I am committed to the position that Plato’s choice to write dialogues is, itself, significant. Numerous motivations for this choice may be worth consideration, but likely among them (and of particular significance for the present study) is the dialogue’s capacity to “contest the authority of genres of speech and writing that were dominant in the fifth and fourth centuries.”

Given that the various genres of speech and writing constituted the Athenian conditions of political and religious authority, Plato’s use of the dialogue itself figures into a broad scheme of challenging authority. Within the context of literary genres, the dialogue form is a challenge to authority. On a more specific level, the format of a written dialogue is underscored by checks to authoritative grounding. Those who engage in dialogue, and those who write dialogues, enter into an agreement to challenge authority—and to enter into this agreement in good faith, one ought to be willing to suspend one’s own claims to authority. As Nightingale argues “when engaging in a philosophical dialogue, one must either test one’s own ideas by submitting them to the criticism of others or else test another person’s ideas by introducing one’s own criticisms and ideas.”

The dialogue form presents as a challenge to external authority, but also requires commitment to challenging authority internally.

For all of this, I do not wish to project an absolute foreclosure of the possibility, or at least the distant hope, of attaining true knowledge (or something like it). This is to say that, while I develop a picture of an antiauthoritarian Socrates within the nonauthoritative genre of Plato’s

---


17 As Josiah Ober remarks, “A pragmatic, discursive, speech-act-oriented analysis seems to me inherently useful for studying Athenian politics and society, not only because of its general heuristic force, but because classical Athenian politics operated quite overtly according to pragmatic, discursive, speech-act principles” (The Athenian Revolution: Essays on Ancient Greek Democracy and Political Theory, 10).

18 Nightingale, Genres in Dialogue, 162.
dialogues, I hope to retain the view that the Socratic pursuit of wisdom is aspirational. I mean to affirm that “philosophia, as portrayed in the dialogues of Plato, is the passion for and not the possession of knowledge.” Through the discussion of the select dialogues in this dissertation, giving special attention to Plato’s literary devices and the characterization of Socrates in his elenctic and dialectical encounters, I hope to show that a Socratic progress towards knowledge requires a dedicated questioning of authority. However, my discussion will ultimately acknowledge that, in the interest of facilitating the loving pursuit of wisdom, the well-ordered soul grants authority to reason—but not without strict qualification. In the just soul of the Republic, tempered by moderation, where each part is doing its own work, reason is afforded a position of authority by mutual assent in the interest of striving towards wisdom. It will be my suggestion that this arrangement does not simply grant license to claim wisdom, but any positive knowledge claim must survive internal scrutiny. In the Phaedrus, Socrates claims he is charged by some divine voice to deliver a message to Lysias (the orator), the poets, and the lawmakers, declaring:

If any one of you has composed these things with a knowledge of the truth, if you can defend your writing when you are challenged, and if you can yourself make the argument that your writing is of little worth, then you must be called by a name derived not from these writings but rather from those things you are seriously pursuing...To call him wise, Phaedrus, seems to me too much, and proper only for a god. To call him wisdom’s lover—a philosopher—or something similar would fit him better and be more seemly (Phaedrus 278c-d).

Out of this statement of my methodological commitments, there emerge obvious questions about the historical Socrates and his relation to the character in Plato’s dialogues, the set of issues that goes under the name the Socratic problem. What do we know about Socrates as a historical

---

20 This is discussed at great length in Chapter Three.
21 It is traditional in Platonic scholarship to describe Plato’s early dialogues as ‘Socratic.’ The general claim is that Plato is presenting, or attempting to present, either an accurate portrayal of a historical Socrates, or an illustration of Socratic Method, or both. It should be noted, however, that this traditional division of
person? By what means can we study him, and which of the Socratic authors provides the most accurate representation? Is Plato even interested in historical accuracy or is Socrates simply a vehicle for the presentation of his own philosophy? I take these to be interesting and important questions on which there has been copious discussion and to which I would like to contribute. However, the present study is not the place to fully recreate, or engage with, that discussion. Throughout this dissertation I treat Socrates as a philosopher and Plato as an author. I am committed to the position that Plato is also a philosopher, and it is my hope that the reading I present here will afford the potential for further research into what I take to be a uniquely literary philosophy.

Without addressing the question of fidelity, I assume Socrates to be a character of Plato’s dialogues, and I assume that the philosophy presented by Socrates belongs to that character. I recognize that this assumption that the philosophy presented by Socrates belongs to that character carries its own difficulties, given the function of Socratic irony, inconsistencies between dialogues (or within a dialogue), and the inconclusive character of his own words. I certainly do not mean to commit to the position that the philosophy is un-Platonic or that it is (at all, or exclusively) the philosophy of the historical Socrates. Nor am I denying, of course, that in choosing to present a character, Socrates, as exemplifying the practice of philosophizing and the conception of

Plato’s dialogues into early, middle, and late is no longer the settled matter it once appeared to be. Brumbaugh provides an early contrast. He admits, in a 1979 article, that “those of us who insist on the inseparability of ‘literary’ and ‘argument’ dimensions of Plato’s work have not done very well in articulating the larger literary questions of sequence as functions of the central drama of ideas” (“Doctrine and Dramatic Dates of Plato’s Dialogues,” in Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy, 2:174)—the article continues to attempt such an ordering (174-184).

22 Or are some of the dialogues intended to be reflective of the historical Socrates while others clearly present Platonic doctrine? Terence Irwin develops such a picture in Plato’s Moral Theory: The Early and Middle Dialogues, and it is expanded by C. D. C. Reeve in Philosopher-Kings: The Argument of Plato’s Republic. In Chapter Three, I attempt (indirectly, expounded in the notes) to suggest that the Platonic reading, as presented throughout this dissertation, might offer a satisfying alternative to the view presented by Irwin and Reeve.
philosophy as a way of living, Plato was acknowledging the importance of the historical Socrates in Plato’s formulation of the conception of philosophy. It is, of course, likely that the character Socrates holds some of the beliefs as his historical namesake, or else the choice of this character would make little sense. But in assuming that we view Socrates as a character of Plato’s dialogues, and that the philosophy presented by Socrates belongs to that character, I believe I am able to do some of the very important work of disentangling the philosophy that is presented from the question of who is presenting it. Rather than beginning with the assumption that some of the things that Socrates says are more Socratic than others, I look for Socratic thought in what Plato wrote that Socrates said.23 This reading will be achieved by examining the Socratic character in context, in narrative, and in discourse with others.

In my discussion of the concept of authority, I note the dramatic force of Socrates’ use of the word ἀρχή—a word designating both “origin” and “authority.” It is also a word used to designate something like a metaphysical “first principle” in nature (far more so in the fourth century than the fifth), and it can function as a thesis statement in an account.24 While I submit that Socrates actively avoids employing this term in its accepted, technical usage, I want to suggest that in his uses of ἀρχή Socrates leverages the connections his audience might hear between

---

23 Hence, the selection of dialogues I examine is only limited to the presence of Socrates as a primary interlocutor. I do recognize a distinction between the young Socrates and the mature Socrates within the broader narrative of the Platonic corpus. Given that the reflections on Socrates’ youth come from dialogues usually accepted to be middle to late (e.g. Parmenides and Phaedo, discussed in Chapter One), this means that they were written by an author with increased literary skill and a better grasp on the philosophy presented by the character Socrates.

24 Aristotle discusses the historical use of the word as a metaphysical concept from Thales to Plato (Physics III 4; Metaphysics A 3-8). To date, Malcolm Schofield provides the most detailed account of the use of the word ἀρχή from the Presocratics to Plato (“ARXH”). See also, the references I present in these notes and in the Appendix.
origins and authority to undermine the intellectual positions of his contemporaries and his predecessors.

Ἀρχή and the Origin of Authority

There is a complexity of authority, expressed in the word ἀρχή, as employed by Socrates in Plato’s dialogues—and as it occurs in early Greek thought—that will be noted as the discussion proceeds. Although my argument does not rest on the uses of ἀρχή in the dialogues under discussion, in highlighting the usages of ἀρχή, I call attention to the possibility that in noting “the echo” of ἀρχή in these discussions, Plato’s audience would raise questions about its complex of meanings and their function in these dialogues. In the Platonic corpus, in various forms, ἀρχή occurs 597 times. Ἀρχή is frequently used in connection with the interrogation of concepts that are generally considered central to Socratic thought.

In the earliest usage, the primary, if not single, meaning of the word ἀρχή was “beginning.” In Hesiod and Homer, who composed their works in the midst of profound changes in the political structure of Greek communities, ἀρχή does not have the connotations of authority that would soon be disseminated into a flood of ἀρχή-root words. Homer did make use of the verbs, ἀγω and ἄρχω

25 Ἀρχή, ἦς, ἡ. For the purposes of these searches, read “Platonic corpus” in the broadest sense. In order to avoid what would inevitably become cherry picking, I have included the canonical dialogues, dubia, spuria, epigrams, and epistles.

26 It is employed with practically as much frequency as τέχνη, [714], φίλος, [702], and ἀρετή, [649], and it is used more frequently than εἶδος [413] (if we wish to include ἰδέα, [98], the combined usage is 511). These four words are well established as significant technical terms in Plato. Ἀρετή [virtue], certainly considered amongst the most significant, is used only 52 more times than ἀρχή. Raw usage data is not enough to show that ἀρχή is a significant term for Socrates (or Plato)—but it is certainly enough to demand attention. All five words were searched using the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae text search tool. The results are exclusively from the respective nouns. All five of these terms have associated words (verbs, adverbs, and derived nouns) which are not included in this comparison. The verb ἄρχω is equally polysemous and will be significant. However, to avoid unnecessary complexity, the comparison is limited to the noun form. Since all of these words are employed with both technical and generic intent, I consider them to be reasonable points of comparison.
[to lead], and the noun Æρχος [leader]—but Æρχη was never employed with the later meaning of authority.27 By the late fifth century, the association of authority with Æρχη was so pervasive that writers appeared unaware that its meaning began without such connotations.28 While Æρχη did not directly correspond to the political concept of authority until some time around the fifth century, the phrase εξ ἀρχῆς had, since time immemorial, carried the weight of an authoritative pronouncement.29

With the simple meaning of “beginning,” Æρχη is well established in early usage. The connotation of authority is a relatively late association with the word, and in a certain sense, the Greek language had been wanting for such a term for some time. Other words, notably κράτος and

---

27 The word ἄρχων likely corresponds to the earlier formulation ἀρχός (See: Robert Beekes Etymological Dictionary of Greek, Vol. 1). The specific noun, ἄρχων, is absent from Homer, but he does use the noun ἄρχος for leader. In each instance, the word marks out a person who, by grace of certain qualities, has charge of a group of men. For the most part, the title of ‘leader’ is assigned to a man who is leading a specific mission or a unit of the army. On other occasions, the title suggests that the ἄρχος is commanding the entire army. Though diminished, the designation already carries with it a degree of authority in the ordinary sense of the term.

28 A detailed (if summary) account of the usage history of the word in association with origin and authority is provided in the Appendix.

29 In Plato, the specific phrase, εξ ἀρχῆς, is one of unusual frequency, occurring 96 times in the corpus. For the sake of comparison, αυτό καθ’ αυτό (itself by itself), occurs only 29 times. In the Odyssey, Homer uses εξ ἀρχῆς to mean that something is of such antiquity that its status is unquestionable. The phrase is used in three places in some variation of “friend of his father’s house of old” (Od. 1.188; 2.254; 17.69). In Book 11, Odysseus commiserates the shade of Agamemnon, lamenting that his family has “long suffered” by the will of women (Od. 11.438). Hesiod informs his audience that it is the Muses who will tell, through him, in their immortal voice, the history of “the revered family of gods from the beginning [εξ ἀρχῆς]” (Theogony 45; Jenny Strauss Clay makes the further claim that Hesiod deliberately uses the plural, “let us begin to sing” [ἀρχώμεθ᾽ ἀείδειν] (Theog. 1), to establish his song as a “collaborative production; it is not simply his alone, but, insofar as his is an inspired voice, it is joined with, and indissociable from, the voice of the Muses” (Hesiod’s Cosmos, 52)). This is a typical refrain of Homeric singers (ᾠδοδόοι), evoking the oldest story tellers to tell the oldest story. The oldest is the truest, and truth extends from the ἄρχη. Hesiod’s use of εξ ἀρχῆς, in each instance, makes the same claim of indisputable antiquity as in Homer. The significant distinction is that Hesiod is referring to moments in time that (for the most part) predate human existence. Hence, the events described are beyond the limits of mortal memory and strain the validity of knowledge claims. Hesiod is using the colloquial connotation of εξ ἀρχῆς with a simple association of authority—that the gods are ancient and therefore demand reverence. In so doing, he is also leveraging this association to authorize his own voice. Of course, εξ ἀρχῆς also appears frequently in Aristotle and sometimes in Plato, with the less weighty meaning of “to go back to the beginning.”
δύναμις, had long been used to designate something like authority. Unlike ἀρχή, however, κράτος and δύναμις have the additional meaning of strength (power or physical force). In this sense, κράτος and δύναμις are extensions of authority emanating from the figure in which authority is properly located.

By the early fourth century, ἀρχή had become a complex, polysemic word. Ἀρχή would also become a technical term in philosophy (possibly as early as the sixth century, but certainly by the fourth). According to Diogenes of Apollonia (mid-fifth century): “At the beginning [ἀρχόμενον] of every treatise it seems to me fitting to provide an indisputable starting point [ἀρχὴν], expressed in a simple and dignified style.” As a starting point in an account, an ἀρχή is that from, and around which, an argument is organized. In Milesian cosmogony (seventh and sixth centuries), an ἀρχή is that from which all nature arose, or that to which all nature can be reduced.

30 In Homer, the meaning is often related to physical strength, e.g.: κράτος - Il. 7.142, 13.484; δύναμις - Od. 2.62, 20.237, Il.8.294.

31 In the Theogony, Kratos (son of Styx) dwells always and only with Zeus and goes only where the god leads (see: Theog. 385-8).

32 In Ancient Greek Cosmogony, Andrew Gregory is reluctant to translate ἀρχή given this multiplicity of meaning, “I do not propose to translate archê, which can mean ‘beginning’, ‘origin’, ‘first cause’ or even ‘first place’ in a political sense. It is wise to keep all these in mind rather than be tied to one” (33).

33 DK: 64, B1. This is an early example of a notable divergence from the Milesian cosmological understanding of ἀρχή as a function of nature. Unless otherwise noted, translations of Presocratic texts are from Daniel W. Graham, ed. and trans., The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy: The Complete Fragments and Selected Testimonies of the Major Presocratics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

34 Attributing, at a minimum, such a base understanding of a starting point should not be controversial. It is not at all clear that ἀρχή was already conceived in a robust, metaphysical sense, but positing a source of being is not such a complex undertaking for sixth-century thinkers. After all, though Hesiod explicitly names neither Χάος nor Γαῖα as ἀρχή, either one, the other, or both, act in the capacity of a starting point in nature (assuming the rudimentary understanding of an ἀρχή as a productive source)—and it is not insignificant to note that Hesiod discovers them, with the help of the Muses, from the beginning [ἐξ ἀρχῆς]. That ἀρχή already contained some of this complexity has been argued by C. J. Classen (“ARXH in its Earlier Use,” in “Studies in Memory of Abraham Wasserstein, Volume 1,” edited by Hannah M. Cotton, Jonathan J. Price and David J. Wasserstein, special issue, Scripta Classica Israelica 15, no. 1 (1996): 20-24).
Reacting to Hesiod’s account of the cosmos as the result of anthropomorphic gods’ sexual union and reproduction, the Milesian thinkers of the seventh–sixth centuries were developing naturalistic accounts of the universe.\(^\text{35}\) The mythopoetic usage of ἀρχή is transformed in the proto-philosophical cosmogonies. At the beginning of its philosophical usage, the concept of an ἀρχή referred to the origin of things, as it did for Hesiod. It is generally thought that Aristotle attributed to the Milesians the additional, metaphysical meaning that the origin is also the substratum and generative principle of existence.\(^\text{36}\) Whether the Milesians (most specifically Thales and Anaximander) had developed such a theory is debatable—indeed, it remains an ongoing debate amongst classicists.\(^\text{37}\) That the word ἀρχή was available to designate an origin and source is clear.

For the purposes of the present study, it suffices to recognize the polysemy and cultural

\(^{35}\) For a detailed account of the distinct similarities between the cosmogonies of Hesiod, Anaximander, and Anaximenes, see: M. C. Stokes, "Hesiodic and Milesian Cosmogonies II," 3. For the significant differences between Hesiod and the Milesians (specifically Anaximander), see: Andrew Gregory, *Anaximander: A Re-assessment*, 116-120.


\(^{37}\) Amongst those rejecting the Aristotelian presumption: For a recent discussion see Daniel W. Graham, *Explaining the Cosmos: The Ionian Tradition of Scientific Philosophy*, Ch. 3; for a sustained argument on this point see Malcolm Schofield, “ARXH,” who insists that Aristotle over-reads the sophistication of the Presocratic use of ἀρχή, especially in Thales and Anaximander. Schofield argues that, while Thales and Anaximander expressed the significance of an ἀρχή as the origin of the universe, they could not have sustained the notion of ἀρχή as a metaphysical principle, i.e., “the substrate of change to which that universe is subject” (220). Prior to Schofield, Jaap Mansfeld had made the case that a metaphysical attribution is indeed beyond the grasp of the early Milesians, but Aristotle did not actually make so strong a claim (“Aristotle and Others on Thales, or the Beginnings of Natural Philosophy (With Some Remarks on Xenophon’s)”). According to Mansfeld, Aristotle was attempting to establish an ἀρχή for the practice of philosophy which would be explicitly distinct from the theologies of the ancient poets. The suggestion is that Aristotle “argues against a tradition which put Thales on a par with early poets such as Hesiod and Homer” (122). Aristotle wants to establish (perhaps controversially, even among his contemporaries) a historical moment in which human thought shifts from songs about the gods to rational accounts of the natural world. Thales is named philosophy’s ἀρχηγός (*Metaphysics* A 983b, 20-1), “because one could be certain that his seminal idea was concerned with Nature” (121). There is also significant disagreement (amongst ancient authors and ongoing in contemporary literature) regarding whether or not there is a meaningful or strictly observable distinction between poetry and philosophy—or what Socrates termed the “ancient quarrel” (*Republic* X 607b). For further detail on this discussion, providing an excellent (and recent) survey of this topic, see William Wians’ edited volume, *Logos and Muthos*. 
significance of the word and how this was relevant to political and intellectual practices of late fifth and early fourth century Athens.

By the fifth century, the century in which Plato’s dialogues are set, ἀρχή is ensconced within an intellectual battle for authority through successive claims to knowledge of the nature of the universe with significant reference to various ἀρχαι. The ἀρχή begins to express, with increased clarity, the sense of authority that had long simmered beneath its meaning. And beyond the metaphysical properties of a natural ἀρχή, the ἀρχή of a discussion came to be established as something like a thesis or premise.38 Arising amidst a climate of intellectual competition, it became essential that an account should begin with a statement that would inform the ensuing discussion. The metaphysical nature of the ἀρχή becomes a functional element of an argument. In this transition, the word retains the original philosophical meaning; the ἀρχή of an argument is the beginning point and it sustains the argument throughout.39 It is only when an argument properly employs an ἀρχή that it can be considered to carry intellectual authority.

That ἀρχή means beginning (as a vague starting-point or the stronger metaphysical sense of an origin) and authority will inform my reading of Plato’s presentation of Socrates. The problem of asserting causal designations,40 highlights the paradoxical nature of human claims to authority. For Socrates, the gods possess genuine authority—if an unchanging principle of the right and power to rule is located anywhere, it would be amongst the gods. Divine authority, to control or to know, is beyond human understanding. Claims to be an authority or to have authority, politically

38 Schofield characterizes this late fifth-century philosophical usage as carrying “reflexive contexts” (“ARXH,” 224).

39 On this meaning of ἀρχή, Schofield makes specific reference to: Philolaus; Diogenes of Apollonia; On Ancient Medicine; Gorgias (Helen); Protagoras, Hippias, and Prodicus in Plato’s Protagoras; and speculatively the mathematicians (Schofield, 223-6).

40 As one might read in Hesiod’s cosmognony or in the cosmological thought of the Presocratics.
or intellectually, are baseless by necessity. The authority of the gods is always prior to human authority. Hence, human “authority” is a mere image of true authority (authority as it is by itself). Further, since human “authority” is preceded by that of the gods, it can never be primary (it is not, properly speaking, an origin). Hence, human authority is never, in the precise sense, authority (ἀρχή). This kind of authority is also, by necessity, temporary. Polemic and πόλεμος await the sage and the tyrant at every instantiation of so-called authority, and this is a danger of which Socrates was well aware.⁴¹ Socrates resisted the inherent hubris of political authority and consistently refused to perpetuate the cyclical violence of intellectual claims to authority. If his antiauthoritarian project was successful it was not by coup; it was achieved through the power of dialectic.

It is my suggestion that Socrates finds engagement with the problems of authority pertinent to the work of philosophy—and I hope that the polysemy of ἀρχή, as I highlight its function throughout this work, will raise questions about its serving as a potential technical term for Platonic scholarship. In the history of the word (as it was used in both myth and philosophy), and in its use by Socrates’ contemporaries, there is a complexity of meaning that correlates with a Socratic understanding of the appropriate practice of intellectual inquiry. In highlighting Plato’s employment of the word, I hope to open the question of how it might function to expose both the paradox of positing origins, and the absurdity of claiming authority. I will also suggest that Socrates leverages the absurdity inherent to the concept of an ἀρχή in his elenctic encounters, and that paying attention to this might contribute to our understanding of dialectic. To this end, I will mark points of return—ἐξ ἀρχῆς—when this functions within dialectic, where the starting point of

---

⁴¹ The mature Socrates, at least. We shall see that the young Socrates was required to learn this lesson before he could begin his philosophical work.
an argument is revisited at crucial points of the dialogues. Although “going back to the beginning” may be nothing more than “rebooting” the conversation, repeated returns to the origin might also be read as a considered Socratic tactic employed to expose the entrenched problem of authoritative knowledge claims, and positively, to reorient discussion. In the *Parmenides*, however, where this dissertation will begin, it is not Socrates, but Parmenides, who will use the dialectical ἐξ ἀρχῆς to teach the nascent philosopher that if he should hope to access a trustworthy path towards truth, he must be prepared to abandon his own claims to intellectual authority. Perhaps of greatest significance is how the recognition of the soul requires us to accept the absurdity of human claims to authority, and the pursuit of knowledge afforded from this recognition originates in a recognition of the absurdity of establishing authoritarian commitments to the knowledge of absolute points of origin.

In Chapter One, I begin my discussion with Plato’s account of the beginning of Socrates’ philosophical career. The first chapter is intended to establish the associate dangers of the problem of authority—specifically, how a recalcitrant commitment to doctrine confounds progress towards truth, or anything like it. In an uncharacteristic move, the young Socrates’ authoritarian commitment to the theory of the forms unintentionally assumes human access to divine knowledge, but in so doing exposes an impassable barrier between mortal and divine knowledge that sets the possibility of becoming wise beyond human capability. In the second and third chapters, I suggest that Plato uses the character of Socrates to uncover this problem of authority as endemic to Athenian society. I attempt to show that recognition of the soul and the function of dialectic offer a partial solution to these problems, and that Plato writes Socrates as an antidote to
the declining condition of the personal, intellectual, and political practices of fourth century Athens.42

I begin each chapter with a discussion of the frame. This is to provide the historical context that I have adopted as essential to my reading, but also to emphasize Plato’s authorial presence. In each of the dialogues I discuss we will encounter Plato distancing himself from the narrative which I will suggest is an intentional abnegation of his own authorial authority (mimetic of his character). This is nowhere more prevalent than in the central dialogue of Chapter One, the Parmenides.43 I

---

42 This characterization is at odds with the idea of a Plato seduced by totalitarianism, a claim often associated with and popularized by the 20th Century philosopher of science, Karl Popper, in The Open Society and Its Enemies. As a caution against the threats against contemporary, democratic society, Popper’s polemic was timely, but as a discussion of a work of ancient Greek philosophy, his work is not only ahistorical, but also anachronistic. He fails to distinguish properly between the origins of democratic thinking in fifth and fourth century Athens, from the political theory and practices developed over the ensuing two and a half millennia. He attributes no significance to Plato’s use of dialogue (central to my own thesis), and the concomitant problems this choice raises for Popper’s straightforward identification of what Socrates says in these philosophical dialogues with Plato’s doctrinal commitments, e.g., Platonic anonymity, Socratic irony, and other literary devices used in the dialogues. In “Plato’s Totalitarianism” (in Plato, ed. Gail Fine, 280-296), C. C. W. Taylor shows that Popper’s allegation that Plato defends a form of extreme totalitarianism lacks textual support (in the Republic, where support would need to be found): “Where, then, do we find the alleged dominant thesis maintained or argued for in the text? Despite, or perhaps because of, the emotional intensity of Popper’s polemic he is remarkably short on documentation. It is an astonishing fact that chapter 6 of The Open Society and its Enemies, volume I, which contains the kernel of his argument, does not refer directly to a single passage of the Republic which even looks as if it supports extreme totalitarianism” (287). The broad thesis is also dependent on the notion that Plato’s political philosophy offers an ideology predicated on the theory of the forms to the extent that we are to understand the kallipolis as an achievable constitution admitting of no change. Popper avers, without citing textual support, that Plato’s political aim is “the possibility that we may stop further corruption in the political field by arresting all political change” (The Open Society, 20). In my dissertation, I attempt to show that it would be un-Socratic (and un-Platonic by extension) to suppose that mortals would be able to establish a changeless constitution. In the text of the Republic, it is also quite clear that an oligarchic constitution (even the idealized kallipolis) is necessarily subject to change. In “Aristotle on Plato’s Republic VIII-IX: Politics v. 12, 1316a1-b27,” (though it is not the main point of the article) Mor Segev provides a detailed account of political change in Plato’s Republic. Arguing for the validity of Aristotle’s critique, the article shows that the only constitution not explicitly susceptible to change is the tyrannical constitution, and this is an omission (not an assertion that tyrannical constitutions are resistant to political change). This omission, Segev explains, is either a mistake or (if Plato intended to suggest that tyranny does not admit of political change) opens Plato’s account of political change to historical counterexamples (with which Plato would have been familiar).

43 Discussion of the Parmenides is focused almost exclusively on the Socratic portion of the dialogue (126-137c), though I make some reference to the Parmenidean deductions (137c-166c). Discussion of the Phaedo is limited, for the most part, to the autobiographical account (roughly: 96a-101c), though, again, I
suggest that part of the reason for the extensive narrative distancing established in the frame of the
Parmenides (this is discussed in detail in Chapter One) is to emphasize the philosophical distance
between the mature Socrates and the caricature presented in discourse with Zeno and Parmenides.
This is important because Socrates exhibits drastically un-Socratic characteristics. I attempt to
show that Plato’s intention here is to strike a hard contrast that emphasizes, by highlighting the
deficit, what Socratic qualities are most essential to the pursuit of wisdom. Missing here is
knowledge of the soul and recourse to dialectic, and these (I will argue) are obscured by Socrates’
recalcitrant commitment doctrine, specifically, the (inchoate) theory of the forms. Parmenides will
seize on Socrates’ authoritarian attitude and use it to guide the young thinker towards an impasse
(the greatest aporia) that threatens to end any further pursuit of knowledge (the destruction of the
power of dialectic). The problem to which Socrates is led is that such authoritarian commitments
conflate divine and mortal knowledge. The remedy, didactically performed by Parmenides, is
found in the dialectical power of undermining authority at its illicitly established foundation

In Chapter Two, I discuss Plato’s presentation of the mature Socrates, cured of his
authoritative pretenses and practiced in dialectic. I focus on the Euthyphro to show that the
shortcomings of the caricature of the young Socrates represent a common ill among the citizens of
Athens. I use the Euthyphro, in part, for its uncomplicated structure (with an apparently single
topic and only one interlocutor), the better to show the function of dialectic and the contrasted
character of the mature Socrates. More importantly, Euthyphro presents as an ideal foil in the
extent of his claims to knowledge—his intellectual authority, he boasts, extends well into the
divine realm, and it is fuller and more precise than any of his fellow citizens. In exposing

refer to other parts of the dialogue. Unless otherwise noted, translations of the Phaedo are from G. M. A.
Grube (Hackett 1977), translations of the Parmenides are from Mary Louise Gill and Paul Ryan (Hackett
1996).
Euthyphro’s flaws, my own argument advances by suggesting that this character (while an exaggeration) is representative of a systemic problem in the socio-political structure of fifth (and fourth) century Athens.

Focusing on the *Euthyphro* allows me to establish the conflation of mortal and divine knowledge within the question of piety. Through dialectic, Socrates leads Euthyphro to the revelation that a definition of piety proves elusive because it is a concept just beyond the limit of the knowledge boundary established in the *Parmenides*. Piety is identified as the divine part of justice, and the remaining part, it is briefly suggested, concerns the care of human beings. In the *Euthyphro*, a single form seems to straddle the boundary between mortal and divine. It is made clear that knowledge of piety (hence, knowledge of the just, or something like it), is unknowable precisely because of its divine nature, and the aporetic ending is forced by Euthyphro’s refusal to admit the limitations of his intellectual authority. Knowledge of the divine part of justice, piety, is by strict necessity unknowable to human nature. However, it is through this revelation that the mortal path towards justice is exposed.

In Chapter Three, I attempt to make the case that Book I of the *Republic* is ideally framed to begin the investigation of the remainder of the just. Through a detailed examination of the first half of *Republic* I, I attempt to make the case that Plato is unambiguously stripping away references to the divine as the conversation moves through several reformulations of a definition of justice. When we encounter Thrasymachus—an authoritarian figure whose authoritarian

---

44 This is presumably the case with any form, but it is made explicit here. It is of additional significance that this is identified in the cardinal virtue.

45 Book I of the *Republic* is often overlooked in the scholarship, and when it is discussed the frame and the discussion with Cephalus and Polemarchus is given little attention in favor of the more exciting episode with Thrasymachus (all of this is discussed further in Chapter Three). I take it to be an auxiliary virtue of my discussion that this less well treated part of the work is provided significant analysis.
definition of justice is that justice is whatever serves authority—knowledge of justice remains elusive even when considered on exclusively secular terms. On my reading, this is because Thrasyphr’s claim to knowledge is so intensely authoritarian that the wisdom he claims to possess can admit of no fault, and this requires that it is abstracted to the extent that it is tantamount to divine wisdom.

Returning to the lacuna of the soul uncovered in Chapter One, I make the additional suggestion that Plato establishes a complex set of analogies for the tripartite soul within the frame and characters of Book I of the Republic. The soul presented through each of these analogies, however, is in some way deficient. Thrasyphr’s commitment to his quasi-divine definition of justice establishes the same conditions for the greatest aporia that threatened the destruction of the power of dialectic in the Parmenides. I suggest that the soul analogies in Republic I are established to remind the audience of the significance of the divine soul in dialectical practice. The dysfunctional condition of the location, the interlocutors, and the argument provides some explanation for the fact that the discussion with Thrasyphr is so disorderly. As a prologue to the discussion proper, Plato establishes the antithetical conditions for the pursuit of wisdom that will need to be righted before knowledge of justice, or something like it, can eventually be discovered.
Chapter One:  
The Socratic Ἀρχή

Introduction

Two of Plato’s dialogues, Parmenides and Phaedo, offer accounts of the young Socrates’ early struggles with philosophy. The Phaedo, which details the last moments of Socrates’ life, features a brief, autobiographical aside recounting his early feelings of inadequacy in his own investigations into the natural sciences and his dissatisfaction with how this subject was understood by others.46 In the Parmenides, Plato provides a biographical return to the Socratic origin where we are treated to the portrait of the philosopher as a young man challenging the intellectual authority of his elder. Here, Socrates—written against character—appears committed to his theory of the forms (or something like it), presenting the theory as though it would dismantle the monist account of the famous philosophers, Zeno and Parmenides. The young Socrates, however, is taken to task by Parmenides, and the inchoate theory is crushed. Either of these stories could have concluded with Socrates’ retreat from philosophy. The conditions described in the Phaedo are apt to lead a young thinker towards, what is described earlier in that dialogue as, misology.47 In the Parmenides, Socrates is guided to the brink of the total destruction by the power of dialectic, and no explicit escape from this predicament is offered in the text.48

---

46 Phaedo 96a-100a. Socrates cites a specific rejection of Anaxagoras’ theory of Mind [νόος] and the general view of his contemporaries.

47 A misguided hatred of good argument (89d-90d), this will be discussed in greater detail.

48 Escape is strongly implied by the 50 years of dialectical practice that would follow.
This dissertation begins with an examination of these two narrative returns to Socratic origins. I hope to show that, in each of these accounts, Plato is stressing the point that it is authoritative claims to knowledge that endanger any serious, rational progress towards wisdom. I suggest that the image of an obtuse Socrates in the *Parmenides* is presented as a foil for the ironist better known for his refusal to espouse positive doctrine. Plato’s Socrates is absent from the *Parmenides*. It is the purpose of this chapter to explain this absence, and to propose that the absence emphasizes two other missing pieces that are essential to Socratic thought—the soul and dialectic. The dialogue contains dialectical exchange, but the character of Socrates is portrayed as ignorant of the practice. While the young Socrates shows promise, amongst his more serious failings is a lack of self-reflection. As I will discuss, he is unwilling to critique his own theory for fear that he will “fall into some pit of nonsense and come to harm” (*Parmenides* 130d). This turning away from the self discloses the more significant lacuna of the soul (the central focus of the discourse surrounding the autobiography of the *Phaedo*). In both the *Phaedo* and the *Parmenides*, the young Socrates is initially ignorant of dialectic. I will suggest that knowledge of the soul is required for dialectic, and that dialectic effects progress towards knowledge of the soul.

Discussion in this chapter will begin with the *Parmenides* and conclude with the autobiographical account of the *Phaedo*. I discuss the curious framing of the *Parmenides* where Plato establishes a radical distance between the events of the narrative and his presence as the author. This is not entirely unusual, but the extent of the distance is nowhere more pronounced than it is at the opening of the *Parmenides*.\(^{49}\) I will suggest that the framing is designed to prime

\(^{49}\)The *Symposium* is perhaps the only rival for such willful abnegation of authorial authority. Of interest for the present discussion, however, the *Phaedo* contains one of only three self-references by Plato in the dialogues (the other two are in the *Apology* 34a and 38b), and it is only to qualify that he, himself, was not present on the occasion of Socrates’ death (*Phaedo* 59b).
the audience for the lesson of the discourse—a lesson which will require us, as a baseline, to abate any predilection towards our intellectual commitments. The frame exposes a temporal, narrative return to the beginning where authorial authority is subverted; the dialogue constitutes a biographical return where the intellectual authority of the protagonist is undermined. I will then discuss Plato’s presentation of Socrates, emphasizing the character failings that will be leveraged by Parmenides in the flipped elenchus that ensues (where Parmenides plays the role of the philosopher ordinarily assigned to the mature Socrates). This interrogation leads us towards the greatest aporia (133b-135b), where Socrates is forced to accept that there is a hard barrier between mortal and divine knowledge. I hope to show that the conditions for this impasse can be reduced to the problems of authority, and that an authoritarian response to the impasse compounds the problem and effects the total destruction of the power of dialectic (135c). By reference to the Phaedo, I will conclude by suggesting that the remedy for the significant dangers of authoritative claims to knowledge requires a recognition of the function of the soul in accordance with dialectic, which is attended by the hypothetical method. 50 This, I take it, is the lesson of the Parmenides, and the questions opened here will be explored (and hopefully, to some extent, resolved) in the remainder of this dissertation.

Origins in the Frame

I will begin by discussing what Plato wrote about Cephalus of Clazomenae’s account of the story he heard recited by Antiphon concerning Pythodorus’ recollection of the time that the young Socrates met Zeno and Parmenides at the Great Panathenaea. The explicit object of discussion in this dialogue is the theory of the forms. If one were inclined to designate a Socratic first principle

50 The hypothetical method is introduced in the Phaedo, 99d-102 (roughly).
(in the sense that Aristotle attributes such things to the Presocratics), the theory of the forms would appear a reasonable candidate.\footnote{To be clear, I will not attempt to support the position that the forms, the theory of the forms, or anything else, could, or should, be considered a Socratic ἀρχή. The forms themselves might be taken as an ἀρχή in the metaphysical sense. The theory of the forms might be looked to for evidence of Socrates’ interest in using an ἀρχή in the sense of a hypothesis. Both will be abandoned here.}

In answer to such an inclination, the theory of the forms is set up to fail in the Parmenides. As Plato presents the theory here, it appears as one not worth taking particularly seriously. What is interesting about this dialogue in general, is that the accuracy of the story being presented, and the identity of all the characters therein, are presented with just as much reason for doubt.\footnote{This is well treated in the scholarship with practical unanimity. For just a few examples of this discussion see: R. E. Allen, Plato’s Parmenides, 61-63; Mitchell H. Miller, Plato’s Parmenides, 15-18; and Kenneth M. Sayre, Parmenides’ Lesson, 57-58. A requirement for historical accuracy is likely a modern concern. The extent to which Plato insists on writing distance into this dialogue, however, demands attention. Some scholars would suggest that Plato’s anonymity is expressed as an attempt to distance himself from the philosophy presented in the dialogues (to various ends)—a view well dismissed by Ludwig Edelstein in “Platonic Anonymity.” I attempt to present an alternative explanation here.}

Nothing, here at the beginning, is quite as it seems. The story is related at a third remove from the original event.\footnote{Reminiscent here of the artist’s representation of a particular which is itself a representation of a form. See Republic X 595a ff.}

The immediate narrator is Cephalus, a name familiar to us from the Republic. But in the opening line, even as the two other major characters from the Republic are introduced (Glaucon and Adeimantus), we are robbed of this allusion when we learn that this Cephalus has come from Clazomenae: “when we arrived in Athens from Clazomenae, we ran into Adeimantus and Glaucon in the marketplace” (126a).\footnote{The Cephalus of the Republic is from Syracuse—a fact of which Plato would have been well aware. For an elaborate account of Cephalus of Syracuse, see Nails, The People of Plato, 84-5. For a scant account of Cephalus of Clazomenae see Nails, The People of Plato, 83 (which references these lines of the Parmenides, constituting everything we know about him). Some scholars take this to be an intentional reference to the birthplace of Anaximander. Mitchell H. Miller argues that the allusion is part of Plato’s attempt to appropriate Eleatic thought (Plato’s Parmenides, 25-28). This, perhaps, ties the Parmenides to the Phaedo where Socrates first allies himself with, and then augments, Anaxagoras’ ἀρχή. Sayer recognizes a significant connection between the Parmenides and the Republic (he allows for the connection to the theory of the forms), however, he ultimately rejects the idea that Plato means to establish direct reference as “it remains unlikely that Plato would convey signals about the main thrust of the dialogue with his choice of characters [Adeimantus and Glaucion] in such minor roles” (59). As a slight adjustment, I would point to the fact that}
further by the fact that Antiphon heard the original account from a friend of Zeno called Pythodorus (who was present on the occasion). If this is not distanced enough, the reliability becomes yet more questionable when we learn that Antiphon practiced the story to perfection in his youth, but he is now more interested in horses than philosophy. When asked to recite the story, “he balked at first—it was, he said, a lot of work” (127a). The audience might reasonably wonder how accurate his memory could be given that he is unpracticed, uninterested, and not a young man.\textsuperscript{55}

The question should arise at this point, for any audience of the dialogue, why we would be compelled to continue reading an account that begins in such uncertainty. But this is precisely the kind of dizzying astonishment in which, according to the \textit{Theaetetus}, philosophy begins: “this is an experience which is characteristic of a philosopher, this wondering \[\text{θαυμάζειν}\]: this is where philosophy begins \[\text{ἀρχὴ φιλοσοφίας}\] and nowhere else” (\textit{Thaetetus} 155d).\textsuperscript{56} Embracing such a lack of assuredness emerges as the unifying theme of the \textit{Parmenides}. A grand Socratic theory will be robbed of its authority, and Plato begins the account of this attack by establishing an

---

\textsuperscript{55} Considering Antiphon’s age, distance from the events, and indifference to philosophy (compounded by the fact that Antiphon’s account is a representation of someone else’s memory, and that representation is being recounted here by a yet more distanced narrator), even accounting for the fact that the fifth century Greek education would have trained young men to memorize large portions of text, given the content of the prose presented in this dialogue, the idea that it could be considered wholly accurate strains credibility. Imagine, for instance, reciting any part of the deductions: “I mean this: there is no need for a thing to come to be different from a thing that is already different; it must, rather, already be different from what is already different, have come to be different from what has come to be different, and be going to be different from what is going to be different; but it must not have come to be, be going to be, or be different from what comes to be different: it must come to be different, and nothing else” (141b)—and this, for 30 Stephanus pages.

\textsuperscript{56} The wonder expressed by Theaetetus arises from his consideration of the same puzzle of change that the young Socrates is attempting to address (unsuccessfully, by way of the forms) in the \textit{Parmenides}.
affirmative association with the process of undermining authority. Socrates’ intellectual authority becomes questionable (even if it is not the real, mature Socrates), just as the authorial authority of Plato is subverted (even if Plato is only relating the story fourth-hand). The ambiguity in the frame is grooming the audience, the better to receive the lesson of the *Parmenides*. This opening is disconcerting, and the dialogue will continue to subvert expectations.

When the story begins, according to (let us say) Pythodorus, Socrates had come to the Kerameikos because he was “eager to hear Zeno read his book, which he and Parmenides had just brought to Athens for the first time” (127c). Once the recitation is complete, Socrates asks Zeno to “read the first hypothesis of the first argument] again” (127e). Immediately, in Zeno, another authority is tested, but it is not long before the origin of that authority will again be offset. The hypothesis that Socrates means to test at the beginning of Zeno’s book (at the beginning of Plato’s book) does not originate with Zeno. Of course, Zeno’s book—as Socrates rather mischievously points out—is essentially a representation of Parmenides’ famous poem:

> “*Parmenides,*” Socrates said, “I understand that Zeno wants to be on intimate terms with you not only in friendship but also in his book. He has, in a way, written the same thing as you, but by changing it round he tries to fool us into thinking he is saying something different. You say in your poem that the all is one...he, for his part says that it is not many...So, with one of you saying ‘one,’ and the other ‘not many,’ and with each of you speaking in a way that suggests you’ve said nothing the same—although you mean practically the same thing—what you’ve said you appear to have said over the heads of the rest of us (*Parmenides* 128a-b).

Zeno’s intellectual authority has a prior origin which destabilizes his own. We are confronted with two books in the *Parmenides*, each written by disciples about theories attributed to their respective teachers. On the one hand we have the dialogue, written by Plato about Socrates’ presentation of

---

57 Hypothesis is sometimes used by Plato in a (somewhat) technical sense. It appears to be operating in a mundane sense here (at least at the beginning of the dialogue). The more technical usage is identified in the *Phaedo*, and this will be discussed later in the chapter.
the theory of the forms; on the other hand, we have Zeno’s book, written in defense of Parmenides’
theory of the one.58 We would do well to recall Socrates’ lamentation at the end of the Phaedrus
that a written discourse “always needs its father’s support; alone, it can neither defend itself nor
come to its own support” (Phaedrus 275e). Zeno’s book is attempting to do precisely this, “the
book comes to the defense of Parmenides’ argument against those who try to make fun of it by
claiming that, if it is one, many absurdities and self-contradictions result from that argument”
(Parmenides 128c-d). Plato’s book does no such thing. The theory of the forms is exposed for its
flaws and no apparent defense is made either by the author of the discourse or by the father of the
theory within the discourse.59 Given the heavy-handed framing of this dialogue, it seems that
coming to the defense of the forms is not Plato’s purpose, nor should this be the purpose of the
audience. To defend the theory of the forms would be to act as Zeno is acting—representing, and
hence weakening, the ἀρχή of his teacher—“When it has once been written down, every discourse
roams about everywhere, reaching indiscriminately those with understanding no less that those
who have no business with it” (Phaedrus 275e). Anything resembling a Socratic ἀρχή, on the other
hand, if there could even be such a thing, is disposable.

While Plato is able to make this broader point, the intent to form this nuanced critique
cannot be attributed to the character within the narrative. Socrates’ indelicate attack is ineffectual

58 The theory of the forms is attributed here to the fictionalized character of Socrates. It is perhaps the
case that Socrates did not commit to such a theory (but which, if any, theories Socrates did propound
remains a mystery). This is to say, the idea that Plato is representing the views of the historical Socrates
cannot be confirmed (see the discussion in the introduction). The point remains, however, that Plato was
sufficiently impressed by the historical Socrates that he chose to write Sokratikoi Logi (as Aristotle called
them in the Poetics 1447b11) and presumably did not mind being considered his disciple. That the theory
of the forms is attested to Socrates in this book is perhaps no more illicit than the unauthorized pressing of
Zeno’s book. What is more, let us not lose sight of the fact that everything that transpires here, more than
in any other dialogue, is most likely Platonic fiction.

59 However, as we shall soon see, it is rather curiously (if unsatisfactorily) defended by Parmenides—
the very person who initially exposes the flaws.
Zeno calmly responds by accepting the similarity but points out that he wrote the book in his youth and “someone made an unauthorized copy” (128d) of it—he did not choose to have it released. More importantly, Socrates has missed the significance of the difference between Parmenides’ original thesis and Zeno’s defense against the counterexample. Zeno kindly explains that those who argue against Parmenides’ position (asserting “many” as opposed to “one”) tend to emphasize the “absurdities and self-contradictions that result from that argument” (128d). Zeno’s retort “pays them back in kind with something for good measure, since it aims to make clear that their hypothesis, if it is many, would, if someone examined the matter more thoroughly, suffer consequences even more absurd than those suffered by the hypothesis of its being one” (128d). Socrates’ quibble here, even if it did expose Zeno’s vainglory in saying the same thing as Parmenides, has no impact on their hypothesis and serves no purpose for the counterargument he means to present.

The Authority of the Forms

In an uncharacteristic exchange, the young Socrates introduces his own theory in a direct and extended attack against his interlocutor’s argument. The speech begins, “don’t you acknowledge that there is a form, itself by itself, of likeness” (128e), and continues to an unusual length. R. E. Allen suggests that Plato’s rendering of such an atypical episode is intended to “remind the reader of Socrates’ youth and impetuosity.” It is important to add here, however, that age is no cure for insolence. A survey of the dramatis personae of the Platonic opera will reveal both youthful

---

60 The speech is more than an entire (unannotated) Stephanus page, over fifty lines. The mature Socrates is known to have given speeches, but it is usually under duress, and seldom (if ever) his opening move.

61 Allen, Plato’s Parmenides, 67.
restraint and senescent conceit. By way of a brief, select review: Euthyphro, Critias, Thrasymachus, and Callicles (in ascending order of obstinance), are all adult men in their 30’s at least. In the Charmides, the very young titular character shows promise (his initial answer to the question of what constitutes moderation is intelligent and demure, Charmides 159b), and it appear it is not his youth, but his association with Critias, that fosters and betrays his arrogance. Theaetetus is the paradigm of youthful restraint.

It is important for Plato to emphasize Socrates’ youth, because it is important to present a nonstandard characterization of Socrates in order to present a foil for the ideal philosopher presented in the Socrates of the other dialogues; and in the present case, Parmenides appears to model the behavior of the ideal philosopher. In writing the young Socrates, Plato can provide his audience with the unflattering image of a Socrates who does precisely what Socrates is generally disinclined to do, that is, make authoritative claims to wisdom.

The account that Socrates is portrayed as proclaiming with such confidence, at the beginning of this origin story, gives the appearance of attempting to establish a first principle of an argument that, if this were really Socrates, would designate a Socratic ἀρχή. But as the careful framing and characterizations warn us, nothing here is exactly as it seems. The theory of the forms, such as it is, is attributed to a Socratic simulacrum in a story that could scarcely be true—and even if true, must be wildly inaccurate. The eventual devastation of the theory (to be discussed shortly) is not presented as a call to the audience (at the Academy or in the academy) to come to its rescue. However, I do not assume the position that Parmenides’ entire criticism must be taken as unassailable, or that the theory of the forms should be abandoned as worthless. My assumed position is that we should be no more willing to abandon the theory of the forms for its flaws than

62 By way of a brief, select review: Euthyphro, Critias, Thrasymachus, and Callicles (in ascending order of obstinance), are all adult men in their 30’s at least. In the Charmides, the very young titular character shows promise (his initial answer to the question of what constitutes moderation is intelligent and demure, Charmides 159b), and it appear it is not his youth, but his association with Critias, that fosters and betrays his arrogance. Theaetetus is the paradigm of youthful restraint.

63 In his discussion of the Euthyphro, James A. Arieti makes a similar claim, equating the recalcitrance of the authoritarian with youthful folly (Interpreting Plato, 145). I discuss this further in Chapter Two.

64 Were we tempted to read the theory of the forms as a Socratic first principle operating within a metaphysical system, the young Socrates might be taken as cosmologist of the Presocratic order.
we are to dismiss the *Parmenides* for its lack of authenticity—and I believe Plato’s framing is
designed to make this very point. As a conceptual framework for addressing the problems of
knowledge, Plato frequently shows Socrates returning to the theory of the forms (or something
like it). Scholars have presented various defenses of the theory in which they cite deficits in
Parmenides’ several arguments or offer responses to those arguments that Plato apparently
neglected to include. Given that Socrates does not completely abandon the forms, it is good to
know that the theory proper is not entirely ineffective. However, I do not believe that the thrust of
the *Parmenides* lies either in criticism or defense of the forms. On my reading, Plato means to
stress the philosophical significance of abstaining from authoritative pronouncements even to the
extent of undercutting one’s own authority and discrediting cherished theories. I suggest that for
Plato, and for Socrates, the loving pursuit of wisdom demands a willingness to resist allegiances
doctrine—no matter how attractive one might find them to be.

Parmenides will deliver a series of blows to the young Socrates’ pet theory. It should be
kept in mind, however, that before the flogging begins, contrary to any expectation that Parmenides
and Zeno might be agitated, Pythodorus reports that “they both paid close attention to Socrates

65 It is not the aim of this chapter to come to the defense of the theory of the forms, nor is there need to
accept the rigor of Parmenides’ criticisms (with the exception of the greatest aporia). Hence, an extensive
review of the (incredibly vast) literature would not be appropriate here. However, by way of a very brief
selection: Mary Louise Gill provides an excellent overview of Parmenides’ arguments (including a
particularity concise, axiomatic presentation of the deductions of Part II of the *Parmenides*) in the
introduction to her 1996 translation. Translations by Allen (1983) and Sayre (1996) are followed by
extensive analyses of the dialogue and each provide close attention to the arguments. In a more recent
article, Matthew Duncombe (2013) argues with Parmenides against the theory of the forms (“The Greatest
Difficulty at *Parmenides* 133c-134e and Plato’s Relative Terms”); hence, he is required to (and does)
provide a detailed review of the literature (focusing most specifically, but not exclusively, on the literature
pertaining to the “greatest aporia” in (6) the Separation Argument).

66 Following Gill’s labelling and cataloging of the arguments (adding to 3 and 5 the more common
“Third Man” label), Parmenides’ arguments are: “(1) Scope of the Forms (130b-e), (2) Whole-Part
Dilemma (130e-131e), (3) Largeness Regress [Third Man I] (132a-b), (4) Forms Are Thoughts (132b-c),
(5) Likeness Regress [Third Man II] (132c-133a), and (6) Separation Argument (133a-134e)” (Gill,
introduction to Parmenides, 18).
and often glanced at each other and smiled, as though they admired him” (130a). This is an early indicator that Parmenides is not engaging Socrates simply to defend his own theory, and as we shall see, there is a didactic value to the elenches that will follow. There may be some degree of irony when Parmenides says to Socrates “you are much to be admired for your keenness for argument” (130b), but the metdiegetic observation has betrayed a glimmer of sincerity.

The first set of questions for Socrates constitutes a basic attempt to clarify what Socrates means when he talks about the forms (ordinarily a standard Socratic opening). This descends quite quickly into an admission that the full scope of the forms has not been carefully parsed out. Socrates is committed to the concept of “a form, itself by itself, of just, and beautiful, and good, and everything of that sort” (130b). But when Parmenides asks about the form of “human being, or fire, or water,” Socrates is less certain, responding, “I’ve often found myself in doubt whether I should talk about those in the same way as the others or differently” (130c). Finally, Socrates agrees that it would be absurd to accept that there might be forms of things like “hair and mud and dirt, or anything else undignified and worthless” (130c). On this point, however, it is revealed that Socrates does not have robust support for this dismissal beyond the feeling that it is “too outlandish to think there is a form for them” (130d). On the first pass of the interrogation, the budding philosopher admits his most serious rational deficit—he is afraid to probe the weaknesses in his own argument. When he does consider the strange case of the form of undignified and worthless things, he admits that he scurries back to the security of the higher forms: “when I get bogged down in that, I hurry away, afraid that I may fall into some pit of nonsense and come to harm; but when I arrive back in the vicinity of the things we agreed a moment ago have forms, I linger there and occupy myself with them” (130d).
Parmenides tells Socrates that his commitment to the safer part of his theory is evidence of his philosophical inadequacies, but he offers some reassuring words: “philosophy has not yet gripped you as, in my opinion, it will in the future, once you begin to consider none of these cases beneath your notice. Now, though, you still care about what people think” (130e). This statement points to a requirement of thoroughness: a good philosopher cannot simply ignore the troubling minutiae of a theoretical position. The statement also addresses the requirement of self-criticism. Those who are committed to appearing wise (rhetoricians, for instance), will publicly expound only the stronger parts of their theoretical assertions, and do so in lengthy accounts glossing over the defects. At the end of the dialogue (137c-166c), Parmenides will perform a public demonstration of such self-criticism, or, as Zeno describes it, “this comprehensive and circuitous treatment” (136e), by positing successive iterations of his own theory and subjecting each to refutation. Before turning towards his own theory of the one, however, Parmenides will guide Socrates through the many deficiencies in the theory of the forms.

While Parmenides has immediately exposed that Socrates’ theory has not been carefully considered for all instances where a particular/universal relation could occur, this deficit is not pursued. For good measure, Parmenides focuses only on the stronger part of the account relating to “those things that one might above all grasp by means of reason” (135e). The examination, from 131a-132c, consists of a set of conflicts to which Socrates commits himself if he maintains the theory of the forms such as it is at the start of the discussion. The starting point, restated by Parmenides, and accepted by Socrates is as follows: “there are certain forms from which these other things, by getting a share of them, derive their names—as, for instance, they come to be like

---

67 By contrast, Sandra Peterson counts 195 short arguments in the second part of the dialogue (“Plato’s Parmenides: A Principle of Interpretation and Seven Arguments,” 167).
by getting a share of likeness, large by getting a share of largeness, and just and beautiful by getting a share of justice and beauty” (130e-131a). The several problems that Parmenides exposes work to undermine the function of the forms, and Socrates is required to return to the first position to make adjustments (and this, it is worth noting, he does diligently).

Socrates is made to agree that a whole form cannot be in various, discrete things and that no form can be divisible (131a-131c). This leads to the largeness regress refutation and Socrates offers the resolution that “each of these forms is a thought…and properly occurs only in minds. In this way each of them might be one and no longer face the difficulties mentioned just now” (132b). It is not my concern, at present, to assess Parmenides’ (or Socrates’) proficiency in argument. Stand or fall, these are the positions established in the text. What I do hope to highlight is the continuous movement of the theory from its physical applicability to abstraction. The forms have retreated from objects in the world and will hide briefly in the mind. However, Parmenides will quickly chase the thought-forms out of the mind and into nature. Socrates makes a final attempt to salvage the theory by suggesting that “these forms are like patterns set in nature, and other things resemble them and are likenesses; and this partaking of the forms is, for the other things, simply being modelled on them” (132d). This reformulation is susceptible to the same regress as the initial formulation. The more serious concern, however, is that the forms have now been abstracted from both the physical and the mental world. While Socrates concedes to the basic problem that it is difficult to provide an account of the mechanics of form theory, Parmenides reveals that this is no longer the most pressing problem: “‘I assure you,’ he said, ‘that you do not yet, if I may put it so, have an inkling of how great the difficulty [ἀπορία] is if you are going to posit one form in each case every time you make a distinction among things’” (133a-b).
The Greatest Aporia

The greatest aporia comes in two parts. The first part concerns human knowledge of the now abstracted forms (or their impossibility); the second part concerns divine knowledge of, and authority over, human beings (or lack thereof). Parmenides will argue that the theory of the forms, such as it has been presented by the young Socrates, shackles human knowledge to the human world and blocks the possibility of knowing the forms (Parmenides 133b-134b). This would perhaps be an unfortunate situation for human beings, but it is not, on the face of it, obviously more damaging to the theory than the previous refutations. “Even more shocking” (134c), Parmenides adds, is the consequence that the gods would have no authority over human beings, nor could they even have knowledge of human affairs (134c-e). This, Socrates admits, would make the argument too strange (Parmenides 134e). Apparently, this is the final nail in the coffin for philosophy as the climax of this episode is the total destruction of the power of dialectic (Parmenides 135c).

I take it that the first part of the greatest aporia (that we cannot know the forms) does more harm to the theory of the forms than the second part (that the gods cannot know human affairs). Following from the preceding refutations of the theory of the forms, Parmenides secures Socrates’ agreement on the point that anyone who, “posits that there is for each thing some being, itself by itself, would agree, to begin with, that none of these beings is in us” (133c). When Socrates agrees, Parmenides follows by stating that, “all the characters [ἰδεῶν] that are what they are in

68 It was the previous refutations that brought the theory of the forms to this impasse. That the gods should be robbed of knowledge is certainly impious and perhaps, as a consequence, more troubling—but impiety is not a fallacy. I return to the second part of the greatest aporia later (“Έξ Ἀρχῆς (Slight Return)”).

69 It is a minor point, but interesting to note, that Socrates does not merely “nod yes or no,” but responds, “yes—how could it still be itself by itself? (Parmenides 133c), indicating that he is committing to the dialectical process and that he is following Parmenides’ (quite complex) argument well.
relation to each other have their being in relation to themselves but not in relation to things that belong to us” (133c). Parmenides has now established, with Socrates, that positing the theory of the forms implies a radical separation between two realms—the mortal realm of changing things, and an abstracted realm of eternal things. The distinction here is best elaborated in Parmenides’ master/slave analogy:

If one of us is somebody’s master or somebody’s slave, he is surely not a slave of master itself—of what master is—nor is the master a master of slave itself—of what a slave is. On the contrary, being a human being, he is a master or slave of a human being. Mastery itself, on the other hand, is what it is of slavery itself; and, in the same way, slavery itself is slavery of mastery itself. Things in us do not have their power in relation to forms, nor do forms have theirs in relation to us; but I repeat, forms are what they are of themselves and in relation to themselves, and things that belong to us are, in the same way, what they are in relation to themselves (Parmenides 133e-134a).

Socrates has presented his theory of the forms in an attempt to solve the problem of change in the physical world in such a way that we would not be required to commit to a monistic account of nature. The theory requires recourse to an abstracted, superlunary, and unchanging set of conceptual correlates to account for the perceived distinctions between the sensual objects in human experience. For this theory to operate as intended, it requires interaction between the two established realms. However, as Parmenides has now exposed, after drawing Socrates through his own argument, the theory has become a victim of its own success. To accept that a realm of forms exists, we are required to accept that it is radically distinct from the world as it is present to human experience. As such, if we accept that there exist ultimate expressions of beauty and justice, these concepts cannot be objects of experience. Parmenides will then emphasize that such things cannot

70 Gill and Ryan account for the various translations for the forms: “in this dialogue Plato uses three different abstract expressions to specify forms...genos (a term restricted to part one of the dialogue) which we render as “kind,” and eidos, which we render as “form.” Later he will use a third term, idea, which we render as “character” (129c n. 8).
be objects of knowledge, and knowledge itself, which would be knowledge of truth itself, is necessarily beyond human experience (134a-c).

True knowledge of beauty, justice, and the good is, according to Parmenides, “much more precise [ἀκριβέστερον] than is knowledge that belongs to us” (134c). Socrates is compelled to agree that “god more than anyone else has this most precise knowledge” (134c). This establishes the forms and the realm of the forms as divine, or at least, existing exclusively in (or as properties of) the divine realm. Parmenides now reveals the (likely impious) second part of the greatest aporia:

Well then, if this most precise mastery and this most precise knowledge belong to the divine, the gods’ mastery could never master us, nor could their knowledge know us or anything that belongs to us. No, just as we do not govern [ἄρχομεν] them by our governance [ἄρχῃ] and know nothing of the divine by our knowledge, so they in turn are, for the same reason, neither our masters nor, being gods, do they know human affairs (Parmenides 134d-e).

The young and pious Socrates, still concerned with what others think, takes this revelation to suggest that the “argument may be getting too bizarre” (134e). Socrates, like many of his later interlocutors, appears to be at a loss.

Mark L. McPherran suggests that “Plato is throwing down a last gauntlet, daring his readers to make sense of and solve this final puzzle.” Given this assumption, he expresses surprise over the lack of scholarly discussion on the second part of the greatest aporia. Taking up the mantle of the most wondrous man [θαυμαστοτέρου], McPherran comes to the rescue of the theory of the

---

71 The kind of knowledge that will lead Euthyphro and Thrasytachus towards aporia will also be characterized as having this “precise” nature (discussed in chapters two and three, respectively).


73 “Only a prodigy more remarkable [θαυμαστοτέρου] still will discover that and be able to teach someone else who has sifted all these difficulties thoroughly and critically for himself” (Parmenides 135b).
forms. The defense ultimately comes to a recommendation for what Plato ought to have done—
that is, he should have appealed to a 20th Century philosophical concept (Cambridge change) to
allow change into the forms. Evidence for such a proposition, McPherran admits, is “equivocal at
best.”

In a later article on the greatest aporia, Matthew Duncombe picks up the opposing side of
the argument. Duncombe presents Parmenides’ objections as serious problems for the theory of
the forms. This should not be a terribly shocking position since this is precisely what Plato has
already done in the Parmenides. However, the claim of the article is that the objections are being
read in novel ways. Perhaps the most novel is the claim that “while it is agreed on all sides that
conclusion…[ii. That the human cannot know the divine] would be unacceptable to
Plato…[conclusion i. that the divine cannot master the human] would also be problematic for
him.” In a note, Duncombe adds, “although it seems obvious, no literature I am aware of says
that (i) would be problematic for the Platonist.” While interesting, the argument here amounts to

74 McPherran presents his argument as a corrective for Plato’s failings. He claims that, rather than
writing the dialogue as he did, Plato ought to have appealed to Cambridge change (“An Argument ‘Too
Strange’,” 69).

75 McPherran, 69. Cambridge change (more precisely, “mere” Cambridge change), is a term coined by
P. T. Geach (Logic Matters, 1972), identifying a change in an object’s relational status to other objects. The
present sentence, for instance (assuming it is printed in ink, on paper), will not change in any apparent way
once it has been read, but it will admit of the change of having been read in every instance of its having
been read—a quality that was not true of the sentence prior to its being read (and, per chance, having been
reread for clarification, it undergoes yet another mere Cambridge change).

76 Duncombe, “The Greatest Difficulty.”

77 Duncombe, 49.

78 Duncombe, 49n16. This is perhaps too obvious a truth to need stating. While it is impious (and
inconsistent with Platonic thought) to suggest that the gods cannot master mortals, Plato could be read as
rejecting the idea that the gods would have any interest in mastery of mortal affairs. Within the context of
the Parmenides, I would suggest that the established division is introduced to highlight the absence of the
soul in this discourse. As I shall discuss shortly (with Michael Inwood, “The Greatest Difficulty: Can we
Know the Forms?”), as the theory of the soul helps resolve the epistemological problems of the greatest
aporia, the absence of any discussion of the soul in the Parmenides is quite telling.
a statement that Plato wrote what he meant to write. The more interesting question, addressed in neither article, is why would Plato write the young Socrates into so great an impasse?

I have introduced the two above articles, representative of arguments on either side of roughly the same passage, to illustrate a point. It is the point, I take Plato to be intent on demonstrating—and one that ought to be taken seriously, given the stakes. On the one hand, we have a commentator objecting that the forms “do not exist, and that, even if they do, they must by strict necessity be unknowable to human nature; and in saying this he seems to have a point; and as we said, he is extraordinarily hard to win over” (*Parmenides* 135a). On the other hand, we have a champion of the forms who would hope to win over a detractor who has “sifted through all these difficulties thoroughly and critically” (135b). If the detractor remains intractable in spite of the best efforts of the champion of the forms, we find ourselves at an impasse. This is the paradigmatic case in which the power of dialectic is utterly destroyed (135c).

**The Power of Dialectic**

It is tempting to assume that the security of dialectic rests on the validity of the theory of the forms—that one can only engage in dialectic if the theory of the forms is correct and functional. Such a reading, however, is less appealing considering that at this point in the dialogue—not halfway complete—the theory of the forms has been four times defeated, and yet the better part of the dialogue continues with a masterful display of dialectic. I would suggest that it is not the rejection of the forms that disempowers dialectic, it is the meeting of two authoritative claims to knowledge. The inscrutability of the forms is the greatest aporia. On my reading, however, it is not this knowledge deficit that disempowers dialectic, rather it is a resistance to criticism and a
reluctance to reevaluate knowledge claims. The young, impudent Socrates is making the uncharacteristic mistake of holding too fast to his ground and positing his theory as a strict first principle rather than a fungible hypothesis. Parmenides has been playing the antagonist, meeting authority with authority, in order to demonstrate to Socrates the danger of this practice by leading him towards a devastating aporia.

It is at this point that Parmenides relents. He asks where Socrates will turn while these difficulties remain unresolved, and Socrates has no answer (135c). There is a palpable danger, at this moment, of converting the promising philosopher into a misologue. Parmenides ceases to play the role of the hardheaded detractor and offers to help Socrates out of his philosophical crisis. The help, however, is not the salvation of Socrates’ pet theory. Plato could have continued the dialogue with a defense of the forms, but he does not. Rather, Parmenides demonstrates the heavy work of the dialectic in what will effectively be a self-elenctic exercise. Here, Parmenides’ own theory is subjected to a series of potential criticisms, effecting a double display. This is not only a lesson in the process of dialectical inquiry, the philosopher is modelling behavior for his youngest

79 The ambiguity of τὴν τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι δύναμιν (135c) is interesting here. Rendered in the mundane sense, this can simply mean “the possibility of conversation.” Just for it to be a conversation, a conversation requires some mutual level of understanding between participants and a willingness to respond and adapt to one another.

80 “We should not become misologues as people become misanthropes. There is no greater evil one can suffer than to hate reasonable discourse…as when one who lacks skill in arguments puts his trust in an argument as being true, then shortly afterwards believes it to be false…it would be pitiable…if a man who has dealt with such arguments… should not blame himself or his own lack of skill but, because of his distress, in the end gladly shift the blame away from himself to the arguments, and spend the rest of his life hating and reviling reasonable discourse and so be deprived of truth and knowledge of reality” (Phaedo 89d-90d).

81 The dialogue continues in a discussion between Parmenides and the youngest member of the party, Aristotle. Aristotle is chosen for his youth as it is deemed this would make him least likely to make this purely didactic exercise more work than it needs to be (137b). Hence, he contributes little more than affirmations and the occasional request or clarification. Of course, it is entirely impossible that this would be the Aristotle who might immediately come to mind.
student, demonstrating the necessary willingness to suspend allegiance even to our most strongly held convictions (noting that his oldest student, Zeno, has not learned this lesson). “What then will you do about philosophy?” Parmenides asks, “where will you turn, while these difficulties remain unresolved?” (135c). The answer, as it happens, is that Socrates will need to turn inward, towards his own theory of the forms. Dialectic requires consistent returns ἐξ ἀρχῆς.

With due consternation, Allen remarks that Parmenides “implicitly rejects his own hypothesis that the sum of things is one, accepts in its place the theory of Ideas, and levels against that theory a series of objections.”\(^\text{82}\) Allen’s observation results from Parmenides’ stated belief at 135b-c (after his litany of assaults against the theory of the forms) “that to reject that theory is to destroy the significance of thought and discourse.”\(^\text{83}\)

We must also accept that Parmenides occupies the standard Socratic position in this dialogue.\(^\text{84}\) Socrates plays the role of the headstrong interlocutor soon to be disabused of his strongly held beliefs, and Parmenides enters the conversation to facilitate the elenctic undermining of these beliefs. In the Parmenides, no doctrine is safe. However, of equal significance, no doctrine is left to die. At the crisis point (the first aporia, as Miller puts it), Parmenides relents and offers assistance to the fledgling philosopher. The first aporia identified in the Parmenides—hence, in a

\(^{82}\) Allen, Plato’s Parmenides, 99.

\(^{83}\) Allen, 99. Allen paraphrases his own translation of line 135c: καὶ οὕτως τὴν τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι δύναμιν παντάπασι διαφθερεῖ. In his translation, Allen renders δύναμιν as “power and significance,” and διαλέγεσθαι as “thought and discourse.”

\(^{84}\) Miller outlines a recurrent structure which, he claims (compellingly), is evidenced in numerous dialogues including the Parmenides (Plato’s Parmenides, 4-9). In short, the structure identifies four moments in an encounter between a philosopher and a non-philosopher: 1. Eliciting the position of the non-philosopher; 2. Refutation by the philosopher (first aporia); 3. Philosopher provides reorienting insight (way through aporia); 4. Return to the aporia. Following this schema, we see that Socrates is usually the philosopher in the encounter. In the Parmenides, it is Parmenides who plays the philosopher and Socrates the non-philosopher (albeit a very promising one).
narrative sense, Socrates’ first aporia—is characterized as one so great\textsuperscript{85} that it threatens the power of dialectic (135c).

The interlude between the revelation of the greatest aporia and the beginning of the dialectic exercise is marked by Plato with a narrative break. Much has transpired since Cephalus of Clazomenae began telling us about the time he heard Plato’s half-brother tell the story he learned, in his youth, from Zeno’s friend about the time that Socrates met Parmenides. The audience may well have forgotten the curious framing of this story if not for the sudden burst of laughter from Zeno. Plato makes it a point to remind the reader of our distance from these events, and that he is not the proper origin of this account—it was Antiphon, Plato writes, who said that Zeno laughed (136d). Only a few lines later, Plato prods the audience again, reminding us that everything related here is something that “Antiphon said that Pythodorus said” (136e).

The authority of the would-be Socratic \(\alpha\rho\chi\eta\) has just been undermined, and Parmenides is set to launch into a series of hypotheses that will be rejected (or contradicted by the introduction of a new hypothesis) just as they are introduced.\textsuperscript{86} Plato chooses this moment to remind us that, if we return to the beginning, desperate to find some authoritative grounding, we won’t find him there—in fact, at the \(\alpha\rho\chi\eta\), we’ll find nothing but ambiguity. The tone, the theme, and the lesson of this dialogue is one of relinquishing commitments to authority.

Before pressing on (since Plato has reminded us of the beginning of the dialogue), it should be remarked that the word denoting both origin and authority, \(\alpha\rho\chi\eta\), has been all but absent from the dialogue until this point. Both the noun and the corresponding verb \([\alpha\rho\chi\omega]\) are used in the same clause at the end of the second part of the greatest aporia: “just as we do not rule \([\alpha\rho\chi\omega\mu\epsilon]\) them

\textsuperscript{85} Parmenides 133a-b.

\textsuperscript{86} This is a practice more closely resembling the hypothetical method outlined in the Phaedo.
by our authority [ἀρχῆ]” (Parmenides 134e). This is the first time either the noun or the verb is used, in spite of several opportunities—perhaps most noticeably the preceding clause concerning the same power dynamics, and the initial argument concerning the human, master-slave relationship. The word used for authority here is δεσποτεία, a word that Plato uses only six times throughout the corpus, four of which are here in the first part of the Parmenides.87 From the point of the narrative break, where Socrates exits the discourse (replaced with Aristotle), ἀρχή is employed by Parmenides 19 times—a stark contrast, which must suggest a deliberate choice by Plato.88

At the beginning of this account of the beginning of Socrates’ philosophical career, the absence of the word ἀρχή is salient. It is at the beginning of this dialogue that the young Socrates is portrayed as ignorant of dialectic. In the second part of the dialogue, where Parmenides provides a dialectical exercise, recourse ἐξ ἀρχῆς returns in force. The power of dialectic, endangered by authoritative claims to knowledge, is thematically tied to the concept of an ἀρχή. But here, Plato affects a perversion of the usages that had, by this point, become standard. Where it could have designated authority, human or divine, it did not (for the most part). Where it could have designated authority (i.e., a slave’s master), δεσπότης is more common, occurring 84 times.

87 δεσποτεία, designating the concept of authority (or mastery). The other two uses are the Laws 698a and the Republic 569c. Given the scarcity, however, it is surprising to find that it is also included in the Definitions as “just authority beyond human control” [ἀρχή ἀνυπεύθυνος δικαία] (415e). The word for an authority (i.e., a slave’s master), δεσπότης is more common, occurring 84 times.

88 There are alternative possibilities (beyond the scope of the present study, but of certain interest). For some scholars, the differences in style between the two parts suggest that they were written at different times. My observation may be used to contribute to this position. However, the absence of ἀρχῆ and the use of δεσποτεία would have to be accounted for—a difficult task given the rarity of δεσποτεία in other dialogues and that ἀρχῆ is absent from only two other dialogues, Clitophon and Minos (the latter being a very curious absence). This difficulty opens yet another (rather alarming) possibility that the first part of the Parmenides is not, in fact, written by Plato. Assuming that this dialogue does belong to Plato, if my suggestion that Plato is attempting to abnegate his own authorial authority is correct, then this note serves as evidence that his gambit proved quite successful.
a beginning of any kind, it did not. Where it could have designated a first principle, as the Presocratics had come to understand it, it did not. Plato radically separates the theory of the forms from any mention of an \( \text{ἀρχή} \). When Plato allows the word to return in the second part, it always enters either as a problem for the proposed hypothesis, or as an invitation to return again to the beginning. Parmenides’ hypotheses are consistently undone by the problem of positing a beginning, and each return to the beginning inevitably produces a new contradiction. The absence of the word in the Socratic part of the dialogue perhaps highlights the absence of the young Socrates’ dialectical skill. When Parmenides begins his demonstration, and \( \text{ἀρχή} \) is used 19 times, we note that Plato may be marking here the importance of undermining authority at its starting-point. This suggests that we should explore a possible association between the usage of \( \text{ἀρχή} \) and the function of dialectic but that must be another project for another time.

But what value is there in this exercise? We should recall that this virtuoso performance of self-defeat, constituting the better part of the dialogue, emerges from the crisis of the greatest aporia where we left the power of dialectic utterly destroyed. Parmenides conjures up aporia after aporia, yet he continues. An impasse is impassable. This means that the unknowability of the forms, and the contradictions inherent to Parmenidean monism present real problems. Neither Plato nor Plato’s Parmenides mean to suggest that either theory could transcend its aporia. The possibility of progression, however, is offered in constant returns to the beginning. Each return reorganizes the conditions of the origin and reorients the resulting path. To achieve such a reorganization, one must be willing to accept the flaws of the original position. Questioning our

\[ \text{89 See, for instance, the beginning of the dialogue where Socrates asks Zeno to read “the first [πρώτην] hypothesis [ὑπόθεσιν] of the first [πρώτου] argument again” (Parmenides 127d).} \]

\[ \text{90 137d.4,6,7; 145a.5,8; 153c.2,3,4; 153d.5; 165a.6,8; 165b.1,1.} \]

\[ \text{91 142b.1,5; 159b.4; 160d.3; 163b.7; 165e.2.} \]
own intellectual authority, in each return to the beginning of our arguments, will not provide passage beyond the most serious aporias, but it can provide a new (and hopefully insightful) route towards the impasse, and even push the impasse further out. This is the power of dialectic.

Έξ Ἀρχῆς (Slight Return)
The crisis point of the *Parmenides*, is marked by a narrative return to the beginning of the dialogue. The dialogue itself, of course, is a return to Socrates’ intellectual debut. Plato wants to expose the flaws in the theory of the forms, and Plato wants us to accept the presence of these difficulties. However, Plato also wants to alert us to the idea that the instability of origins and the fragility of human authority is not cause to abandon the pursuit of knowledge. Parmenides will present the several difficulties in his monistic theory, but we do not assume that he converts to dualism. Plato presents an account plagued with uncertainty, but he surely did not write it with the hope that it would be ignored for its inaccuracy. And Socrates, we know, continues to appeal to the theory of the forms throughout his life. While I do not mean to come to the defense of the theory (as it is presented here), I need to account for Socrates’ continued recourse to the forms.

Plato offers the theory of the forms as a sacrifice in the *Parmenides*. For all appearances, Socrates’ own child is left for dead. But Plato is crafty here, discretely switching the child for a deer. Just as we arrive at the greatest aporia, we are forced to return to the beginning of the account, and we are reminded of the ambiguity in the origin. Nothing there was exactly as it appeared. Even Socrates is not quite the Socrates we know, and while the theory he presents is a lot like the theory of the forms, it is not exactly it.

This is not to say that, in this switch, the theory of forms escapes Parmenides’ arguments. Plato wants us to accept these problems. If the problems are solved, then the forms are knowable
by mortals; and if the forms can be known by mortals, then they are not forms. There is a process, however, that allows the serious philosopher to continue examining an apparently broken theory. This process, dialectic, is not disempowered by otherwise insoluble problems because it begins in a rejection of any absolute commitments to hypotheses. By definition, hypotheses cannot be asserted as intractable doctrine. This rejection is demonstrated by Parmenides in the second part of the dialogue and by Plato in the first. The power of dialectic resides in a willingness to make consistent returns to the origin (or, ἐξ ἀρχῆς, as it were) where problems in the account are isolated and protracted. The problem at the beginning of the *Parmenides* is that Socrates is too committed to his position and is therefore unable to practice dialectic. Plato’s audience would be aware that this character fault is soon to change.

There is another absence in the *Parmenides* that (though, again, it will not solve the problems) will eventually afford Socrates the possibility of appealing to the theory of the forms. There is no soul in the *Parmenides*. The pronounced absence of the soul provides a partial explanation for the failure of the theory of the forms. The soulless application of dialectic, like everything else in the dialogue, suggests that this is an incomplete rendition of the method of dialectic.

Michael Inwood attempts to account for the problems of the greatest aporia by introducing the function of the soul. He suggests that in knowing the forms, the soul shares a special relationship with the forms; however, since there are many souls and souls have a knowing function (while the forms do not), the soul is not, itself, a form. If the soul can bridge the form-
particular gap, its absence in the *Parmenides* gives some explanation for Socrates’ inability to defend the theory of the forms. This is an absence that Plato intensifies at the moment that Socrates is on the verge of abandoning the theory of the forms as too bizarre (*Parmenides* 134e). That “the gods’ mastery could never master [δεσπόσειεν]" us, nor could their knowledge know us or anything that belongs to us” (134d-e) is the greatest aporia.

This brings us back to Duncombe’s concern that Platonic thought cannot sustain the position that the divine has no mastery over mortals. This is shocking to the young Socrates who seems ready to run from the argument. However, in Parmenides’ estimation, this is because philosophy has not yet gripped Socrates and he still cares about what people think (*Parmenides* 130e). In the *Republic*, the older Socrates will criticize the traditional gods of Homer and Hesiod, as acting in a way that is inconsistent with the very idea of the divine. Even in the *Euthyphro*, Socrates identifies inconsistencies in the relation of mortals to the traditional gods. Evidently, Parmenides was correct, and the young philosopher would eventually accept even the aspects of the theory of the forms that would be perceived as impious—and he would stop caring about what people think.

“It is a shame about the gods,” Gill remarks in her discussion of the greatest aporia. But she asks, concern for piety aside, what is really lost here “if things in our realm can be known and explained without reference to forms.” This is a question we could imagine on the lips of the McPherran, he appeals to Cambridge change. Inwood makes a slightly stronger case that Plato could have had such change in mind, and that the forms could allow change to this minimal extent.

---

94 The verb δεσπόζω used here occurs 15 times in the corpus. For contrast, ἄρχω is used 924 times.


96 Gill, introduction to *Parmenides*, 48.
prisoners in the cave.\textsuperscript{97} Giving up on the forms resigns us to a “fuzzy and volatile” realm, where we only have a vague sense of beauty and justice.\textsuperscript{98} The crisis of the \textit{Parmenides} forbids human knowledge and threatens a descent into misology, where the ambiguity of knowing leads to desperate attempts to grasp blindly at fuzzy representations of knowledge, holding fast, and destroying the power of dialectic. This crisis should have ended Socrates’ philosophical career before it had begun.

Plato’s narrative biography of Socrates begins and ends with twin crises. Between the \textit{Parmenides} and the \textit{Phaedo} the forms and the soul are threatened at the beginning and the end (respectively) of Socrates’ philosophical life. Marrying what F. M. Cornford dubbed the “twin pillars” of Platonism,\textsuperscript{99} the greatest aporia threatens the security of the theory of the forms, and the crisis of the \textit{Phaedo} undermines the possibility of the immortality of the soul (\textit{Phaedo} 88c). As the crisis of knowledge endangered Socrates’ intellectual progress, the crisis of immortality renders the soul so fragile that a high “wind would really dissolve and scatter” it, reducing Socrates to nothing (\textit{Phaedo} 77d-e).

\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Republic} VII 514a-520d. This is Gill’s response to her own question, suggesting further that this situation (loss of the forms) leads to the destruction of dialectic. I take it that a lack of precise knowledge of the really real world is enough for Socrates to lament the loss of the forms. I maintain that the destruction of dialectic results from intractable claims to knowledge. This can be reasonably inferred from the allusion to the prisoners. Dialectic is impotent when the escapee returns to the cave with knowledge of the intelligible realm. The problem is that those in the visible realm have an authoritarian commitment to the reality of the shadows, and if the enlightened philosopher (even with knowledge of the forms) brings an authoritative position back to the prisoners, he will be killed (517a).

\textsuperscript{98} Gill, introduction to \textit{Parmenides}, 48-50.

\textsuperscript{99} F. M. Cornford, \textit{The Republic of Plato}, xxv. Noting here the standard assumption in the scholarship of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} Century that the dialogues present a “consciously Platonised Socrates” (R. Hackforth, \textit{Plato’s Phaedo}, 3). As discussed above (in the introduction), this view is not uncritically maintained in the present study.
The Crisis of Origins

As with the Parmenides, the crisis of the Phaedo is marked by a narrative break. The friends gathered together on Socrates’ final day have been engaged in amicable discussion. Remorse has been expressed over the coming death, but the condemned has consistently attempted to abate such grieving. In spite of his efforts, there are moments where mourning will return, but for the most part, the first half of the Phaedo presents sober, philosophical discussion of a range of topics as though Socrates is attempting to settle his intellectual affairs. Simmias and Cebes offer minimal resistance, playing the role of collaborative interlocutors. However, it is eventually revealed that the delicacy of their approach is observed from a sense of respect for someone in Socrates’ “present misfortune” (Phaedo 84d). Socrates laughs, and invites the two to present their cases denying the immortality of the soul. Simmias presents his harmony objection (85e-86d), followed by Cebes’ weaver objection (87a-88b). Cebes draws an analogy of the body’s relationship to the soul, suggesting that it might be like the relationship between a weaver and a cloak. A weaver can spin, and wear out, many cloaks; however, he will inevitably don his last cloak, perishing before the cloak is threadbare. In the same way, Cebes contends, the soul might exist before the body and might outlive many bodies, but the death of any given body could be the soul’s last cloak. With this, Phaedo reports that all those in attendance were deeply saddened (88c). It is at this moment,

100 The topics include poetry, generation, collection and division, knowledge as recollection, the theory of the forms, the nature of the divine, and the immortality of the soul.

101 The text treats Simmias’ objection as less of a threat than Cebes’. In the interest of concision, I will focus only on the latter. However, for the sake of thoroughness, Simmias’ objection, in short, suggests that the body/soul relationship is like the lyre/melody relationship. The melody cannot survive the death of the lyre, and in the same way, the soul cannot survive the death of the body.

102 It should be noted that Simmias and Cebes, both being Pythagoreans, would have been committed to a transmigration theory of the soul (a theory more friendly to the Platonic perspective than the more prevalent Homeric soul of their contemporaries).
the crisis point of the *Phaedo*, that Plato drags us out of the narrative, reminding us that Phaedo is telling this story, not to us, but to Echecrates (88c).

This should be the moment that the audience of the dialogue begins searching for hope. Indeed, Echecrates, breaking into the story, expresses this very desire: “now I am again quite in need, as if from the beginning [ἐξ ἀρχῆς], of some other argument to convince me that the soul does not die along with the man” (88d). However, as it was with the crisis of the *Parmenides*, were we to look to the origin of the dialogue for answers to this concern, we would be reminded that Plato was not there (*Phaedo* 59b). The desire to return to the beginning at moments such as these is good, Socratic even, but Plato makes an exaggerated effort to remind the reader of the absurdity of origins—and, for good measure, the infirmity of his authorial authority. It is from this point that Socrates will announce his “second-sailing,” [δεύτερον πλοῦς] launched by his dissatisfaction with Anaxagoras’ account of causation (96a-99d).103

The destruction of the power of dialectic is threatened again, here at the midpoint of the dialogue. Phaedo reports that Socrates sensed the somber mood effected by the double attack on the theory of the soul’s immortality. Undoubtedly, the group mourning was directed towards the impending death of a well-loved friend and teacher, now compounded by the thought that his soul

---

103 Much turns on how we take the expression δεύτερον πλοῦς. The literal translation is “second sailing,” and the colloquial reference here is to a crew’s recourse to oars when the winds fail. To understand this as “second best” is fair—one would imagine the crew would prefer not to have to row—but we should be willing to accept the distinction that this is a prepared contingency for remaining on course in spite of predictable impediments. Such a qualification is important to scholars who wish to maintain that what follows Socrates’ announcement that he will describe his second best search for causes, is not necessarily inferior to some other method. See, for instance, Miriam Newton Boyd, “Dialectic and Plato’s Method of Hypothesis,” 147-8. Boyd must maintain that this is not a “second best” option, as she holds that dialectic and the hypothetical method are significantly similar to one another (and a ranked relationship would threaten this similarity). Lynn E. Rose, on the other hand, argues that the δεύτερον πλοῦς points to something inferior, but that the inferior process is not the hypothetical method, rather, it is “the explanation of things in terms of formal causes (a type of explanation which of course presupposes the theory of ideas, or at least certain of its main tenets)” (“Deuteros Plous in Plato’s *Phaedo,*” 467).
may well die with his body. But Socrates redirects the concern from himself to the conservation of the account (89b-c). Most lamented by Socrates is the danger of misology, which takes the same form as the destruction of dialectic resulting from the greatest aporia in the *Parmenides* (as I have presented it above). Socrates warns that the defenders of the immortal soul should not become so defeated by the arguments of Simmias and Cebes that they would abandon all hope for the theory. On the other hand, Socrates makes it clear that a defense of the theory should not be motivated by a desire merely to win an argument regardless of the truth (89d-91a).

Socrates deals with Simmias’ argument directly and with little friction (91e-95a). Cebes’ objection, however, gives him pause, “for it requires a thorough investigation of the cause] of generation and destruction” (95e-96a). The cause of generation is the origin of origins, and to approach this investigation, Socrates deems it necessary to tell the story of his earliest experiences in these matters (96a).

**Destruction of Dialectic**

Reminiscent of the young Socrates’ encounter with Parmenides, Socrates’ autobiography recounts an early experience with the work of an older philosopher, in this instance, Anaxagoras. The story begins with the admission that he had once been obsessed with discovering the “causes of everything, why it comes to be, why it perishes and why it exists” (*Phaedo* 96a). He relates his frustration with his inability to discover true origins and everything that arises therefrom—constantly changing his mind before eventually coming to the determination that he had “no natural aptitude at all for that kind of investigation” (96b-c). We might be reminded of the defeat

---

104 The autobiography has three stages: Socrates’ own youthful failure (96a-96e); the failure of Anaxagoras’ account (97c-99e); Socrates’ attempted resolution, the method of hypothesis (99d-100a).
of the theory of the forms in the *Parmenides* exposed in Socrates’ jejune mistreatment of hypotheses. The autobiography of the *Phaedo* suggests that he spent some time searching for someone else with a satisfying account of the same problem he hoped to address in the theory of the forms. What he would eventually realize was that most people, even the most respected thinkers, would posit absurd causes (99a).

Imagine not being able to distinguish the real cause from that without which the cause would not be able to act as a cause. It is what the majority appear to do, like people groping in the dark; they call it a cause, thus giving it a name that does not belong to it. That is why one man surrounds the earth with a vortex to make the heavens keep it in place, another makes the air support it like a wide lid. As for their capacity of being in the best place they could possibly be put, this they do not look for, nor do they believe it to have any divine force, but they believe that they will some time discover a stronger and more immortal Atlas to hold everything together more (*Phaedo* 99b-c).

This passage expresses both the danger of authoritarian claims to knowledge and the paradox of the infinite regress in positing origins. The various ἀρχαί of Socrates’ contemporaries and predecessors were wedged into their respective cosmological or metaphysical accounts as causes with no regard for the absurdity that ensues if every Atlas needs a world to stand on. An account that could avoid this problem would be ideal, but unable to develop one himself, and unable to find a teacher who could, Socrates embarked upon his second sailing in search of the cause (99d).

The approach Socrates took for seeking causes,105 outlined over the next two Stephanus pages, represents the underlying motivation for the work of dialectic at the point of crisis. The method is “nothing new;” it is a method he has been practicing throughout this dialogue and throughout his life (100b). It requires turning back to the forms and taking them only as preliminary assumptions [ὑποθέμενος] (100b). With this method, in contrast to the disputants [ἀντιλογοί],

---

105 Note seeking, not finding.
one must never mix up an ἀρχή with what comes from the ἀρχή.106 That is to say, we must never make the mistake of the young Socrates of the Parmenides, believing he had true knowledge of the unchanging forms; nor should we be so quick to posit an absolute cause for everything. However, what Socrates will permit is the designation, for argument’s sake, not of any form as it really is by itself, but of something like it.107 By way of recollection, facilitated by the soul, we have potential access to fuzzy knowledge of something divine.

Socrates presents the hypothetical method twice. The first description is a general schema or overview (99d-100a); Admitting that this account would probably not be entirely clear, he provides a specific example using the forms (100b).108 In the simplest terms, in the hypothetical method one must first accept ignorance, then assume a statement is true and accept what whatever follows from this statement. This method developed as a reaction to his initial inability to apply himself to natural philosophy, compounded by the realization that most people seemed to have this same shortfall without realizing it.

Socrates’ youthful failure to discover causes is realized in the absurd consequences of positing an absolute origin among the sensual things of the mortal world. He searched for origins

---

106 Phaedo 101d, ἀμα δὲ οὐκ ἂν φύροιο ὑσπερ οἱ ἀντιλογικοὶ περί τε τῆς ἀρχῆς διαλεγόμενος καὶ τῶν ἐξ ἐκείνης ὄρμημένων.  
107 Thus Ronna Burger, “the ascending movement to a higher hypothesis is thus an archaeological movement uncovering the deeper levels of assumption concealed in the initial hypothesis: every step forward would actually be a step backward in recognizing an apparently self-evident starting point to be in fact derivative” (The Phaedo: A Platonic Labyrinth, 157).  
108 100b provides a very short summary: Socrates will posit the forms, the interlocutors will grant their existence, the argument will progress to the immortality of the soul. The schema established, Socrates moves on to demonstrate the exercise. This begins with a brief review of the hypothesis of the forms (100c-101b). There is a break to demonstrate the consequences of accepting the hypothesis of the forms (101b-c) and to remind Cebes (and the audience in the dialogue) of the rules (101d-102a). There is also a narrative break to remind the audience of the dialogue that we are also expected to accept these rules (102a-b). The proof of the existence of the soul is then demonstrated over the next four Stephanus pages (102b-105d). This proof, however, is not quite finalized, as “the first hypotheses require clearer examination, even though we find them convincing” (107b). Later that day, Socrates dies.
in the blood, or the brain, or fire; he searched in the sky and on the earth. Socrates believes that there are absurd consequences of, essentially, looking for causes in things that are caused. On the verge of abandoning his search altogether, Socrates recounts that he was briefly excited to learn that Anaxagoras had a satisfying account of causation. What was surely appealing here, was the suggestion that some non-physical property, mind \([\nuoùç]\), might serve as the ultimate cause. Anaxagoras, unfortunately, continued to posit as ultimate causes many of the same absurdities by which Socrates had been beguiled.

In this autobiographical aside, Socrates is emphasizing, in both his own early failures and in his disappointment with Anaxagoras, he cannot accept that truth can be discovered in earthly things. That small glimmer of hope, however, shone in the brief suggestion that some superlunary cause, something like mind, might be accessible by human investigation. To access something like this directly would surely be the best course of inquiry, but if even Anaxagoras could not maintain this course, what hope could there be? The hope, we assume, is in Socrates’ methodological hodgepodge \([φύρω]\) (97b)—an admixture of mortal discourse with fleeting glances towards divine truth. Socrates’ second best \([δεύτερον πλοῦς\)] method for seeking true origins cannot risk staring directly into the sun and cannot avoid resorting to ordinary language (99d-100a).

As a form of internal critique, or in friendly dialogue, this method serves to keep good philosophers clear of the evils of misology. When all agree to these terms (as they do from this point in the *Phaedo*), the good work of philosophy can proceed.\(^9\) There are, of course, numerous occasions on which Socrates’ interlocutors are not at all willing to agree to the terms of the method of hypothesis. It is on these occasions that Socrates is required to harness the destructive power of

---

\(^9\) That is, perhaps, until Socrates dies. After this, Simmias, Cebes, and the rest will have to find some new charmer (*Phaedo* 78a).
dialectic. The recalcitrance of the authoritarian, who unflinchingly proffers absurd theories of causality, would (and has been seen to) seriously threaten the already delicate possibility of coming to know anything like the truth. A friendly elenchus might be preferable, but in circumstances such as these, a second-best method is required. Socrates will drag his interlocutor back to his own starting point repeatedly. In each return ἐξ ἀρχῆς, the absurdity of the origin picks at the foundations of the authoritarian claim to knowledge. For better or worse, ἀρχή ruptures all λόγοι. This is a lesson Socrates learned early in his life; and it was a lesson that might have been the first and final aporia. But Socrates discovered a way to convert the potential destruction of the power of dialectic into the destructive power of dialectic.

Conclusion

In the Phaedo, Socrates suggest that “when the soul and the body are together, nature orders the one to be subject [δουλεύειν] and to be ruled [ἀρχεωθαί], and the other to rule [ἀρχεῖν] and be master [δεσπόζειν]” (Phaedo 80a). In the Parmenides, Socrates appears to have no account of the soul. Perhaps the young Socrates in the autobiography of the Phaedo had a similar deficit. However, the Phaedo makes it clear that, at some point, Socrates would begin this important investigation. When Parmenides asks Socrates where he will turn in the face of the potential destruction of the power of dialectic, perhaps he was recommending (or rather, Plato was hinting at) a turning towards the soul (Parmenides 135c).110 Parmenides expands on this by saying that he

110 Consider the significance of turning [στρέφω] to proper education in the Republic VII (518ff). This concerns the turning of the soul, and it is reasonable to assume that the first step would be the turning of the soul towards itself. However, the more sophisticated understanding of dialectic in the Republic includes the upward movement towards the good. Of further interest, this discussion immediately follows the allegory of the cave, and Socrates urges that those who have gained truer knowledge ought to be compelled to return—ἐξ ἀρχῆς—to the cave for the benefit of the disoriented souls, in spite of the dangers inherent to this task (520c).
was impressed when Socrates would not allow Zeno to remain among the visible things, but to examine “those things that one might above all grasp by means of reason” (135d-e). When Socrates faces the destruction of the power of dialectic, Parmenides advises him to turn towards the invisible things. In the *Phaedo*, this same distinction between visible and invisible things is made between the body and the soul:

> When the soul makes use of the body to investigate something…it is dragged by the body to the things that are never the same, and the soul itself is confused and dizzy…But when the soul investigates by itself it passes into the realm of what is pure, ever existing, immortal and unchanging (*Phaedo* 79c-d).

What the young Socrates lacks, as I have attempted to illustrate here, are the fundamental tools for progression towards truth; how the young Socrates of the *Parmenides* attempts to grasp wisdom is antithetical to such progression. Lacking knowledge of the soul and commitment to dialectic and making authoritative claims to knowledge is decidedly un-Socratic. It is for this reason, I believe, that Plato chose to present this unflattering caricature of Socrates—in light of the complete turn towards philosophy that he would inevitably, and famously effect. Without this turn, Socrates would have had no chance of coming to know anything like the good, the beautiful, or the just. This is representative of the tragic condition of the Athenian intellectual climate, and Socrates, as he is presented in Plato’s dialogues, is an archetype of contrast.

Plato’s biographical return to Socrates’ philosophical debut reveals a personal return to something like a Socratic ἀρχή. The path from the hypothesis presented in the *Parmenides*, dogged by authoritative commitment, leads towards a devastating aporia. The forms were offered as an access point to the unchanging objects of absolute truth; but, while accepting the forms as presented has the effect of establishing a divine realm of precise knowledge, any human passage into the divine realm is simultaneously blocked. In Socrates’ first return ἐξ ἀρχῆς, by turning inward, he discovers that the soul “is imprisoned in and clinging to the body, and that it is forced
to examine other things through it as through a cage and not by itself, and that it wallows in every kind of ignorance” (*Phaedo* 33d-e). The young philosopher learns to stop worrying and love the soul. Socrates will discover that the Athenian intellectual and political condition presents as a great, dysfunctional soul consisting of individuals obsessed with mortal concerns. The extent of this sensual commitment has so riveted the Athenian soul to the body that the average citizen could not distinguish the two, leading to the alarming result that (in spite of appearances) a man of a certain status would assume himself possessed of divine wisdom. The way Plato tells it, it is to the greatest benefit of Athens, and of its citizens, that Socrates directed his talents towards the care of the human soul. Without this tireless program of undermining authoritarian claims to knowledge, ugliness and hubris would prevail—and amongst the highest dangers, without dialectical engagement, justice would remain, by strict necessity, unknowable to human nature.
Chapter Two: Knowledge of the Divine

Introduction

In the *Euthyphro* and Book I of the *Republic*, Plato presents two parallel, yet discordant, treatments of justice. Here, and in the following chapter, I will consider these treatments and attempt to show that the unifying factor stalling its discovery is the problem of authority. In the present chapter I discuss the relationship of Socrates—and mortals in general—to divine authority. The focus here is primarily on the character presented by Plato in the *Euthyphro* where two important points of enquiry are raised but remain unexamined. The first is, *what is justice?*, a question that Socrates means to address in both the *Euthyphro* and Book I of the *Republic*, but one that he is barely able to touch on owing to the obstinacy of the respective interlocutors. The second point raised in the *Euthyphro* is that justice is split into two parts—piety is the part of justice concerning the gods and the, unnamed, remaining part of justice concerns human beings. Here we see that the problem with investigating justice from the perspective of piety is the embedded, untestable claim to authority—we cannot know the minds of the gods. I will attempt to show that Socrates sees in this conflation of divine and human wisdom, compounded by the hubris of intellectual authority, a pervasive and dangerous condition within the socio-political structure of fifth-century Athens. Plato returns to the question of justice in Book I of the *Republic*, which will be discussed in Chapter Three. Though not explicit, and not Thrasymachus’ intended meaning, I will suggest in Chapter Three that the remainder of the just, left open in the *Euthyphro*, is unsatisfactorily identified in Book I of the *Republic* as something more akin to the rule of law. In the *Republic*, the question of justice is
revisited without the problematic appeal to divine authority that stymies progress in the *Euthyphro* yet claims to authority continue to cloud the investigation. The secular route to understanding justice need not suffer from the same problem, and yet it does.

The reading of the *Euthyphro* in this chapter begins with an examination of the frame of the dialogue, the character of Euthyphro, and the homicide case brought by Euthyphro against his father. I hope to highlight the extent to which the problems of authority are written into the context, the eponymous character, and the driving force of the narrative, hence suggesting that Plato is drawing our attention to this problem. The problem, on the Socratic view, is that the understanding of legal authority in Athens was fundamentally conflicted. Readings of the *Euthyphro*, as Michael Morgan observes, rarely attempt to situate the dialogue “amid the religious turmoil of the period. But if we do, Socrates’ challenge to Euthyphro, an unreflective adherent of the traditional cultic and sacrificial system, might be understood as a special example of the conflict between old and new piety.”\(^{111}\) Morgan argues that Socrates is presented as an advocate of a “rational revision of ecstatic initiation rites,”\(^{112}\) against which Euthyphro represents the Athenian understanding of piety in which one “takes knowledge for granted; power is the crucial dimension of divine-human distinctness.”\(^{113}\) I will argue, in accordance with this position, that the *Euthyphro* targets a systemic problem in Athens concerning assumed knowledge of the divine that transfers into an illicit appropriation of divine authority. Morgan’s suggestion is intended to lead to the conclusion that Socrates believes that divine knowledge is within human grasp.\(^{114}\) This is a fair suggestion, but I take it that this would be a distant hope for Socrates. The present problem—that knowledge of the

---


\(^{112}\) Morgan, *Platonic Piety*, 22.

\(^{113}\) Morgan, 22.

\(^{114}\) Morgan, 22-31.
divine is a simple concern—is so entrenched within Athenian culture that it was work enough for Socrates to teach his fellow citizens that such knowledge is difficult to grasp, let alone offering a way to gain any such knowledge. This problem, I believe, is epitomized by the *Euthyphro*. After examining this problem in the character of Euthyphro and the frame and narrative of the *Euthyphro*, I will argue that the bifurcation of justice leads to the Athenian appropriation of authoritative claims to divine knowledge. Piety will be exposed as unknowable precisely because it concerns the gods; and the assumption that divine knowledge is easily discovered reduces the unchanging concept of justice to a degenerate representation more akin to a human code of law.

**Authority in the Frame**

The frame of the *Euthyphro* places Socrates within a web of diverse manifestations of authority. Socrates tarries with Euthyphro for the feigned purpose of coming to understand the nature of piety as this should assist him in his trial. He stands before the king-archon’s court, a monolith of legal and religious authority, where he has come to learn about the charges of impiety, and essentially, civil-disobedience that have been brought against him. The king-archon’s court dealt specifically with legal cases of religious significance. Sacred laws were “believed to have been made by gods, not men … but most sacred laws had no remembered origin and were just ancestral tradition.”

In the event that an act might be seen to provoke the ire of the gods, indictments could be brought to the king-archon where *citizens could decide* if the gods would, in fact, take offense at the action of the accused. This institution was the locus of mortal and divine authority, where human beings would speak for the gods.

---

We are introduced to Euthyphro, a self-proclaimed authority on religious matters—matters, that is, concerning the gods, including their ultimate authority. Euthyphro is surprised to see Socrates: “surely you are not prosecuting anyone before the king-archon as I am?” (2a). Socrates replies by explaining that “the Athenians do not call this a prosecution but an indictment [graphe]” (2a), leading to the revelation that Socrates has been accused of impiety. This story would presumably have been well known by Plato’s fourth-century audience, but Euthyphro’s surprise might serve to remind them (and to inform us) that Socrates’ case was unusual. MacDowell suggests that “this may have been the first case in which a graphe for impiety was brought for impious thought and speech, rather than impious behavior.”116 In a move that would surely be shocking to the audiences in and of the dialogue, Euthyphro appeals to his mantic wisdom in justifying the prosecution of his own father, thus including paternal authority—or the rejection thereof—within the scope of his expertise.117

All of this is outlined within a few lines of the opening of the dialogue. Plato establishes a theme of questioning authority, at multiple levels, that will permeate the ensuing discussion. We are presented with the domestic authority of the father; the civic authority of the courts; and the religious (and ultimate) authority of the gods. Within each structure of authority there are appeals to divinity. The father is responsible for rites and sacrifices performed about the hearth of the home, and the basileus oversees festivals of the polis.118 All of this, it should be noted, is shot through with intellectual claims of authoritative wisdom.

116 MacDowell, The Law in Classical Athens, 202. He adds that the political motivations for prosecution and conviction mark this case out as “a misuse of the procedure” (202).

117 Paternal authority extended over a household and the relatives and dependents therein. The “lordship” of a father over his household carried substantial legal significance (to be discussed shortly) that complicates Euthyphro’s case.

118 Walter Burkert provides a detailed account of the religious responsibilities of the Greek household, the polis, and beyond (Greek Religion, 254-260). For specific reference to the father, 255; Athens 258. Of
The *Euthyphro* gathers together these various forms of authority as though a prelude to the *Apology* where authority itself will be set as the major antagonist and Socrates will return to the just understanding of paternal, civic, and divine authority. In the *Crito*, the same three modes of authority will be examined in the light of the human practice of justice, codified in the law. Each presentation of authority is treated, in the *Euthyphro*, in relation to religious circumstances and consequences. At the same time, the *Euthyphro* is an exaggerated display of Socrates’ elenctic mastery; its audience is provided with an example of the kind of impertinent behavior that Socrates will suggest (in his defense in the *Apology*) is the genuine impetus for his indictment.\(^{119}\) We see the ironic treatment of ‘wise’ men and the twisting argumentation of the dialectic that would lead to their public humiliation. On the other hand, this example presents a foil for Socrates’ self-orchestrated defeat in his dialogue with the Laws in the *Crito*, where he is shown unable to bend the thinking of the Laws. A dichotomous understanding of justice, mortal and divine, is established in the *Euthyphro*.

In a discussion of the *Euthyphro*, James A. Arieti makes the very interesting point that it is “as much a mistake to assume that any of the dialogues is about what the *personae dramatis* discuss

---

\(^{119}\) In opening his defense, Socrates suggests that the accusations against him are broader than those presented at the trial: “Let us take up the case from its beginning [ἐξ ἀρχῆς]. What is the accusation from which arose the slander in which Meletus trusted when he wrote out the charge against me? What did they say when they slandered me?” (*Apology* 19a-b). The direct reference here is to Aristophanes’ parodic portrayal of Socrates in the *Clouds*. He will go on to suggest that this reputation is truly caused by the slanders of those “ambitious, violent, and numerous” (*Apology* 23e) men whose intellectual authority has been publicly undermined not only by Socrates, but by the youth who emulate him. These slanders are compounded by the political enemies Socrates made when he voted against the illegal trial of naval generals for their failure to rescue sailors after the battle of Arginusae (406 BCE), and when he refused an order by the Thirty Tyrants to arrest Leon of Salamis (404-3 BCE). Socrates cites these as underlying reasons for his prosecution (*Apology* 32b-d).
as it would be of Shakespeare’s plays.” 120 He means to suggest that it is wrong to simply assume that the *Euthyphro* is (or at least is simply) about piety, as many commentators have been quick to assume. I am suggesting that this dialogue is not simply about piety, but that piety is standing in for the more important concept of justice, of which Socrates says it is a part. 121 I believe that Plato is insisting on the hard split between piety as the divine part of justice and the remainder of justice—which will be encountered in Book I of the *Republic*—and I hope to situate this within the discussion of the broader, and significant, organizing theme of the problems of authority. Arieti’s summary suggestion for the dialogue’s theme, with which I am in agreement, is that it “is about the self-delusion that drives a man to act with absolute certitude … so intense that it thrives even when the hollowness of its foundation is absolutely manifest.” 122

In relating the charges brought against him, Socrates ironically praises Meletus for taking on such a noble cause in this indictment:

> He says he knows how our young men are corrupted and who corrupts them…I think he is the only one of our public men to start out the right way, for it is right to care first that the young should be as good as possible, just as a good farmer is likely to take care of the young plants first, and of the others later. So, too, Meletus gets rid of us who corrupt the young shoots, as he says, and then afterwards he will obviously take care of the older ones and become a source of great blessings for the city, as seems likely to happen to one who started out [ἀρχῆς] this way (2c-3a).


121 However, this might seem a slight distinction, and Arieti might reasonably accuse me of committing the same error of settling for a superficial reading. I would not entirely disagree, but I would caution that, while the greater significance of a dramatic work is certainly broader than the colloquy, what the characters discuss should not be dismissed as wholly irrelevant. Alexander Nehamas raises the same objection in *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault*. It is too much to assert that “it is inaccurate and misleading to refer to the work as ‘a play’” (34), as Nehamas does—particularly since he maintains that literary analysis is useful in the case of the *Euthyphro*. Where I agree with Nehamas is in his objection that Arieti “vastly underestimates the intrinsic importance of the dialectical discussion” (197, n. 36).

The irony here exposes the fact that Meletus is not concerned with what Socrates genuinely believes one ought to be concerned. Plato is stressing the Socratic interest in systemic problems of Athenian society. Euthyphro misses the irony but hits on the point remarking: “I wish this were true, Socrates, but I fear the opposite may happen. He seems to me to start out by harming the very heart of the city by attempting to wrong you” (3a). Socrates, as Euthyphro and the audience are aware, directs his efforts towards improving the people of the city. We should understand the praise of Meletus to be reversed, where Socrates is tending to the roots of society. The evil of Meletus is identified in the fact that he is indicting Socrates for the sake of the gods (3b), arrogantly assuming divine wisdom and serving as protector of the gods—and he is achieving this through established mechanisms of the Athenian legal system.

Arieti makes a further assumption that Plato is tying the character of Euthyphro (a young man wrongly prosecuting his elder) to that of Meletus. From this, Arieti suggests that “Plato’s point is this: watch out for the young!” The connection between Euthyphro and Meletus is not unfair, but the extended observation that we are to be apprehensive of the youth seems strained. No doubt, as Arieti does suggest, there is a plea here to the Athenian audience to focus on the proper education of the young, but it is not youth itself of which we are being warned. As I discussed in Chapter One, arrogance may be an affectation of youth (not even the young Socrates is immune to this), but it is not a problem exclusive to adolescence. Adolescence, however, is perhaps the best time to cure this problem. In childhood, the values of the city are implanted, and these values will be carried into adulthood.

The parallel descriptions of Meletus and Euthyphro are explicit in the text. Socrates makes a point of describing Meletus’ weak beard and ironically praises the extent of the knowledge of

---

123 Arieti, 145.
one so young (*Euthyphro* 2b-c). With as much irony, Socrates exclaims to Euthyphro: “You are younger than I by as much as you are wiser” (12a). These two characters are young (younger than Socrates, at least) and headstrong. Perhaps there is an implication that youth contributes to their stubbornness, but this is surely not the driving function of the dramatic development. There are other places where Socrates teases his interlocutors for their youth, but there are plenty of examples of Socrates treating his elders and his contemporaries just as roughly—indeed, his accusers, Anytus and Lycon, are not young men. 124 For that matter, Euthyphro is certainly not a child; he appears to be in his mid-forties. 125 We should also keep in mind that, among the charges against Socrates, corrupting the youth is one, and one that he does not do much to deny. This suggests that even if the young are dangerous, it is not simply because they are young—or else why would Socrates spend so much time with them—rather, there is some other malignant, but curable, aspect of youth of which we ought to be cautious. The consistent factor in all instances is the inherent danger of the unwavering self-confidence of authority. It is a playful danger in Euthyphro, a far more serious danger in Meletus.

**Plato’s Euthyphro**

Euthyphro is drawn up as a comically recalcitrant authoritarian. Such heavy-handed portraiture prompts Nehamas’ claim that the “actual fact is that Euthyphro is stupid only because Plato decided to create a character with those features. And that is a fact that any interpretation of the dialogue must explain.” 126 There is perhaps some overemphasis in modern scholarship on the

124 According to Debra Nails in, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics*, Anytus would have been close to, or in, his fifties (37). Lycon might have been born as early “as 460, but is nevertheless a man of Socrates’ generation” (188).


extent of Euthyphro’s stupidity. Plato’s audience may well have been less quick to read the character as an absolute fool. The contemporary view is perhaps also skewed by his role as a mantic—strange for us, common to the Greeks. Scholars are also well trained in following Socrates’ unique style of inquiry; his contemporaries were not. The bewilderment of any of his interlocutors ought always to be read with some consideration of this privileged view.

However, both the extent of Euthyphro’s claims to knowledge, and his complete refusal to admit of any lack of knowledge mark him out as a character apt for derision. By his own admission, his claims to prophetic knowledge are met with laughter at the assembly (3c). He is not at all perturbed by such laughter; rather, he considers himself to be “superior to the majority of men” (4e) in the accuracy of his “knowledge of the divine, and of piety, and impiety” (5a). The irony of Socrates’ praise of such a singular intellect goes unnoticed by its target. Euthyphro also appears unshaken by his repeated inability to follow Socrates’ points, frequently requiring explanations to be re-stated or re-formed. Plato at least seems intent on presenting us with an exaggerated image of self-styled authority with Socrates as his antithesis. Further, it cannot be ignored that Plato gave this character the presumably ironic name meaning “straight thinker.”

It is certainly not the case that Socrates actually believes, as he claims to believe, that he will learn the nature of piety from Euthyphro. Nevertheless, he takes the time to engage in a discussion that, but for Euthyphro’s retreat, has no timely end in sight (noting that perhaps Socrates ought to have been seriously focusing on his imminent trial). The god is wise, Socrates proclaims in his defense speech, and “human wisdom is worth little or nothing” (Apology 23a). In the

127 If, as Eric Havelock and others have suggested, Plato is establishing the discourse of philosophy as we know it, the audiences in and of the dialogues are not likely to have seen Euthyphro’s errors as egregious, or grasped them as quickly as we do. This is not to say that they would have missed his exaggerated sense of his knowledge or himself.
Apology, Socrates lists the groups of people he interrogated in defense of this claim that only the gods are wise. Among those questioned for their professed wisdom—the politicians, the poets, and the craftsmen—one group is conspicuously absent, those in service of the gods. The targets of Socrates’ interrogations are those whose influence structures and amends the discourse of Athenian society. The opinions of these people are (to varying degrees) respected; they represent models of citizenship; and they disseminate ideas that inform public practice. The politicians, through public speech, establish and revise Athenian law; the poets, as educators, guard the accounts of the gods that underscore Athenian morality. However, Socrates does not mention any elenctic encounters with religious functionaries, and this is a notable omission. Euthyphro, the farcical prophet, will stand here as such a representative who will ultimately be shown to be ignorant of even the true worth of his wisdom.

Perhaps this goes some of the way towards answering the question of why Plato would present so risible a character as he does in Euthyphro. The lacuna of the account of the interrogation of religious authority in the Apology (and in the dialogues in general) is palpable. If, during his trial, Socrates claimed to have exposed the ignorance of Athenian religious officials, this may have gone too far towards supporting Meletus’ charges of impiety. Broadly speaking, while Athens had already been moving towards a more secular society by the beginning of the fourth century, deference to the authority of the gods retained significance in the legal system, and more

---

128 Burkert remarks that “Greek religion might almost be called a religion without priests: there is no priestly cast as a closed group with fixed tradition, education, initiation, and hierarchy” (Greek Religion, 95). However, he goes on to identify the general administration of priestly functions such as sacrifice which “can be performed by anyone who is possessed of the desire and the means, including housewives and slaves” (95). He also observes that ritual practices are attended to by any authority pertinent to the immediate religious festival (i.e., the father in the household or the archon of Athens). Dispensing of such duties could perhaps not reasonably be considered claims to divine wisdom (hence not suitable for cross-examination). There are, however, officers responsible for the various sanctuaries who are well respected, often appointed by inheritance, and remunerated for their service. Burkert does (somewhat reluctantly) refer to these people as priests or priestesses [ἱερεία] (95-97).
importantly, in popular opinion. Consider R.E. Allen’s observation: “In short, the charges of irreligion against Socrates probably had a procedural rather than a substantive effect: they served to bring his conduct within reach of a writ of impiety. The heart of the charge against him…was corrupting the youth.”\textsuperscript{129} In itself, criticism of religious practices might not have been wholly damning but playing into Meletus’ trap would have been too risky. Since we lack this important treatment of religious claims to knowledge in the \textit{Apology}, Plato is taking the opportunity to present a Socratic challenge to those who claim to understand divine will in a closely associated dialogue.

This might explain why Plato gives Socrates a seer to cross-examine but not the reason for presenting such an unflattering caricature. Again, this might be an attempt to avoid provoking the ire of any who would take an assault against a respected religious authority to be actionable. Euthyphro is too inept for anyone to take as a genuine representative of the gods—he essentially, admits this point himself (3c). Unlike Euthyphro, a good seer is taken seriously. According to Burkert, “to doubt the arts of divination is to fall under suspicion of godlessness,”\textsuperscript{130} which remains an actionable offense. Presenting a parodic prophet allows Plato to show the very important Socratic position that, among the many claims to wisdom, the claim to know the will, the interests, or even the activities of the gods, is truly the most outrageous.

\textsuperscript{129} Allen, \textit{Socrates and Legal Obligation}, 18. For a short and insightful treatment of the “process of secularization” in Athenian culture, see the chapter of that name in Marcel Detienne, \textit{The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece}, 89-106.

\textsuperscript{130} Burkert, \textit{Greek Religion}, 111.
Euthyphro’s Case

The discussion in the *Euthyphro* begins with a request for a definition of piety (and impiety). This is the typical Socratic elenchus, and the dialogue remains on course. Euthyphro’s first ‘definition’ is that piety is acting as he is acting in prosecuting his own father for murder (*Euthyphro* 5d). The ‘murder’ was committed by Euthyphro’s father in the administration of his ordinary authority over his estate. The victim was a hired laborer (a πελάτης and dependent of Euthyphro) who had killed a houseslave (an οἰκέτης and property of Euthyphro’s father). Euthyphro’s father bound the laborer and confined him to a ditch, where he was to remain until a messenger could return with advice from the Exegetes on what should be done. While Euthyphro’s father was waiting for the messenger to return, the laborer died. In this narrative within a narrative, a hierarchy of authority is established from the lowest up to the gods. Euthyphro fancies himself to be in the highest tier attainable by mortals, above even the standard interpretation of piety in Athenian law.

Euthyphro relates the consternation of his family, given that this does not seem to count as murder, and even if it did, the victim had it coming (as he was, himself, a murderer). More importantly, as his relatives object (and Socrates has already observed), “it is impious for a son to prosecute his father for murder” (4e). Respect for paternal authority is enshrined in tradition if not law. Euthyphro considers it absurd that people should treat a father or a stranger differently in matters of justice (4b). This is a point that Socrates will later reprise, suggesting that nobody entertains the thought that “one who has killed or done anything else unjustly should not pay the penalty” (8c). In this case, on this point, Euthyphro might actually be correct. If his father had committed murder, then he ought to be have been prosecuted, and if nobody else had been willing
to bring the man to justice, then it would have fallen to Euthyphro to do so. But it is roundly considered impious for a son to prosecute a father. This is a significant conflict.\footnote{Hubert J. Treston, remarks that Plato is “sophistically exposing, if not covertly sneering at, the inconsistency of the pollution doctrine” (Poine: A Study in Ancient Greek Blood-Vengeance, 147).}

Euthyphro’s father was the κύριος (lord, master) of the οἶκος (household) of which Euthyphro is apparently still a member. Given that this (as recognized by Euthyphro) is an issue of purification (hence religious), the determination of impiety would fall to the master of the house, and not a member of the house.\footnote{R. E. Allen suggests that Euthyphro does not even have a legitimate case (Plato’s ‘Euthyphro’ and the Earlier Theory of the Forms, 20-22), and that even if he did, “Euthyphro’s father had the right to execute the murderer on the spot; sending to the Exegete for instruction under these circumstances was an act of unusual scrupulousness (21).} The regulation of the οἶκος is provided for in Athenian law,\footnote{Macdowell, The Law in Classical Athens, 84-86.} as is prosecution for murder, and it is not entirely clear that Euthyphro’s father is not culpable.\footnote{Contra Allen, Spiro Panagiotou argues that Euthyphro’s case could be brought to trial (“Plato’s Euthyphro and the Attic Code on Homicide”).}

Murder has been committed; purification is required by prosecution; and yet Euthyphro is “thought crazy to prosecute” (Euthyphro 4a). Socrates exclaims that “most men would not know how they could do this and be right” (4a). It would seem that Euthyphro is right to recognize this inconsistency. It is even, by immediate comparison, Socratic.\footnote{As Allen observes, “the introduction to the Euthyphro is meant to exhibit a need which the dialogue will later explicitly state: the need for a standard by which to determine what things are genuinely holy and what are not” (Plato’s ‘Euthyphro,’ 23).}

This is no small problem, and it is not some kind of sophistic trickery. Euthyphro’s actions are evidence of a genuine and significant contradiction in the Athenian laws of piety. As Laszlo Versényi observes, “Plato may have invented Euthyphro’s actual court-case, but he certainly did not invent the circumstances
which would inevitably create precisely the type of difficulties in which Euthyphro finds himself."  

There is a Socratic quality to Euthyphro’s claims to prioritize specialized knowledge over public opinion. The ensuing discussion makes it clear that Euthyphro does not possess even the knowledge of what it means to have such knowledge. We can read sincerity in Socrates’ claim that in the past he had “considered knowledge about the divine to be most important” (5a). Reverence for the wisdom of the gods is a hill upon which Socrates demonstrates his willingness to die. However, claiming to know the wisdom of the gods, as Euthyphro does here, is outrageous.

Euthyphro is a ridiculous character because of his ineffectual prophecy and because of the case he is bringing against his own father. Presented in such an inflated way, few (if any) audience members would want to identify with this character. Hence, potential critics would be unlikely to rush to the defense of Euthyphro’s position. For Plato’s purposes, the mere fact that someone would claim to know the minds of the gods is enough for Socrates to set about exposing their true ignorance. Euthyphro’s position, however, is presumably more reflective of the average Athenian citizen’s understanding of the gods than the average Athenian citizen would likely be aware.

The Demotic View

Plato is able to undermine the more ubiquitous religious sensibilities of Athenian culture by placing Euthyphro in conversation with Socrates. In defense of the prosecution of his father,

---


137 Versényi suggests that “this inflated impersonation...serves to reveal the Athenian religious orthodoxy in all its absurdity” (*Holiness and Justice*, 38). The accusation of absurdity here is directed towards the opinion of the many. Versényi argues that, for all of Euthyphro’s “mock-heroic conflict with his contemporaries he is in fact their true representative” (38).
Euthyphro cites the poets’ accounts of how the gods have behaved in relation to their own fathers. He suggests that any attempt to argue against this is self-refuting, since people “believe that Zeus is the best and most just of the gods” (*Euthyphro* 5e). Socrates points out that he “finds it hard to accept things like that being said about the gods” (6a), adding that this may well be among the reasons he is being prosecuted. Socrates does not believe that these stories represent the gods, but he is careful to secure Euthyphro’s commitment to this position, asking if he really believes these things and then asking again if he believes “that there really is war among the gods, terrible enmities and battles, and other such things as are told by the poets” (6b). This will soon be used to undo Euthyphro’s second attempt to define piety—and this belief is generally shared by the Athenian people (a belief that is the impetus for Socrates’ trial). A statement of the uncritical religious commitments of the citizenry has already been tucked into the narrative, and when the flaw in this position is exposed, exposed too is the hollowness of the foundation of contemporary Athenian religious understanding. I submit that this problem, as Plato means to expose it, is broader than cases brought before the king-archon. The dilemma of Euthyphro’s prosecution, where divine knowledge is assumed and the location of authority confounded, serves as an inflated paradigm for the general problem of authority within the socio-political practices of late-fifth century Athens.

Socrates is not alone in questioning the immoral behavior of the gods reported by the poets. Burkert points out that such criticism was a significant point of intellectual concern reaching as far back as Solon, and by “the end of the sixth century the sharp and final judgement was formulated

---

138 Zeus attacked and usurped his father, Kronos, who had previously attacked and usurped his father, Ouranos (Hesiod, *Theogony*, 132-182, 453-506, 617-819).
by Xenophanes.” However, the critique of philosophers and statesmen did not effect the fall of religion; “people did continue to pray to these gods, Greek religion was practiced for 800 years after Xenophanes.” Popular opinion continued to read the questionable tales of the poets as reflective of some kind of historical accuracy. Eric Havelock suggests that Socrates was deeply concerned with the state of Athenian education precisely because it was rooted in such an uncritical praise of the poets. Through early contact with Homer and Hesiod, citizens are raised in “a tradition of half-morality … Do not the gods so often reward the unrighteous? And immoral conduct in any case can be expiated quite easily by religious rights.” The young are expected to believe fanciful tails of the gods (gods who often act with questionable moral values), but in adulthood citizens become the moral standard.

A reductive picture of the gods is provided to the citizenry in their youth. The idea that the gods are simply better versions of humans—wiser, more powerful, and immortal—grounds the understanding of authority as being located in a pantheon that appears to operate without any centralized concept of morality. This foundation, along with an overabundance of domestic and foreign divinities, each demanding their own rituals, sacrifices, etc., forms what Morgan terms “Delphic theology, which viewed the gods as distant and powerful, and men as frail and endangered.” Athenian religion was undergoing a crisis, but its practice was in no danger of fading out. Hence, while it was broadly accepted that “human affairs, voluntary action as much as

139 Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 246. The reference is “Homer and Hesiod have ascribed to the gods all deeds which among men are a reproach and a disgrace” (DK 21B11).

140 Burkert, 246.

141 Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato*. This is perhaps the central thesis of the book, but for an introduction to this topic see: “Chapter One, Plato on Poetry,” 3-15.

142 Havelock, 12.

143 Morgan, *Platonic Piety*, 18.
its consequences, are under divine control, the guiding principle of which is the justice of Zeus,”\textsuperscript{144} men such as Meletus feel empowered to bring indictments against other citizens in the name of, and for the protection of, the gods. Again, Plato’s example in the \textit{Euthyphro} (seen now in both the homicide prosecution and the indictment for impiety) serves as an exaggeration of a problem. This problem is less obvious, but visible, in the broader operation of Athenian jurisprudence.

Athenian law, beyond cases involving impiety heard by the king-archon,\textsuperscript{145} was a democratic affair. Josiah Ober argues that the “authority of the demos was legitimated neither by ‘divine right’ nor by ‘natural right’.”\textsuperscript{146} Laws were established in public speech and maintained legitimacy because they were reflective of the will of the people. The same laws were always open to debate if not interpretation in the courts by any citizen. Athenian authority was enacted in the courts (and the assembly) but was rooted in the collective will of the people. Ober goes on to point out that a “politics built on common opinion can be built from the bottom up, and potentially allows for the integration of ‘local knowledges’.”\textsuperscript{147} Still, the ideological foundation of Athenian authority was deep and pervasive. Educated by Homer’s songs featuring divine war and enmity, a belief that authority ultimately resided amongst the gods was foundational for the Athenian people. The people have a naïve commitment to the authority of the gods. These people constitute the authority and the force of the law; and the laws are designed in response to social convention and amended by discourse—a discourse permeated by an underlying, and conflicted, commitment to

\textsuperscript{144} Morgan, 18.

\textsuperscript{145} There were numerous courts in Athens. MacDowell provides a relatively brief, but thorough, history of the Athenian courts up to the fourth century in Chapter II of \textit{The Law in Classical Athens}, “Magistrates and Juries,” 24-40.

\textsuperscript{146} Josiah Ober, \textit{The Athenian Revolution: Essays on Ancient Greek Democracy and Political Theory}, 150.

\textsuperscript{147} Ober, \textit{The Athenian Revolution}, 150.
the knowledge of divine authority. Even when it is not clearly articulated, Athenian law contains
the popular recognition of ultimate authority of the gods. According to Ober, this was a condition
that Plato was able to exploit, revealing that “democracy’s claims to be a legitimate way of
knowing about society and a just system for making decisions were false because it had no way of
testing appearances by reference to an external, metaphysical Truth.” 148 The people appealed,
uncritically, to something like a divine authority. On the Socratic view, such an appeal is
immediately problematic. The problem is compounded by the fact that political authority was not
actually understood to be grounded in claims to divine authority, since it was a point of pride that
“it was created and re-created through collective practices of public communication, rather than
given by an external authority.” 149

Legal issues of a religious and/or political nature were formed and maintained in response
to popular opinion, not in an attempt to appeal directly to the divine. The superiority of the
authority of the gods is protected by the legal system, which is authorized by the (inferior) authority
of the people. Recalling Arieti’s thematic description of the Euthyphro, we see in the authority of
Athenian law the self-delusion of “absolute certitude … so intense that it thrives even when the
hollowness of its foundation is absolutely manifest.” 150 Socrates’ questioning of Euthyphro’s
understanding of piety articulates this problem. Probing a religious authority (arrogant and risible
as he might be) for a definition of piety exposes the difficulty of attempting such a definition.
However, as knowledge of piety continually slips out of view, Socrates is able to catch a glimpse

148 Ober, 158.
149 Ober, 150.
150 Arieti, Interpreting Plato, 143.
of justice lurking in the background. It is here that the conflation of divine and mortal knowledge is revealed as the crux of the problem in any human attempt to come to know justice.

Justice in Parts

Euthyphro’s claim to know all about the gods is, for Socrates, immediately questionable and impious. This, however, is not his reason for rejecting the first attempt to define piety. Socrates’ preferred program is not to tell people that they do not know but to lead them to realize that they do not know. The first definition of piety is simply rejected because it is an example of a pious act and fails to get to the idea [εἶδος] of piety. Euthyphro quickly returns with the second definition, that “what is dear to the gods is pious, what is not is impious” (Euthyphro 6e). This will eventually be refined (third definition) to state that “what all the gods hate is impious, and what they all love is pious” (9d), and from here we arrive at the famous Euthyphro Dilemma. In the following reading of the elenctic portion of the dialogue (5d-15c), while discussing Euthyphro’s attempts to teach Socrates about the nature of piety, I will highlight three dialectical moments that figure into the Socratic rejection of intellectual authority. Discovered in the Euthyphro, this antiauthoritarian theme is associated with the problem of claims to divine knowledge and—enveloped into the Athenian legal system such as it is—political authority is simultaneously undermined. The three moments will be: I. ἄρχη, establishing a starting point (6a-c); II. ἐξ ἄρχης, or the realization of crisis (11b-d); and III. second sailing and the attempted resolution of the crisis (11e-12d).

I. Ἀρχη: I have already touched on the introduction and quick dismissal of the first attempt to define piety. Euthyphro offers his current case against his father as the definition of piety (5d-e). Socrates will retort by saying to Euthyphro, “I did not bid you tell me one or two of the many pious
actions but that form itself that makes all pious actions pious” (6d). This rebuttal is short work, a single Stephanus page, but it is shorter still when we note that only about half of the space between Euthyphro’s statement and Socrates’ response is dedicated to the refutation. Some of the dialogue here is occupied by Euthyphro’s lauding of the extent of his knowledge and the superiority of his wisdom compared to his fellow citizens. A good portion (perhaps the better portion) is devoted to establishing with Euthyphro the grounding principle of the ensuing argument.

The work here almost seems an aside. Euthyphro is veering off topic when he remarks that his fellow citizens “contradict themselves in what they say about the gods and about me” (6a). He ought to be providing his definition of piety, but he is complaining about the ineptitude of his contemporaries. Twice over the next few lines, Socrates will restrain Euthyphro’s waffling off topic, but over this point he lingers. The contradiction that Euthyphro is emphasizing is that, while people take Zeus to be the greatest of gods, and Zeus attacked his own father in the name of justice, they do not see that Euthyphro’s case is truly pious. It is at this point that Socrates remarks that he does not put much stock in such stories and that this is likely the reason he will be found guilty in his own case (as discussed above). The following point, however, will become essential for the refutation of the second definition of piety:

Now, however, if you who have full knowledge of such things, share their opinions, then we must agree with them, too, it would seem. For what are we to say, we who agree that we ourselves have no knowledge of them? Tell me, by the god of friendship, do you really believe these things are true? (6a-b).

Three essential points are established here at the beginning of the discussion of piety: 1. Socratic ignorance; 2. hypothetical agreement; and 3. aligning Euthyphro with common belief. Socrates’ assertion of his lack of divine knowledge is a typically Socratic position, but Plato’s placement here is significant. That the limitation of human knowledge with respect to divine wisdom makes piety impossible (or near impossible) to define is the point to which Socrates hopes Euthyphro will
be led. Through consistent returns ἐξ ἀρχῆς, the conditions of Euthyphro’s opening statement will be stripped away until all that remained would be ignorance. That is, this would be all that remained were Euthyphro willing to follow Socrates on these consistent returns.

To the second point, without securing Euthyphro’s agreement on the truth of the poets’ stories of the gods, Socrates would not be able to move from the second definition to the third. What appears to be a minor digression on the way to the simple refutation of the first definition will soon be revealed to constitute the full force of the rejection of the second definition. That the gods disagree with one another will require the definition to be refined, but the assumption of divine wisdom is not jettisoned here. At the origin of the argument, Socrates carefully establishes the absurdity of intellectual authority that will be carried through to the end of the dialogue. Of additional importance (point 3), Euthyphro is tied here to common opinion. As I have attempted to show above, the audience of the dialogue ought to find it difficult to relate to Euthyphro. However, Plato is subtly introducing the similarities between the uncritical commitment to divine knowledge of the farcical prophet and the religious assumptions of the average Athenian citizen.

Euthyphro agrees that he accepts the standard accounts of the Homeric gods to be true and then appears on the verge of meandering off topic: “Yes, Socrates, and so are even more surprising things, of which the majority has no knowledge” (6b). Rather than allowing Euthyphro to distinguish himself from the majority, and in order to fully establish the foundation of the position that will soon be undermined, Socrates restates the conviction in certain terms:

And do you believe that there really is war among the gods, and terrible enmities and battles, and other such things as are told by the poets, and other sacred stories such as are embroidered by the good writers and by representations of which the robe of the goddess is adorned when it is carried up to the Acropolis? Are we to say these things are true, Euthyphro? (6b-c).
In this restatement, Euthyphro is fully committed to this position. With the additional qualification, citing a popular Athenian festival, the audience of the dialogue is made complicit. All of this is folded into the argument at its origin, as Socrates prepares to expose the foundation of Euthyphro’s argument as barren Plato is constructing the phases of the conversation such that they are subtly reflective of the socio-political discourse of fourth century Athens.

Elated that Socrates is apparently so interested in his opinions, Euthyphro again attempts to elaborate on his knowledge of the divine, but having everything he needs, Socrates stops him short (6c). The dialogue is dragged back on course. Socrates restates the first definition and quickly dismisses it as relating an instance of piety rather than expressing “that form itself that makes all pious actions pious” (6d). Euthyphro now presents the second definition: “what is dear to the gods is pious, what is not is impious” (7a).

II. Ἐξ Ἀρχῶν: Prior to all of this, the question of justice has already been surreptitiously introduced into the discussion. As has already been mentioned, Euthyphro makes the admirable point that, in prosecuting for murder, it should make no difference whether the victim is a stranger or a family member, or whether or not the suspect is your own father (4a-5a). All that matters is justice. Socrates makes no attempt to argue against this point. He expresses surprise since this defies conventional practice. He expresses concern, since conventional practice may well be correct, and Euthyphro’s acts against his father might actually be impious. It will be demonstrated that Euthyphro does not have knowledge of divine things, but the point that authority should not be prioritized over justice is left untested.

In the course of rejecting the second definition of piety—what is dear to the gods is pious—Socrates returns (7b) to the problem that the gods are said to differ with one another (6a-c). He
then asks if there are disputes on which agreement can be resolved by measurement and calculation (7b-c)—Euthyphro agrees. Socrates then asks what sorts of disagreements are so contentious and difficult to resolve that people are driven to heated conflict with one another. Before Euthyphro is able to answer, Socrates offers his own suggestion: “Perhaps you do not have an answer ready, but examine as I tell you whether these subjects are the just and the unjust, the beautiful and the ugly, the good and the bad” (7c-d). Socrates tells Euthyphro that his argument is that the gods would also differ on these points (7e). The next step will be to discover which of these ideas, the just, the beautiful, or the good, is relevant to the question of piety.

Socrates is in full control of the discussion by this point. Euthyphro is being led through ‘his’ argument so quickly that he can barely keep pace. Euthyphro has independently asserted that justice is more important than familial allegiance or paternal authority. He has also cited that Zeus must have been just in turning against his father, much as Kronos was just in turning against his. However, Socrates continues to insist that Euthyphro has argued that the gods disagree with one another concerning matters of justice and injustice (7e-8a, 8d), even though Euthyphro has merely assented to these points made by Socrates. Within a few lines, and without any remark on the excision, the subject of contention has been narrowed down to simply justice and injustice:

**Socrates:** And they like what each of them considers beautiful, good, and just, and hate the opposites of these?

**Euthyphro:** Certainly.

**Socrates:** But you say the same things are considered just by some gods and unjust by others, and as they dispute about these things they are at odds and at war with each other. Is that not so?

**Euthyphro:** It is.

**Socrates:** And the same things then are loved by the gods and hated by the gods, and would be both god-loved and god-hated.

*(Euthyphro 7e-8a).*
And let it not be forgotten that this interrogation is supposed to be about the idea of piety, but Socrates is peppering in references to justice with increasing frequency, Euthyphro assenting all the way.

Euthyphro remains adamant on one point: “on this subject no gods would differ from one another, that whoever has killed anyone unjustly should pay the penalty” (8b). Socrates allows this and presses Euthyphro into the third definition of piety: “let us assume, if you wish, that all the gods consider this unjust and that they all hate it. However, is this the correction in our discussion, that what all the gods hate is impious, and what they all love is pious…?” (9c-d). This definition is propped up only to fail. Immediately before telling Euthyphro that this is his definition, Socrates has carefully bracketed the idea of justice, having conceded that all the gods would think a killing (such as the one in question) would be hated by the gods and considered unjust. From here, Euthyphro is led through the well-known, labyrinthine twists of all things loved and coming to be loved, and once the third definition is deflated (Socrates no longer waiting for Euthyphro to supply his part of the discussion) the dialogue will return to justice. The claim to understand piety will be given a severe flogging, but the idea of justice had been set aside for this particularly damaging part of the interrogation.

Euthyphro believes that the third definition of piety is in good shape: “I certainly think that this is now a fine statement” (9e). If we remain uncritical, we can say that our definition is universal by divine endorsement. If we know that anything god-loved is pious then, using this as a model, we would know in any given situation if an act is pious or impious, and this is what Socrates asked for at the beginning (5d, 6d-e). The following discussion, however, will undo this security leading Euthyphro to recognize—even if only momentarily—the fragility of his heretofore unshakable wisdom.
The Euthyphro Dilemma, used to refute the third definition, opens with the question, “is the pious being loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is being loved by the gods?” (10a). Euthyphro does not understand, and we should allow him this moment of confusion. This is perhaps the first point at which any first-time audience would require significant exposition—fifth-century, fourth-century, and contemporary. Socrates is making a fine distinction which is difficult enough to grasp, but he is also introducing a subject object distinction which would have been scarcely comprehensible to an ancient audience. Even a contemporary audience, for any of our derisive assessments of Euthyphro’s intellectual ability, should experience some degree of empathy at this moment. Socrates expands:

We speak of something carried and something carrying, of something led and something leading, of something seen and something seeing, and you understand that these things are different from one another and how they differ? (10a).

Euthyphro believes that he is teaching Socrates about one thing, piety. It is now revealed however, that the third definition requires an elaboration of three referents: a subject, an object, and the relation between the two. The subject is the gods (collectively), the object is piety, and the relation is how the gods feel about piety. The discussion will reveal to Euthyphro that there is an important distinction between knowing what piety is and knowing how the gods feel about piety. I can tell someone that I love the contents of an unmarked box, and this will reveal that the thing in the box is loved by me, but the knowledge of my affection does not disclose that the box contains, say, a dead cat.

Socrates concludes by driving home the force of the refutation: “when you were asked what piety is, you did not wish to make its nature clear to me, but you told me an affect or a quality of it, that the pious has the quality of being loved by all the gods, but you have not yet told me what the pious is” (11a-b). This is enough to discard the third definition as insufficient. This attack,
however, has broader ramifications. We were led to this point allowing for the assumption that we know the minds of the gods—and we must not lose sight of the fact that Socrates does not accept this position. Even if we allow that a quality of piety is that it is loved by all the gods, Socrates does not believe that we have any notion of what all the gods love. Further, as the hypothetical origin of the current account maintains, the gods are wont to change their minds. Recalling this postulate, even if we assume knowledge of divine affection, and even if this were sufficient to know the difference between pious and impious actions, it only takes one god changing her mind (as gods are apparently wont to do) to reveal a false positive in the assessment of the piety of any given human act. Gods are surely not required to tell mortals when their affections have altered from the reports given by Hesiod and Homer.151

Euthyphro is clearly at the end of his tether when Socrates immediately follows this crushing revelation with a request to begin, once again with their investigation of piety: “Now, if you will, do not hide things from me but tell me again from the beginning [ἐξ ἀρχῆς] what piety is” (11b). Euthyphro complains that “whatever proposition we put forward goes around and refuses to stay put where we established it” (11b). Socrates riffs on this idea of shifting propositions, making allusions to Daedalus’ self-moving statues, and the two banter back and forth over whom is to blame for the infirmity of the argument (11b-e). This is the crisis point of the dialogue—signified by Plato in this request to return ἐξ ἀρχῆς—with the interlocutor nearing the point of

151 Yet another interesting consequence of this definition is that Socrates seems to allow that being god-loved is a quality of piety and asks, “is something loved either something changed or something affected by something?” (10c). We cannot be entirely certain that Socrates does believe that piety has this quality or that something loved is something changed (the former could be ironic, the latter is a question rather than an assertion—though it does seem reasonably Socratic). If Socrates does accept both positions, it suggests that piety is subject to change (Cambridge change notwithstanding, see Chapter One), which would mean that piety cannot be a form—and if the virtues are forms, piety cannot be a virtue. Conversely, if we insist that Socrates understands piety to be a virtue, we have another reason to reject this attempt at a definition.
misology. Euthyphro does not believe he is to blame: “I am not the one who makes them go around and not remain in the same place; it is you who are the Daedalus; for as far as I am concerned they would remain as they were” (11c-d). While the banter here appears somewhat lighthearted, this is a significant statement in this moment of crisis. Plato is stressing the problem that has led Euthyphro to his current state. He has always presumed that his utterances are absolute. Socrates has revealed to Euthyphro that the foundation of his wisdom lacks the authority that he had always taken for granted.

Socrates agrees that it would really be best if Euthyphro’s statements would remain in place (11c). Given that this is apparently not possible, one might wish to abandon the argument as Euthyphro seems ready to do. Socrates, on the other hand, is accustomed to the infirmity of human claims to knowledge, having accepted in his youth that if we hope to move towards something like divine knowledge, we must resign our discussions to a second-best method of inquiry. Socrates presses on, dragging Euthyphro along despite his reservations.

III. Second Sailing: That “the pious is part of justice” (12d) is a thought introduced by Socrates alone. There are many points in numerous dialogues where it is fair to suggest that Socrates is leading his interlocutor towards a thought he seems to have already had in mind. As Thrasymachus angrily insists, Socrates “gives no answer himself, and then, when someone else does give one, he takes up the argument and refutes it” (Republic I 337d-e). The Euthyphro thus far seems only to prove Thrasymachus’ point—but not here. Just when Euthyphro seems ready to quit, Socrates reignites the discussion by asking if “all that is pious is of necessity just” (11e). Euthyphro does not even fully understand the meaning of this distinction. Socrates asks, “is then all that is just pious? Or is all that is pious just, but not all that is just pious, but some of it is and some of it is
not?” (11e-12a), to which Euthyphro responds, “I do not follow what you are saying, Socrates” (12a). Socrates is required to walk Euthyphro through this distinction, and then Socrates asks Euthyphro to clarify “what part of justice piety is” (12d). Euthyphro responds: “I think, Socrates, that the godly and the pious is that part of the just that is concerned with the care of the gods, while that concerned with the care of men is the remaining part of justice” (12e).

Justice is bifurcated into one part concerning the care of the gods and another part concerning human beings. In the *Euthyphro*, the part concerning the care of human beings, “the remaining part of the just” (12e), is not discussed directly. Care of human beings, in matters of justice, however, has been a lingering question throughout the dialogue. The two cases presented, at the beginning, admitted of both divine and human interest. In that each case is being brought before the king-archon, the prosecutors each assume a pretense of caring for the divine. Euthyphro is concerned with impurity, and Socrates says of Meletus’ charges, “he has indicted me for their sake, as he puts it” (3b). That Socrates’ case is for the protection of the gods has already been questioned (above), but we are now able to examine if such a pretense carries any legitimacy.

In each case there is human interest that is being ignored by the prosecutors in favor of assuming the role of champion of the gods. I have already discussed Socrates’ ironic praise of Meletus, suggesting that he is indicting Socrates for the good of the Athenian citizens. In Euthyphro’s case, two men have died and nobody, not even Euthyphro, seems interested in acquiring justice for the victims. Justice is pursued for the sake of the gods, and this, according to Euthyphro, is pious—though as it has turned out, we do not know why this is pious. Now that the suggestion has been entered that both Meletus’ and Euthyphro’s cases are pious because they observe a part of justice devoted to care of the gods, the righteousness of each case will hang on our understanding of the nature of “care.”
Socrates congratulates Euthyphro for “his” distinction but asks for further clarification: “You seem to me to put that very well, but I still need a bit more information. I do not know yet what you mean by care, for you do not mean the care of the gods in the same sense as care of other things” (12e-13a). It is safe to assume that Socrates does believe that the bifurcation of justice is a good distinction, since it is exclusively his. What it could mean to care for the gods now becomes a question of what purpose cases brought to the king-archon actually serve.

Socrates will lead Euthyphro through the possible meaning of this relationship of care, dismissing each, eventually leading back to the already dismissed position that “the pious is once again what is dear to the gods” (15b, cf. 7a). The first possible meaning is animal husbandry (13a-c), which is dismissed because it suggests that “when you do something pious you make some one of the gods better” (13c). Euthyphro then suggests that this is a master-slave relationship (13c-14b). In this case piety “is likely to be a kind of service of the gods” (13d), but Socrates inquires after what the gods are attempting to achieve that requires the help of mortals. There is an immediate problem here relating to the dismissal of the first clarification of care—how could the gods possibly need our help? This point is rather more simply dismissed by the fact that Euthyphro has no answer to the question of what the gods would need help producing (even if we could imagine they had any need for human assistance in the first place):

**Socrates:** Tell me then, my good sir, to the achievement of what aim does service of the gods tend? You obviously know since you say that you, of all men, have the best knowledge of the divine.
**Euthyphro:** And I am telling the truth, Socrates.
**Socrates:** Tell me then, by Zeus, what is that excellent aim that the gods achieve, using us as their servants?
**Euthyphro:** Many fine things, Socrates.

*(Euthyphro 13e)*

This is an empty response, and at this point the audience is reminded of Euthyphro’s authoritative claims to divine knowledge at the moment that this knowledge is clearly exposed as barren. The
fourth century audience might also find themselves searching for answers to this question—and while they might not make such exaggerated knowledge claims as Euthyphro, in attempting to account for the nature of piety in the Athenian legal system, the audience should be beginning to see themselves in Euthyphro’s position. All that is left to respond to Socrates’ question is to say that “it is a considerable task to acquire any precise knowledge of these things, but if a man knows how to say and do what is pleasing to the gods at prayer and sacrifice, those are pious actions such as preserve both private houses and public affairs of state” (14b). This does nothing to defend Euthyphro’s prosecution of his father or Meletus’ prosecution of Socrates, or any case tried at the king-archon’s court. If piety is simply prayer and sacrifice, the king-archon has an important role to play, but that role should not include litigation. As it turns out, however, this final attempt to understand piety proves untenable.

Socrates asks if the exchange in ritual practice is a kind of commerce with the gods in which “we have such an advantage over them in the trade that we receive all our blessings from them and they receive nothing from us?” (15a). Euthyphro cannot escape this problem by suggesting that anything mortals provide to the gods is for their benefit. He can only offer the response that piety, understood as ritual exchange, is pleasing to the gods (15a).

Aporia

From the perspective of the eponymous character, the Euthyphro is an aporetic dialogue. The dialogue is inconclusive if we take its sole purpose to be an attempt to produce a positive definition of piety. A circuit is established in the discourse that appears inescapable. Socrates claims that he

---

152 Recalling the discussion (above) of Morgan’s pairing Euthyphro with the common Athenian adherence to piety as ritual and sacrifice.
is unwilling to give up the pursuit and will gladly “investigate again from the beginning [ἐξ ἀρχῆς] what piety is” (15c). Perhaps he is sincere, surely this is a question worth answering, but it is presented here as an answer unlikely to be encountered as Euthyphro suddenly recalls that he is in a hurry and needs to leave (15e). The impasse is not so rigid, however, if it is conceived as demonstrating the falsity of claims to know piety.

Plato brings the dialogue to a close with a caution to Euthyphro that might just as easily serve as an admonition of Meletus: “If you had no clear knowledge of piety and impiety you would never have ventured to prosecute … for fear of the gods you would have been afraid to take the risk lest you should not be acting rightly, and would have been ashamed before men” (15d). It is demonstrated that piety, that part of justice concerning the gods, is significantly difficult (if not impossible) to have any knowledge of. What remains, however, is a part of justice that human beings must have some chance of coming to know. Perhaps an investigation of the remainder of the just, that which concerns human beings, would prove a fruitful endeavor.

A return ἐξ ἀρχῆς from this point (as Socrates has pledged his willingness to proceed) would require an examination of justice without the assumption of piety, since the care of the gods is now exposed as a nonstarter. However, it is not clear that justice in fifth century Athens could be understood without the presumption of divine interest. As I attempted to show (above), the discursive conditions of Athenian society were rooted in confused assumptions of divine knowledge and a confounded understanding of authority. Could just laws be enacted and amended in the assembly, or could justice be practiced in any Athenian court, if assumptions of divine wisdom were embedded in the socio-political foundations?

Socrates’ trial, as it is presented in the *Apology*, is less a matter of religious impropriety and more a question of human concerns, not the least of which would seem to be settling scores.
Socrates is charged with impiety. These laws, written by human beings, deign to both understand and protect the interests of the gods—and of the polis which might suffer if the interests of the gods are not protected. As Socrates will take pains to point out, this is the height of *hubris*; in the *Euthyphro*, a human claim to act on divine authority is exposed as impious, but also impossible. The Athenian legal system conflates the care of the gods with the care of human beings—and this is the central concern of the *Euthyphro*.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have attempted to show that the *Euthyphro* is not only an aporetic exploration of the concept of piety but also an exposition of the problems of authority in late fifth and early fourth century Athens. The explicit target is the hubris of Euthyphro’s claim to understand the will of the gods. I hope to have expanded the possibility that Euthyphro might be read as an exaggerated representative of the audience of Plato’s dialogue. This would show that the character of Socrates is occupied here with disabusing his contemporaries of their uncritical understanding of justice. Euthyphro’s authoritarian attitude is shown to be the cause of his ill-advised case against his own father. The real problem, however, is not necessarily that the case has no merit, but that it cannot be tried in the name of piety. At the beginning, the audience may be shocked by Euthyphro’s impiety and skeptical of his wisdom. By the end of the dialogue, the audience ought to realize that they, just as much as Euthyphro, lack wisdom in questions pertaining to piety. I have also attempted to show that Socrates considers knowledge of justice to be a worthwhile pursuit. In the *Euthyphro*, however—a dialogue that begins with reference to two instances in which justice ought to be the central concern—it is demonstrated that the discussion of justice must be prefaced by a long and difficult discourse on, what turns out to be, the empty concept of piety. I believe that this
is not intended to be read as an isolated problem in encounters with men such as Euthyphro. Rather, Plato wrote this dialogue to illustrate the Socratic conviction that knowledge of justice, and other important concepts, will be perennially blocked if the pursuit of wisdom is not relieved of the burden of authority.
Introduction

In this chapter, I present an examination of Book I of the Republic that is informed by the lesson learned by the young Socrates (Chapter One), and by the preceding reading of the Euthyphro. The broad suggestion in this chapter is that, in Book I of the Republic, Plato returns to the two important points of enquiry raised in the Euthyphro: the first concerns the nature of justice; the second, the separation of justice into two parts. I suggest that the remainder of the just that is not dealt with in the Euthyphro is the subject of Book I of the Republic. In the Euthyphro, the question of justice subtly underscores the discussion of piety. At the beginning of the Republic, justice will be introduced as the focus of the discourse. The very beginning of the book, however, presents a false start where we encounter Socrates amongst suppliants and their goddess—a framing already established in the Euthyphro as unlikely to yield knowledge of the just. Plato carefully strips away reference to the divine while the discussion of justice becomes increasingly focused on the care of human beings. I take it that this is a testament to Socrates’ sense of piety. This focus on the human path towards knowledge of justice is not an argument against the intellectual, religious experience (as it pertains to Plato, or more broadly). Rather, it forms part of the aspirational pursuit of human wisdom in deference to the superiority of divine knowledge and authority. The dialectical pursuit of justice begins when the dialogue is reframed at the home of the wealthy metic, Cephalus. However, as I hope to elaborate in this chapter, Book I of the Republic, as a prologue to the discussion proper, is presented through shifting characters and settings structured as the defining
antitheses for the dialectical pursuit of justice occupying the remainder of the dialogue.\textsuperscript{153} The culminating introduction of Thrasymachus leads to a framing of the idea of justice such that it is conceptually beyond the limits of human understanding. An exclusively mortal rendering of justice will be established, admitting of the same degree of obfuscation as the divine view of justice that forced the aporetic ending of the \textit{Euthyphro}.

As with the \textit{Euthyphro}, I will suggest that Plato means to identify authoritarian claims to wisdom as the central problem of \textit{Republic} I—where the question of justice is revisited without the problematic appeal to divine authority that stayed progress in the \textit{Euthyphro}, yet illicit claims to authority continue to cloud the investigation. At the estate of Cephalus, where the locus of authority is ever shifting, the power of dialectic proves barely effective in spite of Socrates’ best efforts to orient the discourse towards a fruitful discussion of the remainder of the just.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{153} Discussions of the \textit{Republic} for at least the last century have been required to address certain differences in style and content between the first book and the remainder of the work. As early as 1926, A. E. Taylor is required to dismiss (and already with seemingly perfunctory commitment) what he derisively refers to as “fanciful modern speculations about…the possible existence of the first book by itself as a ‘dialogue of search’” (\textit{Plato: The Man and his Work}, 264). The separate dialogue view has never been entirely settled (Leonard Brandwood provides a complete overview of the scholarship on stylemetry in \textit{The Chronology of Plato’s Dialogues}, which includes summaries of those arguing for the separation of Book I, see: H. Siebeck (48-54); C. Ritter (55-86); H. von Arnim (96-114); W. Lutoslawski (123-35)—Brandwood considers Lutoslawski’s and Arnim’s findings to be methodologically and materially flawed). The curious style, however, prompts an array of responses regardless of claims to chronology. Terence Irwin (\textit{Plato’s Moral Theory: The Early and Middle Dialogues}, 177-80) and C. D. C. Reeve (\textit{Philosopher – Kings: The Argument of Plato’s Republic}, 3-5), for instance, assume that Book I is an indication of Plato’s dissatisfaction with certain of Socrates’ arguments. Taylor’s view is that the book serves as an ideal introduction (indeed, Socrates describes Book I as an introduction [προοίμιον] at the beginning of Book II (357a)) to the problems worked out in the remainder of the books, and considers it to be “inconceivable that \textit{Republic} I. should ever have been planned except as the introduction to a work covering the ground of the \textit{Republic} as we have it” (\textit{Plato}, 264). In one of few complete works (perhaps the only one) dedicated exclusively to \textit{Republic} I, Kimon Lycos also characterizes Book I as an introduction, “but it is one whose special function is to reshape thinking about justice in a certain direction” (\textit{Plato on Justice and Power: Reading Book I of Plato’s Republic}, 2). Julia Annas is of the same mind, but remarks that “even if Book I was written separately, this does not matter; it forms an entirely suitable introduction to the main discussion” (\textit{An Introduction to Plato’s Republic}, 17). Annas also directly compares the discussion in \textit{Republic} I with that of the \textit{Euthyphro} (16-17).}
I offer here an overview of the important points that will be elaborated throughout this chapter. Book I of the *Republic* begins with dense references to religious ceremony but gives way to a far more secular discussion of justice. At the beginning of the dialogue, Plato situates Socrates in the context of a religious festival held in the Athenian harbor, the Piraeus (327a). Socrates’ experience here is summed up in few words before he is ready to return to Athens. This is a brief opening image and Socrates’ attempted exit marks the first schism from the religious to the profane. However, he is waylaid by Polemarchus (327b-328a). Socrates is drawn back into the world of divine observance with promises of an “all-night festival” (328a), and encounters Cephalus “on a sort of cushioned chair with a wreath on his head as he had been offering a sacrifice” (328c). Socrates will manage to turn the conversation towards justice, but Cephalus’ suggestion—that justice amounts to us owing “sacrifice to a god or money to a person” (331b)—is reminiscent of Euthyphro’s failed definitions of piety.

The conversation turns exclusively to justice as it pertains to human beings—and this, I will suggest, is the remainder of the just which is mentioned, but not elaborated, in the *Euthyphro*. A second schism from the sacred to the secular is marked by Cephalus’ bequeathal of his argument to his son, as the elder retreats to “look after the sacrifice” (331d). When the argument is taken up by his heir, Polemarchus, Cephalus leaves to tend to the gods. As though a scapegoat, the old man appears to carry piety away as Plato banishes him from the discussion. The working definition of justice is immediately refined, by reference to Simonides, as “to give to each what is owed to him” (331e), no more mention here of sacrifices to the gods. The Simonidean view is corrected to

---

154 Plato may not have been familiar with the story attributed to Simonides (by Cicero) that concerning knowledge of the gods he once said “the longer I deliberate, the more obscure the matter seems to me” (*De Natura Deorum* 1.22.60, trans. Rackham). If this statement, or something like it, was available to Plato, reference to Simonides at this point is quite telling.
allow that justice is the practice of benefitting one’s friends and harming one’s enemies (331e-332b). Through a short and amicable elenchus (332b-335d), the understanding of justice undergoes many strange alterations until Socrates and Polemarchus ultimately amend the definition to excise the contention that it is proper to do harm to one’s enemies (335e). The idea that it is ever just to do harm is marked out as tantamount to tyranny (336a). 155

It is at this point that Thrasymachus violently enters the conversation (336b), and the remainder of Book I is occupied with this, at times painful, discourse dominated by the authoritarian view of the just (336b-354c). My claim is that, reading this together with Socrates’ interrogation of Thrasymachus, the authority of the rule of the law stands in relation to justice as piety relates to justice in the Euthyphro. Reading these two texts together shows that authoritarian accounts in each instance constitute faulty knowledge of the just, where those who claim such knowledge are mistaking a phantom for that which is, as it is, by itself—and we should also recall that these are the conditions that would risk the destruction of the power of dialectic as presented in the Parmenides (see Chapter One). As we shall see in this chapter, though Thrasymachus will not recognize the conflation, the central elenctic portion of Republic I draws what amounts to a discussion of the rule of law into the same recursive trap to which piety is doomed in the Euthyphro—confounding the potential path towards an understanding of justice.

155 In the precise sense, the view that Socrates ascribes to “Periander, or Perdiccas, or Xerxes, or Isemnias of Corinth, or some other wealthy man who believed himself to have great power” is that it is just to help friends and harm enemies (Republic I 336a). That three of the four named here are notorious tyrants suggests that the target of this criticism of the definition of justice is specifically the harm clause—as harming enemies is more clearly within the purview of tyrannical rule (not to say that nepotism is not also common amongst tyrants). As Mark Gifford points out, for Polemarchus to accept that it could be just to harm one’s enemies develops a sense of tragic irony when considering that this would make his own execution at the hands of the Thirty Tyrants perfectly just (“Dramatic Dialectic in Republic Book I,” 91). Gifford also provides a lengthy discussion of the peculiar addition of the wealthy Ismenias. In short, the suggestion is that Plato is tying Polemarchus to Ismenias (a wealthy foreigner and Theban warlord [polemarch]), and thus associating Polemarchus with the tyrannical understanding of justice (91-97).
Justice will not be encountered, here at the beginning, in Book I of the Republic. When Glaucon and Socrates are on the verge of discovering justice, or something like it, in Book IV, Socrates exclaims that they have been acting like idiots, explaining that, “what we are looking for seems to have been rolling around at our feet from the beginning [ἐξ ἀρχῆς]” (432d). Should the audience of the dialogue follow Plato’s cue and think back to the beginning, they would discover in Book I only false starts, errors, and aporia. The result of the discussion in Book I, in Socrates’ own words, “is that I know nothing” (354c). However, as Socrates reveals at the beginning of Book II, the preceding discourse “turned out to have been only a prelude” (357a). After searching the beginning for a hint of justice, as recommended (Book IV 432d), we might echo Glaucon’s sentiment, that this “is a long prelude for someone who wants to hear the answer” (432e). As tedious and empty as this prologue might seem, however, I will attempt to show that Plato builds a complex set of analogies into the setting, characters, and the argument of Book I. The structure established at the beginning of the Republic is representative of the city and the soul where authority is improperly allocated.

The Piraeus

To address the framing of the dialogue, I will begin by quoting extensively from the opening page. I suggest that the use of the first-person presents initially as a claim to authorial accuracy but turns out to the contrary. This discussion leads into what I take to be Plato’s intentional allusion to the authority of the poets, which reminds us of the associate problems of divine authority. I will discuss the significance of the authorial authority presented in the use of an unmediated first-person address—all of which is contained in the first word of the dialogue, κατέβην (I went down). Finally, before moving on to the preliminary dialogical portion of the text featuring Socrates’ conversations
with Cephalus and Polemarchus, I address the significance of the unusual setting of the dialogue in the Athenian harbor region of the Piraeus and the direct references to gods and ritual practice that litter the brief, opening passage.

I went down to the Piraeus yesterday with Glaucon, the son of Ariston. I wanted to say a prayer to the goddess, and I was also curious to see how they would manage the festival, since they were holding it for the first time. I thought the procession of the local residents was a fine one and that the one conducted by the Thracians was no less outstanding. After we had said our prayer and seen the procession, we started back towards Athens (Republic I 327a).

In the statement, “I went down” [κατέβην], Socrates’ use of the first person promises the reader an unusual degree of clarity. Unlike the carefully curated ambiguity of dialogues such as the Parmenides and Phaedo (as discussed in Chapter One), or the distancing of the dramatic presentation used in the better part of the corpus, the Republic is one of only three dialogues to offer the narrative authority of a direct address by Socrates himself relating, without mediation, the details of a dialectical encounter. For further clarity, this story is being told moments after the conversation took place. It is in this realization, however, that the authority of the narrator begins to unravel. The audience ought to be surprised by the stamina required to take part in a conversation (and not a light one) that must have been close to half a day in length, followed by a five mile walk, and presumably the immediate retelling of the twelve hour conversation. In addition to the physical strain, the mental agility required to recall and relate, without practice, a

156 Charmides and Lysis are the only other dialogues directly related by Socrates without mediation (that they each recount conversations with attractive young men is surely of some interest, but beyond the scope of the present study). Protagoras is very nearly narrated from the same perspective but for the medium of the Friend to whom Socrates is relating the encounter. In Protagoras, Plato makes direct reference to Odysseus’ descent into Hades (315c-d).

157 This is also true of Protagoras. Socrates ends this account by announcing that he is on his way to meet a friend, who is the Friend to whom the entire event is being addressed.

158 We might be reminded of the near superhuman prowess of the Socrates portrayed in the Symposium who talks and drinks the night through before heading directly to the Lyceum (223d).
conversation as long and as dense as the Republic is formidable—in fact, it is scarcely believable.¹⁵⁹ Greek education would prepare young men to memorize large portions of Homeric verse, but the ability to recite a poem the length of the Odyssey (which is roughly the same length as the Republic) required the skill of a rhapsode (or even divine inspiration).¹⁶⁰ The authority of the opening, then, appears less secure than it had initially appeared—and like the Parmenides (though to a greatly diminished extent), the recounting of these events is shrouded in ambiguity.¹⁶¹

Somewhat to the contrary, a certain degree of authority is extended to Socrates in his apparent ability to recite an extended narrative that puts him on a par with the rhapsodes, and perhaps even the old poets themselves. The poets, however, appeal to the muse to inaugurate their song. At the beginning of the Republic, Socrates makes no such appeal. The events of the Republic are presented as though recounted directly from Socrates’ own memory. A nameless goddess is acknowledged,¹⁶² but Socrates tells us that he watched the procession, said a prayer, and prepared to leave.

The fourth word of the Republic informs us that the ensuing discourse will take place in the Athenian port of Piraeus. The location of any dialogue, if Plato chooses to draw our attention

¹⁵⁹ Naoko Yamagata provides an interesting study of Plato’s treatment of rhapsodic skill in “Plato, Memory, and Performance.”

¹⁶⁰ Yamagata points out that inIon, Socrates is just as capable as the trained rhapsode at quoting Homer from memory, remarking that “to make Socrates outdo the professional in reciting Homer is surely Plato’s deliberate irony” (“Plato, Memory, and Performance,” 117). Of additional interest, “Ion’s and the first three of Socrates’ Homeric examples are each slightly ‘misquoted’” (117). Yamagata concludes that these mistakes are probably Plato’s, and perhaps this is simply reflective of “the usual way people quoted Homer and other authors in their daily conversations” (118). On the other hand, given Plato’s literary skill, we might reserve the possibility that these mistakes are intentional, suggesting that even the memory of experts is not infallible, given that Ion does not notice that Socrates is misquoting the text.

¹⁶¹ The allusions to the framing of the Parmenides appear intentional—see the discussion in Chapter One.

¹⁶² Though not named in the opening, Bendis is identified as the fêted goddess at the end of Book I (354a).
to it, cannot be ignored. This is especially true if the location is unusual, and encountering Socrates beyond the walls of Athens is unusual. The Piraeus, however, was connected to Athens by a continuous wall, in which case, in leaving Athens, Socrates does not leave the city walls. This exposes a curious ambiguity in the frame as we discover Socrates both at home and not at home—a situation akin to the status of the broader population of the Piraeus and of the family of metics who host Socrates, his interlocutors, and his audience. The Piraeus operates under the auspices of Athenian political rule but at the external limits of authority’s reach. On Plutarch’s

---

163 As a single example of the significance of setting, since it is the subject of the foregoing discussion, consider the scene of the Euthyphro playing out before the king-archon’s court.

164 As Phaedrus remarks when he encounters Socrates barely beyond the city walls, “and you, my remarkable friend, appear to be totally out of place…Not only do you never travel abroad—as far as I can tell, you never even set foot beyond the city walls” (Phaedrus 230c-d). John Sallis, in Being and Logos: Reading the Platonic Dialogues, takes Plato’s choice of setting very seriously. Observing that the name Piraeus “is said to be derived from ‘παραία’ which (derived in turn from ‘πέρας’) means literally ‘beyond-land’” (315), Sallis takes this as an intentional allegory to “the river Lethe or another of those rivers that must be crossed in order to reach Hades” (316). Sallis means to suggest that the opening of the Republic is intended to read as Socrates’ descent into Hades. This is perhaps a heavy-handed interpretation, but it is not offered without serious consideration of the text. Concerns for the potential over-reach aside, κατέβην, “I went down” (Republic I 327a) may reasonably be read as an allusion to Homer, a reference to Odysseus’ account of his descent into Hades (Odyssey XXIII 252-3; this is Sallis’ observation (Being and Logos, 316; see also, his references in n. 7)).

165 A technical but significant distinction. But for the walls, the three-mile walk from the agora to the harbor would have taken Socrates through open countryside. The Piraeus is a deme of Athens (to mark this distinction, it is common to refer to the urban center of Athens proper as the astu in relation to demoi and suburban districts in the greater Attic area). Given the distance from the astu, its economic and martial significance, and the density of non-citizen residents, the Piraeus almost presents as a polis unto itself. There is further detail on these points below.

166 Precise demographical information for the Piraeus is difficult to estimate, but Robert Garland does suggest that during Socrates’ lifetime, “the Peiraieteis or demesmen of the Piraeus represented only a fraction of the total population, which had now been supplemented both by metics and by Athenians registered in other demes” (The Piraeus, 60). Undoubtedly, the population would have included a large proportion of short-term visitors and slaves, but as Garland laments, “sources tell us virtually nothing about [these] two groups” (59). Metics such as Cephalus and Polemarchus contributed to the activities of the polis and enjoyed certain privileges, but not the extensive rights of an Athenian citizen. Douglas M. MacDowell notes that metics could be afforded special privileges, such as ἔγκτησις, which is “the right to acquire ownership of land and buildings in Attika” (The Law in Classical Athens, 78). Cephalus clearly enjoys this status.

167 As Sitta Von Reden observes, “harbour towns are frequently fully developed urban centres which question the centrality of the political centre … a harbour town upsets the structural subordination of a local deme to the astu” (“The Piraeus – A World Apart,” 25).
account, when Themistocles “fastened the city to the Piraeus, and the city to the sea … he increased the privileges of the common people as against the nobles, and filled them with boldness, since the controlling power came now into the hands of skippers and boatswains and pilots” (Themistocles 19.4). Situated as an ideological outsider ensconced within the political unity of Athens, the Piraeus functions as an essential part of the polis and presents a significant danger to the locus of authority. Amongst these dangers, sea trade brings with it the celebration of new gods, such as the Thracian goddess Bendis whose festival is the reason for Socrates’ descent. More generally, the Piraeus “was the product and cornerstone of Athenian democracy.” To this extent, while this deme threatened to destabilize the authority of the astu, it was simultaneously a symbol and champion of perhaps the most iconic Athenian value. The character of the Piraeus ought perhaps to remind us of the gadfly himself.

A Tediouso Prologue

An analogy between Socrates and the Piraeus, however, is significantly deficient. I believe that Plato does want to invite this comparison, but he does so partly to emphasize what is missing. The program of the Republic, stated in Book II, is to develop the picture of an ideal city, the kallipolis, in an effort to pursue an understanding of justice (368c-369b). The hope is to discover justice in the individual soul, and by analogy, Socrates suggests “we should adopt the method of

168 Recalling the charges against Socrates: Apology 24b-c; Euthyphro 3b. The Republic famously includes an attack on the institution of democracy, which suggests a disanalogy. The analogy persists, however, in that the concerns of Book VIII target the descent of democracy into tyranny—it is against the tyrannical occupation of Athens that the democrats of the Piraeus present resistance.


170 If the analogy holds, we might also consider the actions of the Thirty Tyrants during their brief rule, with which Plato was intimately familiar. During this tyranny, “a number of their measures were aimed directly at the Piraeus, not only because it was the heartland of radical democracy, but also because it symbolized the exact antithesis of the oligarchic value-system” (Garland, The Piraeus, 33).
investigation that we’d use if, lacking keen eyesight, we were told to read small letters from a distance and then noticed that the same letters existed elsewhere in a larger size and on a larger surface” (368d). I will attempt to show that Book I, as a prolegomena to any future psychology, presents at least two paradigmatic cases for the condition of the individual soul.171 However, each is in some way deficient but writ too small to discover the deficiency without the expanded picture drawn out over the course of the ensuing discussion. The two paradigms, which I will briefly discuss, are the festival of Bendis, and the estate of Cephalus (each smaller than a city but larger than an individual).

Over the course of Books II-IV, the complex project is structured such that the ideal city must be organized into three classes, each of which corresponds to a part of the soul, with each corresponding to virtue as follows: The guardian class, the rational part of the soul, and the virtue of wisdom; the auxiliary class, the spirited part of the soul, and the virtue of courage; the producing class, the appetitive part of the soul, and the virtue of moderation. The appetitive/moderation correlation is not so neat as the other two relations (nor so neat as presented above). The most virtuous spirit is courageous, and wisdom is the virtue of rational part of the soul (when the rational part rules). Moderation is found in each part of the city and the soul (430e-432a). The need and function of the virtue, however, is a corrective for desires. The important distinction is that the appetitive part of the soul becomes virtuous by grace of the virtue of the spirited and rational parts of the soul.172 Socrates, Adeimantus, and Glaucon all agree that a completely good city, such as

171 The Piraeus itself would present an interesting contrast with the formation of the ideal city and its image of a deficient soul. The contrast would be interesting for a number of reasons, and for a number of reasons the contrast is too complex to present here.

172 These partitions are laid out and elaborated in several places throughout the text. For a lengthy discussion of the tripartite soul see: Republic IV 435b-441a. On the discovery of the virtues in the city, 427d-432a. The need for producers begins, and is elaborated, in Book II (369b-371e). This establishes the healthy city (372e), to which luxury commodities and producers are added (373a-c), which in turn requires warfare and soldiers (373d-374a), hence the guardian class (374e-376c). From the guardians, rulers are
the kallipolis, would necessarily be “wise, courageous, moderate, and just” (Republic IV 427e). Justice is found after the other three virtues are discovered, and whatever remains must be justice (427e-428a). Encountering Book I of the Republic for the first time, this information is unavailable to an audience of the dialogue. Returning to the beginning, the audience is in a position to apply the lessons of the dialogue to its starting point. The entire dialogue is, in fact, such a return for Socrates as he is delivering an account of the events of the previous day. For Plato’s part, as author, we can recall another return to the analogous opening of the Parmenides, but a mature Socrates now returns, gripped by philosophy. This is the Socrates promised by the Parmenides (130e)—markedly less committed to authoritative claims to knowledge, unconcerned with what people will think of him, and possessed of the power of dialectic.

I. The Festival of Bendis: Socrates reports that he went to the Piraeus yesterday to “say a prayer to the goddess” and “to see [θεάσασθαι] how they would manage the festival” (Republic I 327a). Plato’s use of the word θεάομαι, particularly in reference to a religious festival, cannot be incidental. Socrates is taking part in a significant religious practice in traveling from Athens selected, and here Socrates names the young guardians, auxiliaries (Book III 414b). The correspondence of the virtues in the city and the soul is summarized in Book IV (440e-442d). The virtue of moderation has important consequences for the problems of authority in the well-ordered soul. When we discover that the power of justice (or something like it) is “doing one’s own work” (433b) where reason is granted authority, moderation works to ensure that each part of the soul recognizes it does not have an appropriate claim to authority. In Book IV pleasure and desires are checked by moderation and both “the ruler and the ruled in any city share the same belief about who should rule” (431d-e).

173 The noun, θεωρία [theoria], refers to the Greek observance of pilgrimage. Translating the word as “pilgrimage,” is problematic; see, for instance, Scott Scullion, “Pilgrimage and Greek Religion: Sacred and Secular in the Pagan Polis,” in Elsner and Rutherford eds. Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity: Seeing the Gods, 111-130. Scullion argues that “sanctuary visitation belonged to the realm of the ‘secular’ rather than to the ‘sacred’” (111), and that translating θεωρία as pilgrimage gives the wrong impression of Greek religious practices. The general point that “the word ‘pilgrimage’ elicits associations appropriate to the ‘world religions’” (112), is well taken. It is also important to remark that the function of the theoroi was political, and that eventually “the noun θεωρός becomes a standard Greek term for ‘ambassador’, a political or secular rather than a sacred role” (121). However, the suggestion that a
proper to observe a religious festival.\textsuperscript{174} This theoria, however, is a drastically reduced case—reflective of neither the typical pilgrimage enjoyed by individuals, nor the elaborate excursions that would be officially sanctioned by a polis.\textsuperscript{175} According to Rutherford, a theoria would generally be “a journey of a greater than usual length, sometimes also a journey of significant difficulty, so that visiting a sanctuary in one’s home-town would not normally count.”\textsuperscript{176} As discussed, while the Piraeus is a deme of Athens and within the city walls, for Socrates, this is a journey of unusual distance from the agora.\textsuperscript{177} This is as much a theoria as we could imagine in Plato’s Socrates.\textsuperscript{178}

---

ritualized excursion to sanctuaries and festivals held in honor of gods or a god could be considered entirely secular perhaps admits of a category mistake. We should also not lose sight of the fact that θεωρία, in the simplest sense, means “seeing, observing,” and would take on philosophical significance in Aristotle (and to a lesser extent in Plat, see the following note). With all of this in mind, I will assume pilgrimage is an acceptable translation in the very specific circumstances of the present discussion. Scullion’s contribution is important, but he notes at the beginning of his discussion that this translation (and conceptualization) is already too entrenched in the scholarship to be ignored, but cautions that “the term and concept ‘pilgrimage’ are misleading rather than illuminating in their application to Greek practice, and should therefore be used, if at all, only with explicit and thorough qualification” (111). This note serves as sincere deference to Scullion’s argument.

\textsuperscript{174} Ian Rutherford’s “Theoric Crisis: The Dangers of Pilgrimage in Greek Religion and Society” provides a focused overview of the practice (and see 277 n.5 for a comprehensive list of references). In Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy: Theoria in its Cultural Context, Andrea Nightingale presents the history of Greek \textit{theory}, reading the significance of the cultural practice in 4th century philosophical usage. Of particular interest, see chapters two (72-93) and three (94-138) in which she analyzes “Plato’s deliberate and quite extensive use of traditional \textit{theory} in his accounts of theoretical philosophy in the \textit{Republic, Symposium, and Phaedrus}” (73).

\textsuperscript{175} For more on this distinction, see Matthew Dillon, Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in Ancient Greece (11 et passim).

\textsuperscript{176} Rutherford, “Theoric Crisis,” 276.

\textsuperscript{177} Cephalus remarks on the fact that Socrates seldom makes the trip to the Piraeus (\textit{Republic} I 328c). In the \textit{Crito}, the Laws remark that Socrates has “never left the city, even to see [θεωρίαν] a festival” (\textit{Crito} 52b). Some manuscripts include the phrase δὲ μὴ ἄπαξ εἰς Ἰσθμόν [except once to Isthmus], suggesting that Socrates visited the Isthmus of Corinth for the Isthmian Games. Other manuscripts omit this phrase.

\textsuperscript{178} It may in fact be the case that during this period, the Bendideia served in place of the standard theoria for the majority of Athenian citizens, since “following the abandonment of the Attic countryside during the Peloponnesian War, other processions … had either to be suspended or at best much reduced in size” (Garland, \textit{The Piraeus}, 121).
Those returning from an official pilgrimage were expected to return home with a report of
the oracle or festival. Socrates’ direct address at the beginning of the Republic summarizes his
theoria in a few words: “I thought the procession of the local residents was a fine one and that the
one conducted by the Thracians was no less outstanding” (Book I 327a). But for Polemarchus’
intervention (to be discussed shortly), it looks as though this would have been the report in full.
Plato is establishing a religious setting for the dialogue which Socrates attends with due
observation and prepares promptly to leave. For its brevity, however, Plato opens an important
comparison. Socrates isolates three parts of the festival: the goddess, the Thracians, and the local
residents.

In Book IV, after establishing the kallipolis and identifying the parts of the city where each
virtue would be found, Socrates and Glaucon begin their examination of the soul. They decide, in
short order, that it is satisfactory to take an individual soul as analogous to a city (434d-435d).
Immediately after accepting the security of the analogy, Socrates states that “it would be ridiculous
for anyone to think that spiritedness didn’t come to be in cities from such individuals as the
Thracians” (435e). This, according to Socrates, “isn’t hard to understand” (436a). As this is
presented as elementary, it would be reasonable for the audience to recall that this discussion began
with a reference to an outstanding procession performed by the Thracians (Republic I 327a).

179 Nightingale, Spectacles of Truth, 3.
180 At the beginning of this quick acquiescence to the soundness of the analogy, Socrates asks, “are
things called by the same name, whether they are bigger or smaller than one another, like or unlike with
respect to that to which that name applies?” (435a). Glaucon agrees that such things are “alike.” In the
commentary to his translation, Paul Shorey suggests that Plato is laboring the point here, “merely repeating
in precise logical form the point already made (434 D-E), that the definition of justice in the individual must
correspond point for point with that worked out for the state” (435b n.5). In What Plato Said, commenting
on the same line, Shorey claims that “it is obvious in general that the characteristics of nations and
communities are derived from the like qualities in their individual members” (223). Given Plato’s insistence
on the strength of the analogy and Shorey’s endorsement in his commentary, I take it that extending the
analogy to the festival of Bendis is fair. By extension, I hope to be afforded license to read an analogy in
the individual members of the community of the estate of Cephalus.
Plato’s choice of opening the *Republic* with reference to the Bendideia is interesting as “this was the only Athenian festival in which an ethnic group was permitted to retain its national identity.”\textsuperscript{181} Unlike other festivals,\textsuperscript{182} as Plato is careful to expose, citizens and metics can be identified as parts of the whole, allowing the audience to examine the soul analogy that will form a central part of the dialogue. Taking the Thracians as representing the spirited part of the soul, the local residents neatly align with the appetitive. The class correlation of the producers bears out since the local Athenians would have been drawn to the harbor region for trading opportunities. For Plato’s Socrates, harbors were places of unfettered desire, and in this respect, appetitive. Harbors, however, are regarded disparagingly with little to no chance of developing the much-needed virtue of moderation.\textsuperscript{183} Hope for moderation is further impeded by the fact that the hierarchical structure of the Piraeus orders the appetitive (the locals) above the spirited (the Thracians), which will later turn out to be the reverse situation of a properly ordered city. The festival, as an analogy for the soul, is in disarray. The rational ought to hold authority over the other two parts and the spirited, aligned with the rational, should check the desires of the appetitive.

At the Bendideia, held at the Piraeus, there is no direct correlate for the rational part of the soul. There is, however, a component of the festival that would be properly called wise. The goddess, who presumably also knows justice, is wise—but this will get us nowhere. We can discover correlates for two of the three parts of the soul. These two parts, however, will never

\begin{flushright}
181 Garland, *The Piraeus*, 120.

182 By contrast, “at the Dionysia and Panathenaia, in which metics also participated, they assembled as an amorphous, undifferentiated body of emigrés” (Garland, 120).

183 See *Gorgias*: “for with no regard for temperance and justice they have stuffed the city with harbors and arsenals and walls and tribute and suchlike trash” (519a, trans. W.R.M. Lamb); and *Laws* “to have the sea nearby is pleasant enough…but in fact it is a ‘salty-sharp and bitter neighbour’ in more senses than one. It fills the land with wholesaling and retailing, breeds shiftily and deceitful habits in a man’s soul, and makes the citizens distrustful and hostile” (705a). See also: Garland, *The Piraeus*, 69-70; Moshe Amit, “Le Pirée dans l’histoire d’Athènes à l’époque Classique,” 473-4; von Reden, “The Piraeus,” 27-29.
\end{flushright}
become virtuous without the intervention of wisdom, and the only access to wisdom, via the goddess, is blocked (as we saw in the *Euthyphro*). One might be tempted to read Socrates as this third part of the triad; even on this suggestion, however, while Socrates may be taken as a representative of reason, he is not wise.\(^{184}\) Since no virtue can be developed, and knowledge of justice remains beyond reach, Socrates gives what is owed to the gods—he says his prayer and prepares to leave. This tableau at the opening of the *Republic* presents an antithesis for the pursuit of justice that will soon follow.

Our interpretation cannot hang solely on a reading of the setting of the *Republic*, since it may simply be the case that Plato thought it important to make use of the characters Cephalus and Polemarchus at the beginning of this extended discourse on justice. If we do take this to be the case, we are not relieved of the interpretative burden, but must now attend to the question of why Plato thought it necessary to place Socrates in conversation with these men of this family.\(^{185}\) This question is particularly pressing since each character occupies so little space in relation to this particularly long work.\(^{186}\)

---

\(^{184}\) To some extent this agrees with Michael Morgan’s suggestion that “Plato wanted to distinguish Socrates from the poets and ecstacies. Like many of them, he held that the soul was immortal, but he replaced nonrational ecstasy with rational inquiry as a way to ascend to divinity, and substituted cognitive virtue and transcendence for pious displacement” (*Platonic Piety*, 22).

\(^{185}\) Cephalus, a successful shield manufacturer, is the elderly patriarch of a family of metics whose youngest sons, Lysias and Euthydemus, each feature in other dialogues. The eldest son Polemarchus will be the second of Socrates’ interlocutors here in the *Republic*.

\(^{186}\) The possibility must not be foreclosed that this is simply a faithful retelling of a historical event. This, however, comes with a unique set of complications requiring any analysis to deal with the question of the dramatic date of the dialogue—a knotty problem when dealing with any dialogue, and the *Republic* is notoriously difficult in this respect (for an extensive overview laying out the history of the debate offering some tentative solutions, see Debra Nails, “The Dramatic Date of Plato's Republic”).
II. The Estate of Cephalus: Immediately following the brief *theoria*, Socrates and Glaucon are prepared to head back to Athens. The entire discussion of justice that constitutes the *Republic* would not have taken place if Polemarchus had not seen the two from a distance. Socrates recounts that Polemarchus “told his slave to run and ask us to wait for him” (*Republic* I 327b). Having quickly dispensed with the problems of authority that attend claims to divine wisdom, mortal authority will mark the new beginning. In the immediate statement following Socrates’ prayer to the goddess, Plato uses a slave, at the command of his master, to reframe the narrative. The complexity of the relationship of authority is further expanded over the next few lines. The slave extends Polemarchus’ authority by physically restraining Socrates, “the slave caught hold of my cloak from behind: Polemarchus wants you to wait, he said” (327b). As though this might be too figurative to stress the authoritarian theme built into the opening of the discourse, Plato has Polemarchus make the terms explicit: “Do you see how many we are? He said. I do. Well, you must either prove stronger than we are, or you will have to stay here” (327c).

The authoritarian tone of this narrative reset is a playful one, but this tone will be amplified with the coming of Thrasymachus. There will follow an exchange of interlocutors in which Plato presents two shifts in the locus of authority: Thrasymachus seizes authority from

---

187 If we accept the allusion to the practice of *theoria*, it is interesting to note that in seizing Socrates on his return home, Polemarchus is (figuratively) in violation of the sacred truce that would be announced and observed by all states during religious festivals protecting the safety of pilgrims (Dillon *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage*, 1-8).

188 It is generally agreed that this episode is meant to be read as a friendly exchange. However, commenters point to the underlying seriousness. Carl Page, for instance, suggests that while the threat is jocular, Polemarchus has reason to feel slighted by the fact that Socrates (a family friend) planned to leave without stopping to visit (“The Unjust Treatment of Polemarchus,” 245-6). Page will also discuss the more serious undercurrents of this characterization of “Polemarchus’s counterfeit tyranny” (247). For a stronger reading, see Kenneth Dorter, “Socrates' Refutation of Thrasymachus and Treatment of Virtue.” Gifford discusses the dramatic irony here foreshadowing the historical Polemarchus who would be “seized while walking on the road by underlings of Eratosthenes in execution of the orders of the Thirty” (“Dramatic Dialectic,” 60 n. 32). Polemarchus was executed without trial. This allusion emphasizes the more serious consequences of unchecked authority.
Polemarchus (336b) who had inherited his from his father, Cephalus (331d). Again, analogy to the ordering of the soul and the kallipolis is opened, and the shifting authority adds to the analogy. In both the well-ordered city and the virtuous soul, authority must be allotted to the appropriate part, and all parts must agree to the allotment.

Reeve suggests that the interlocutors at the estate of Cephalus are presented as analogous to the classes of the kallipolis. He assigns the representations to groups of characters: “Cephalus and Polemarchus, Thrasymachus, and Glaucon and Adeimantus are, in some respects at least, our introduction to the money-lovers, honour-lovers, and wisdom-lovers—the producers, guardians, and philosopher-kings.”189 However, given that Glaucon and Adeimantus are not a significant part of the discourse in Book I, I would like to offer an adjustment for the analogy within the discrete schema of the prologue.190 I will suggest that Plato presents the three interlocutors at the estate of Cephalus as imperfect representatives of the three virtues of the soul. Cephalus is a producer who is shown to possess a kind of moderation (with important qualifications). Polemarchus, who is referred to as a philosopher in the *Phaedrus*,191 represents the rational part, but falls short of wisdom. For what remains, the wild beast, Thrasymachus betrays a spirited appetite for argument that, should it be tamed by reason, might make for a courageous intellect.192

Socrates’ role is to direct the discussion. In the *Parmenides*—a dialogue, we should recall, that also begins with a false start that foreshadows the frame of the *Republic*—the young Socrates

---

189 *Philosopher-Kings*, 35.

190 I will suggest, however, that Glaucon is introduced in Book II as a corrective to the deficient image of the soul.

191 Following the great speech, Socrates asks the god to put a stop to Lysias’ speechmaking and to “convert him to philosophy like his brother Polemarchus” (*Phaedrus* 257b).

192 Dorter also considers this kind of analogy. He goes so far as to describe Polemarchus as belligerent (“Socrates’ Refutation of Thrasymachus,” 27), likening his character to the spirited part of the soul, which leads to the objectionable suggestion that Thrasymachus represents the rational (26-28).
learns that authoritative claims to knowledge lead to the destruction of the power of dialectic (*Parmenides* 133b-135c). Book I presents a difficult task for the dialectician, signposted by Polemarchus’ opening admission that he will not listen to persuasion (*Republic* I 327a). The would-be wisdom-lover and representative of rationality marks his debut with a statement, even if said in jest, that aligns him with the recalcitrant attitude that threatens a descent into misology. In spite of this challenge, which is only exacerbated by Thrasymachus’ entrance, Socrates will be able to nurse the beleaguered discourse towards an optimistic aporia. The Book II reboot of the argument, with Glaucon appropriately cast in the role of the wisdom-lover, is a promising return ἐξ ἀρχῆς apt to deal with the aporetic conclusion of Book I. Glaucon’s proper introduction displays his “characteristic courage” (*Republic* II 357a) through his willingness to champion Thrasymachus’ argument despite its being at odds with his own position (358a-c). This preferable structure could not be so well appreciated but for the counterexample of the disorderly image of the soul rendered in the characters of Cephalus, Polemarchus, and Thrasymachus. As Socrates will remind us towards the end of the whole discourse, sick people say that “nothing gives more pleasure than being healthy, but that they hadn’t realized that it was most pleasant until they fell ill” (*Republic* IX 583c-d). As readers, we might not appreciate the argument for the virtuous soul so well if we had not experienced the examples presented here in Book I.

193 See the discussion on Chapter One, along with the associated dangers of misology (*Phaedo* 89d-90d). The young Socrates also appears to lack any knowledge of the soul, and this is a deficit pointedly remedied in what will follow. Socrates is able to direct the conversation towards a discussion of justice and the soul only after he has somewhat tempered Thrasymachus’ spirit (*Republic* I 353d-e).
Justice at the Beginning

When the elderly Cephalus is first encountered, he is depicted “sitting on a sort of cushioned chair with a wreath on his head, as he had just been offering a sacrifice in the courtyard” (*Republic* I 328c). The observance of piety had quickly been dispensed with, but Polemarchus asserted his authority, hindering Socrates’ return home. With the introduction of Cephalus, the audience is reminded of the patriarchal standard of authority while simultaneously reestablishing piety as a framing concept of the dialogue.194 Cephalus’ turn as a representative of paternal authority is short-lasting and he falls short as a representative of moderation. Plato’s character is not to be ignored, but he is to be rejected.195

As soon as the exchange between Socrates and Cephalus opens, Plato provides an early cue for the audience to watch the discourse apprehensively. Cephalus tells Socrates that his “desire for conversation [λόγους] and its pleasures” increases as “the physical pleasures wither away” (328d). This is in contrast with Socrates’ view, expressed in the *Phaedo*, of how the wisdom-loving soul would reason: “it would not think that while philosophy must free it, it should while being freed surrender itself to pleasures and pains … it follows reason and ever stays contemplating the

---

194 On the paternal standard of authority, Peter J. Steinberger offers a critical analysis of Plato’s Cephalus in light of Greek literary tradition (“Who is Cephalus,” 175-6). I would like to add that the paternal standard of authority, particularly as it is tied to the performance of religious rights within the household, is reminiscent of Euthyphro’s relationship with his father (as I presented it in the previous chapter).

195 Gifford questions the “astonishingly widespread view that Plato’s picture of Cephalus is generally favourable” (“Dramatic Dialectic,” 68). In a note, he presents an extensive survey of the scholarship advancing this position. He suggests that much is missed by readers, owing to “their haste to get to the argumentation in the episode with Thrasymachus” (68 n.48). Annas is one of the few commentators who does devote some time to the character “because Plato does, and because the picture of him is important: it depicts the view which Polemarchus will articulate, the ordinary person’s view of justice” (*An Introduction to Plato’s Republic*, 20-21). Contrary to the favorable picture—perhaps best captured in Reeve’s reading of an “attractive character, portrayed with delicacy and respect” (*Philosopher-Kings*, 6)—Annas argues that “there are enough malicious touches in Plato’s picture of Cephalus to show us that we are being presented with a limited and complacent man” (*An Introduction to Plato’s Republic*, 19). Gifford and Annas may go too far in staking their anti-Cephalus positions. I hope to assume a median position between a malicious and an attractive characterization.
true, the divine” (*Phaedo* 84a). When Socrates responds to Cephalus’ request to engage in conversation, he says, “I enjoy talking [διαλεγόμενος] with the very old, for we should ask them, as we might ask those who have travelled a road that we too will probably have to follow, what kind of road it is … Is it a difficult time? What is your report about it?” (*Republic* I 328d). Socrates’ question here is essentially, “are you prepared to die?”

Through the short interrogation, it will be demonstrated that Cephalus is ill-prepared for death. It is not enough to ease into moderation and towards a love of reason as death draws near. It will be made apparent that the old man lacks a sincere commitment to rational deliberation as Socrates gently exposes the faults in the image of moderation that Cephalus seems to possess.

When the virtue of moderation is introduced in Book IV, Socrates describes it as “a kind of order [κόσμος], the mastery [ἐγκράτεια] of certain kinds of pleasures and desires” (430e). One might take Cephalus’ contented abstention from “sex, drinking parties, feasts, and other things that go along with them” (*Republic* I 329a) as a clear reflection of his commitment to moderation. I would suggest that Plato means to open this comparison, only for it to stand as a contrast upon a reflective return.

In Book IV, Socrates remarks on the peculiarity of related terms, such as being stronger than oneself [κρείττω αὑτοῦ], used in popular parlance to comprehend the virtue: “isn’t this being stronger than oneself absurd? For the one who’s stronger than himself would also be weaker than himself, and the weaker stronger. For it is the same person who is referred to in all

---

196 In the *Phaedo*, “practice for dying and death” is revealed as “the one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner” (*Phaedo* 64a).

197 Plato perhaps overplayed the bait here, considering the general reading of Cephalus as a virtuous man (see note 187, above). Reeve (recalling that he reads Book I as Plato’s philosophical distancing from Socrates, note 145, above)—who translates Cephalus’ celebration of being κόσμιοι as “moderate” (*Republic* I 329d)—reads this episode as Plato’s view that “Cephalus’ life is not very different in character from Socrates’” (*Philosopher-Kings*, 6). It is worth noting that the word σωφροσύνη does not appear in Book I (the adjective form, σώφρων, is also absent).
these expressions” ( Republic IV 430e-431a).\textsuperscript{198} Socrates is marking this common understanding of moderation to prepare the way for the tripartite theory of the soul that will soon follow.\textsuperscript{199} The conceptualization of an individual soul as two distinct entities, one of which being stronger and ruling over the other, risks leading to the faulty belief that “the same thing can be, do, or undergo opposites, at the same time, in the same respect” (436e-437a).\textsuperscript{200}

To make sense of the peculiarity in language that seems to betray an image of a fractured or multifarious soul, Socrates goes on to explain that such expressions are an attempt to reach towards an (perhaps intuitive) understanding of the nature of moderation as a soul harmonizing virtue:

It is plain to me that this expression wants to indicate that in the same person, as far as his psyche is concerned, there is something better and something worse, and that when that which is in its nature better is in control of that which is worse, he is said to be stronger than himself; that’s why it is a term of praise (431a).

Moderation is present in a properly ordered city or soul where the weaker happily grants authority to the stronger, “when the ruler and the ruled believe in common that the rational part should rule” (442c). This is the kind of harmony that moderation produces in the city and in the soul—this does not reflect the condition of Cephalus’ soul. Cephalus provides an anecdotal reference to Sophocles as a summary of his thoughts on old age and temperance: “I am very glad to have escaped from all that, like a slave who has escaped from a savage and tyrannical master” ( Republic I 329c). In his abstention, Cephalus exhibits a kind of image of moderation, but the desire for λόγος now

\textsuperscript{198} This (and the following) is Reeve’s translation in Philosopher-Kings (239-40). I rather feel the absurdity is easier to see in this rendering than it is in “self-control.” It also provides a pleasant link to Thrasyymachus’ definition of justice.

\textsuperscript{199} Republic IV 435c-444a.

\textsuperscript{200} Socrates needs to reject this view of the soul in order to offer a unified theory of the tripartite soul.
gripping Cephalus is not necessarily indicative of spirit allied with rationality, ruling by mutual assent in a harmonious soul.201

Socrates does express admiration for Cephalus’ general position that the abatement of desire is not truly caused by old age, but by the way one lives, for if people “are moderate [κόσμιοι] and contented, old age, too, is only moderately [μετρίως] onerous; if they aren’t, both old age and youth are hard to bear” (329d). This presents as part of Plato’s use of Cephalus as an analog of contrast. Both men are committed to living well, but an understanding of what is required to live such a life distinguishes the two positions. Socrates follows his praise with a question about wealth that will lead to the distinction.

I admired him for saying that and I wanted him to tell me more, so I urged him on: When you say things like that, Cephalus, I suppose that the majority of people don’t agree, they think that you bear old age more easily not because of the way you live but because you’re wealthy, for the wealthy, they say, have many consolations (329d-e).

Socrates has thus far asked Cephalus for his expert opinion as it pertains to being old and having money—reasonable questions to ask a wealthy old man. Cephalus, however, is edging the conversation towards matters beyond his ken. Socrates attempts to steer Cephalus back within his bailiwick—or a less charitable reading might suggest that Socrates is baiting Cephalus. In either case, the discourse presses deeper into the conditions of living the good life. Socrates asks what Cephalus believes to be the greatest good [μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν] money can buy (330d). This question will direct the current of the discussion towards justice and into waters too deep for Cephalus to tread.

201 That Cephalus’ dialogical participation lasts only three Stephanus pages before he excuses himself from the discussion is perhaps further indication that his recent interest in discussion is lackluster.
The head of the household betrays his money-loving disposition when he reveals that his definition of justice is undergirded by the necessity of wealth. The theory of justice is also lacking, given that it is motivated by a fear of what will happen after death.²⁰² Cephalus draws the discourse back towards the stories of the poets—qualifying that these may be stories one had not previously taken seriously (330d)—and suggests that if a “decent and orderly [κοσμίῳ] man” has enough money, he can be assured that he has lived a good life provided that he does not “owe sacrifice to a god or money to a person” (331b).

The first definition of justice has been encountered, and it is essentially expressed by Cephalus as “what I am doing now” (Euthyphro 5d).²⁰³ The definition also contains two parts, with one part concerning the gods and the remainder concerning mortals. Cephalus’ complete definition of justice must be derived by negation as he is praising the benefits of wealth insofar as it spares a good person the dangers of injustice. According to Cephalus, justice is achievable if we have enough money “to save us from having to cheat or deceive someone against our will and from having to depart for that other place in fear because we owe sacrifice to a god or money to a person” (Republic 1 331 b).

Cephalus has stumbled into this definition, but Socrates seizes on it. Much has been said in response to the question, “what’s the greatest good you’ve received from being very wealthy?” (330d). Socrates says that all this is fine but excavates the part he considers most apt for dialogical

²⁰² A fear deflated in the Apology (40a-42a).

²⁰³ Annas notes that “this is a move of a kind often made in the Socratic dialogues. Somebody who appears to have a particular virtue is asked what it is, and replies by specifying actions of a certain type. Euthyphro, who is a supposed expert on piety, is asked what that is, and replies, ‘the pious is just what I’m doing now, prosecuting for murder and temple theft and everything of that sort’ (Euthyphro 5d-e). Similarly, Cephalus, whom most people think a just man, characterizes justice as performing a few basic duties like telling the truth, not deceiving people, and not keeping what is not yours” (An Introduction to Plato’s Republic, 21-22).
pursuit (the pleasures of which Cephalus has begged Socrates to provide). Following the short speech pocked with references to fear, the afterlife, the old and new poets, moral and intellectual character, the gods, ritual practice, piety, and the benefits of wealth (330d-331b), Socrates responds, “speaking of this very thing itself, namely, justice” (331b). This is a hard dialectical move, trimming away a great deal of fat the better to “think and to speak” (Phaedrus 266b). What remains, after cutting up Cephalus’ speech, is a working definition of justice, immediately to be rejected. Socrates asks, “of this very thing itself, namely, justice, are we to say that it is speaking the truth and paying whatever debts one has incurred?” (Republic I 331c). Socrates willfully ignores the debt of sacrifice included in Cephalus’ definition. If the figurative removal from divine concerns was not clear enough, this dialectical excision ought to stress the point that the justice pursued henceforth is human justice.

The Ἀρχή at Our Feet

While this definition will be immediately rejected, it does reflect justice, or something like it, as it is discovered in Book IV. More precisely, here at the very beginning, the first mention of justice resembles one of the important consequences of a just and properly ordered city, “that no citizen should have what belongs to another or be deprived of what is his own” (Republic IV 433e). The danger here, recalling the Phaedo (and Chapter One), is that one might “jumble the two as the debaters do by discussing [διαλέγομενος] the hypothesis [ἀρχῆς] and its consequences at the same time” (Phaedo 101e). The problem, as was the case with Euthyphro’s first definition, is that

---

204 Socrates’ response to Euthyphro’s first definition: “I did not bid you to tell me one or two of the many pious actions but that from itself that makes all pious actions pious” (Euthyphro 6d). We should recall that it seems likely that Socrates would agree that it is just to prosecute someone for murder “whether the wrongdoer is your father or your mother or anyone else” (5e).
Cephalus has mistaken just behavior for justice itself. This marks the man as a poor dialectician and, particularly considering his age, unlikely to become a true lover of wisdom. Fortunately for the audience, and for the pursuit of justice, Cephalus is quickly succeeded.

Polemarchus’ assertive reintroduction serves as a transition of authority and a new beginning for the argument. Socrates tells Cephalus that “the definition of justice isn’t speaking the truth and repaying what one has borrowed” (Republic I 331d), since “everyone would surely agree that if a sane man lends weapons to a friend and then asks for them back when he is out of his mind, the friend shouldn’t return them, and wouldn’t be acting justly if he did” (331e). One might imagine Cephalus relieved when his son interrupts to defend the argument, as he immediately signs it over, suddenly recalling that he has to “look after the sacrifice” (331d).

Plato is marking a new starting point for the argument while simultaneously offsetting the locus of authority. To a certain extent, this reshuffle foreshadows the power of justice as it operates in the Kallipolis. In Book IV, Socrates timorously suggests that “doing one’s own work—provided that it comes to be in a certain way—is justice” (Republic IV 433b). Some form of justice is identified as a power that makes it possible for wisdom, courage, and moderation “to grow in the city and that preserves them when they’ve grown for as long as it remains there itself” (433b-c). Socrates and his three interlocutors in Book I are unable to satisfactorily discover justice because each is meddling in affairs to which he is not naturally best suited. Cephalus, an imperfect representative of the moderate man, has been inexpertly dabbling in reason. His paradigmatic definition-by-way-of-example contribution casts his character among the Euthyphro variety of uncritical thinkers who are unaware of their own ignorance. What little authority remains to the
very old manufacturer is all but ceded to his heir, who will repay the intellectual debt owed to
Socrates. The κύριος of the οἶκος leaves to tend to his own work of giving sacrifice to the gods.\textsuperscript{205}

Polemarchus is an improvement, but when authority remains in the producer class, as it
does here, an analogy is opened to the oligarchic city. In Book VIII, Socrates, Glaucon, and
Adeimantus discuss, and rank, five kinds of city (and a kind of soul analogous to each).\textsuperscript{206} The
constitution of the oligarchic city is “based on property assessment, in which the rich rule, and the
poor man has no share in ruling” (\textit{Republic} VIII 550c). Book I, however, suggests that one moves
from democracy, through oligarchy, and towards timocracy. From the estate of Cephalus, harbored
within a democratic regime, the phantom of moderation sires a wealthy man and invests him with
authority. The danger that Socrates recognizes is that “it is impossible for a city to honor wealth
and at the same time for its citizens to acquire moderation” (555e). The justice praised by Cephalus,

\textsuperscript{205} Precisely what authority does remain to Cephalus is unclear. Nails uses “so we went with them to
Polemarchus’ [Πολεμάρχου] house [οἴκαδε]” (\textit{Republic} I 328b), as evidence that Cephalus is fully retired
and that Polemarchus, and not Cephalus, is the head of this household (Nails, \textit{The People of Plato}, 84).
Nails refers to MacDowell’s observation that “if a father was getting old and had an adult son, he could
retire, handing over control of the oikos to his son” (\textit{The Law in Classical Athens}, 91). Ultimately, Nails’
argument is that “it is natural, but incorrect, to infer from the fact that Cephalus II is alive and still
performing sacrifices that the conversation of \textit{Republic} takes place in the house of Cephalus II” (Nails, 84).
This ignores the significance of the role of sacrifice in Greek households, performance of which is allocated
by authority (see Burkert, \textit{Greek Religion}, 95, 254-5). If this were Polemarchus’ house, he would be
required to lead the sacrifice. Cephalus must be the head of the household, however, it does seem as though
Polemarchus would be in charge of the majority of the business affairs, particularly given Cephalus’
advanced age. It may well be the case that while Cephalus was granted the special right to own property
[ἔγκτησις], Polemarchus was not naturally afforded the same right.

\textsuperscript{206} The first and best kind of constitution is the aristocratic kallipolis established across books II-IV
(and elaborated throughout). This kind of city is named at the end of Book IV (445d). Before Socrates is
able to enumerate the remaining four constitutions, he is interrupted by Polemarchus and Adeimantus and
the discourse takes a 100-page diversion. When resumed in Book VIII, Socrates ranks the different kinds
of constitutions form best to worst where each is a degraded form of the prior: timocracy from aristocracy;
oligarchy from timocracy; democracy from oligarchy; and tyranny from democracy (\textit{Republic} VIII 543c-
545a). Each constitution, along with its analogue soul-type, is detailed through the remainder of the book
(with the exception of the tyrannical soul, which is provided an elaborate analysis constituting the better
part of Book IX).
the kind that only money can buy, risks leading to the sickness of soul found in the oligarchic man at the precipice of the fall into democracy:

Won’t we say that, because of his lack of education, the dronish appetites—some beggarly and others evil—exist in him, but that they’re forcibly held in check by his carefulness... And doesn’t that make it clear that, in those other contractual obligations, where he has a good reputation and is thought to be just, he’s forcibly holding his other evil appetites in check by means of some decent part of himself? He holds them in check, not by persuading them that it’s better not to act on them or taming them with arguments, but by compulsion and fear (Republic VIII 554b-d).

Cephalus has raised himself above the misery of his peers who “complain about the lost pleasures they remember from their youth” (Republic I 329a), and “for this reason he’d be more respectable than many, but the true virtue of a single-minded and harmonious soul far escapes him” (Republic VIII 554e). Polemarchus, by the intervention of philosophy, has thus far escaped the fate of other money-lovers. His definition of justice, however, is still affected by his inheritance. The interest in reason is admirable, but it is the reason of the producer-class. It is through dialectical exchange that Socrates will steer Polemarchus’ renumeration theory of justice towards the suggestion that justice concerns the care of human virtue. In this way, the analogy of the soul at the estate of Cephalus is able to move away from the evils of democracy (the setting being within the democratic stronghold of the Piraeus).

The inherited definition, cleared of reference to piety and reformed by way of Simonides, is that “it is just to give to each what is owed [ὀφειλόμενα] to him” (Republic I 331e). From here, to Thrasytuchus’ entrance at 336b, Socrates continuously attempts to draw Polemarchus’ definition away from this mercantile concept of justice.207 Repeating the initial madman rebuttal,

---

207 During this exchange, we should keep in mind that “Thrasytuchus had tried many times to take over the discussion but was restrained by those sitting near him” (Republic I 336a-b). It is worth our attention for the comedic value. It is a pleasant distraction to imagine Thrasytuchus angrily gesticulating and perhaps grunting, jumping from his seat and being pulled back down, generally mounting a grand farce in the background as this sober discourse on justice plays out at center. On a more serious note, an audience
what Simonides meant is clarified as “friends owe it to their friends to do good for them, never harm” (332a). When Socrates asks, “should one also give one’s enemies whatever is owed to them?” (332b), he is presumably expecting the answer that “what enemies owe each other is appropriately and precisely something bad” (332b). What Socrates has pointed out here is that the connotation of paying debts does not suit the discussion of justice—Socrates offers the subtle correction that Simonides “thought it just to give to each what is appropriate [προσῆκον] to him, and this is what he called giving him what is owed to him [ὀφειλόμενον]” (332c). Polemarchus does not seem concerned with the distinction, but Socrates will change course slightly by inquiring after what function justice serves as a craft. This course only leads back to trade as Polemarchus thinks justice is useful for acquiring contracts (333a), which is further refined exclusively to money matters (333b). Socrates then leads Polemarchus through a (somewhat clumsy) reduction of the mercantile view that defines justice as either essentially worthless (333e) or as a kind of theft (334b).

Polemarchus, displaying some understanding of, and commitment to, dialectic, admits his own confusion and volunteers to return ἐξ ἀρχῆς, expressing that he still believes that “to benefit [ὠφελεῖν] one’s friends and to harm one’s enemies is justice” (334b). Socrates leads Polemarchus to clarify the meaning of friends and enemies as not those who only appear to be friends or enemies, but that “a good person will be a friend and a bad one an enemy” (335a). With everything neatly defined, and these definitions agreed to by Polemarchus, Socrates will be able to extract the element of harm through a quick exchange of question and assent. Harm degrades, degradation is a reduction of virtue, justice is human virtue, therefore harm produces injustice (335b-e).

is provided with a visual representation of a disorderly soul. Reason and the money-loving appetite are allied in the person of Polemarchus while the spirited part is ignored. The danger of a soul so ordered will soon tear its way into the analogy.
The next step of the argument, now that it has been established that “it isn’t the function of a just person to harm a friend or anyone else” (335d), would be to establish the positive function of a just person. It is reasonable to assume that the function of a just person would consist in somehow benefitting friends or anyone else—and Socrates will admit that he agrees with Thrasymachus that “the just is some kind of advantage [συμφέρον]” (339b). If we were to assume this positive function, this still would not constitute a definition of justice itself, but a guide by which one could reasonably recognize a person possessed of the virtue. In any event, the positive function of the just person is not made explicit since this pursuit is cut short by Thrasymachus’ entrance.

It may be the case that Polemarchus could not have brought the argument any further. I would suggest that this is at least to be taken as the figurative reading. The progression of the argument has enjoyed the benefit of dialectical exchange, and short of giving an answer himself, Socrates can do little more than guide the intellectual experience of any given interlocutor as far as his soul will allow. Polemarchus’ commitment to reason has facilitated an ascent, but within Plato’s metaphorical enactment, wisdom cannot be realized. Though authority is appropriately granted to reason, its representative has emerged from the producer class. It is perhaps of greater concern that this arrangement is far from being mutually accepted by all present.

208 If Socrates does believe that justice is some kind of συμφέρον, his meaning is presumably significantly distinct from Thrasymachus’. The verb itself is uncommon in Plato, with only 85 instances and occurring in few dialogues. The vast majority (42) are in Book I of the Republic, with three more in the remainder of the work. These three are in Book IV where two are direct references to Thrasymachus, and the third is related to how the wisdom of reason manifests when directing the spirit to be courageous, thus establishing moderation in the soul (442c). It is of further interest that συμφέρον also carries the meaning of bringing things into harmony.
The Ἀρχή of Thrasymachus

As Thrasymachus watches the polite exchange between Polemarchus and Socrates, it seems that much of his ire is provoked by the fact that neither man is willing to make (or at least, maintain) a solid position. As is often the case when Socrates encounters sophists and rhetoricians, the practice of dialogical speech provokes indignation. The speechmakers are accustomed to delivering their wisdom to a captive (read: silent) audience. Andrea Nightingale observes that the “language of the lawgiver … is monological rather than dialogical,” which is characterized in the Laws as a “tyrannical prescription” (Laws 722e). We are reminded that the estate of Cephalus in the Piraeus is a household within a democratic city where “a resident alien or a foreign visitor is made equal to a citizen” (Republic VIII 563a). In such a community, when it is on the brink of tyranny, a teacher “is afraid of his students and flatters them” (563a). The present conditions are ripe for tyranny.

---

209 Andrea Nightingale, “Writing/Reading a Sacred Text: A literary Interpretation of Plato’s Laws,” 285. Nightingale goes on to suggest that the Athenian proposes the addition of ‘preludes’ to laws as a way of softening the tyranny of the monological voice (285-6). However, she means to argue that Plato’s somewhat subversive goal in the Laws is to convince the reader to “defer to the authority of the lawgiver … the reader is urged to treat the lawcode as a scripture that only the impious will dare to challenge” (300). In “Oral Preambles and Written Laws: The Dialogic Character of the Laws and lawfulness,” Joanne Waugh offers an alternative account. Owing to Plato’s well evidenced literary ability and his awareness of the mutability of meaning expressed by written texts, compounded by the fact that after twenty-five hundred years neither the laws of the Athenian nor the meaning of the dialogue itself have gone unchallenged, one might fairly suggest that “the Laws combines narrative and the propositional syntax sought by philosophy, and invites the audience of the dialogue as well as that in the dialogue to respond” (31). It seems to me, that if Nightingale has correctly surmised Plato’s intent in writing the Laws, he must have been swayed towards Thrasymachus’ view of justice in his later years. There is little space for arguing this point here, but I will say that it is a confounding and painful position to maintain that all of Plato’s early and middle dialogues were, to echo the Crito, “said pointlessly just for sake of argument, and that in truth it was child’s play and drivel” (Crito 46d).

210 Here referring back to a discussion (as an analogue for types of lawgivers) concerning ‘slave-doctors’ who treat their patients without explaining the ailment or remedy, largely because they do not properly understand the art of medicine, but act with the self-assurance of a tyrant [καθάπερ τύραννος αὐθαδῶς] (Laws 720a-c).

211 A democratic city also “contains the most models of constitutions and ways of living” (Republic VIII 561e).
In the kallipolis, the wise guardians emerge from amongst the courageous auxiliaries. If the spirited Thrasymachus had been trained in philosophy, he might have achieved the courage of Glaucon, and perhaps even approached wisdom.\(^{212}\) Like the “just” thief,\(^{213}\) however, he uses his skill to disarm Socrates as soon as he is set free from his restraints. Thrasymachus’ first edict is that one cannot come to know justice by asking questions and refuting the answers, and he demands that Socrates give an answer himself (336b). This is a considered tactic. Thrasymachus is familiar with Socrates’ dialectical procedure and is deliberately attempting to reduce its power.\(^{214}\) This would give Thrasymachus a clear advantage in argument, since the content and style of his argument rests on untested authority, and dialectic (in the picture I have been attempting to develop) is directed towards testing authority. Thrasymachus is an impasse incarnate, attempting to force Socrates to assume a hard conviction that will be required to stand against his own—literally authoritarian—definition of justice. This definition of justice, as I hope to illustrate, will effectively, “by strict necessity be unknowable to human nature” (Parmenides 135a).

---

\(^{212}\) In spite of Benjamin Jowett’s assertion that Thrasymachus is “a mere child in argument” (The Dialogues of Plato Translated into English with Analysis and introduction, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1871), in “Socrates Meets Thrasymachus,” C.D.C. Reeve attempts to show that such estimations of him are “seriously mistaken by excavating from his remarks two impressive and consistent arguments” (Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie 67, (1985): 246). Reeve’s quite successful efforts to salvage Thrasymachus’ arguments from total dismissal establishes higher stakes for the elenchus and prompts us to take the attack on justice more seriously than would Jowett’s characterization. However, we should remain alert to the fact that there is a significant difference between the statements that appear in the text and the argument that Reeve is able to “excavate.” There is an important difference between giving an incomplete (or as it stands, invalid) argument, and having someone who is good at argumentation reconstruct it. I suggest that we should not entirely discount the threat presented in Thrasymachus, but we should not assume that Plato is awarding him the level of deference that is sometimes reserved for the other sophists whom Socrates encounters.

\(^{213}\) “The best guardian of an army is also the very one who can steal an enemy’s plans” (Republic I 333e).

\(^{214}\) That this is a targeted plan is made more explicit when Socrates reverts to irony causing Thrasymachus to laugh scornfully and announce, “that’s just Socrates’ usual irony. I knew, and I said so to these people earlier that you’d be unwilling to answer and that, if someone questioned you, you’d be ironical and do anything rather than give an answer” (Republic I 337a).
It is no simple task for Socrates to resist giving his own definition. In spite of the fact that “it was obvious that Thrasymachus thought he had a fine answer” (Republic I 338a), he is slyly prefacing his answer with attempts to expose and undermine the dialectical tricks that he knows Socrates will attempt to use against him. Before Thrasymachus will give an answer, Glaucon has to agree to pay, Socrates has to reiterate that he does not know the answer, and those present beg him to speak (337d-338a). Eventually, he delivers his famous pronouncement—that “justice is nothing other than the advantage of the stronger [κρείττονος]” (338c)—with tyrannical self-assurance.215

Socrates responds by emphasizing the ambiguity of this (or any such) definition:

The advantage of the stronger, you say, is just. What do you mean, Thrasymachus? Surely you don’t mean something like this: Polydamus, the pancratist, is stronger than we are; it is to his advantage to eat beef to build up his physical strength; therefore, this food is also advantageous and just for us who are weaker than he is? (Republic I 338c).

Socrates is playing on the ambiguity of the word “stronger” [κρείττονος]. The (perhaps somewhat tongue-in-cheek) suggestion is that Thrasymachus would think it is just for physically weak people to eat the high-protein diet of a professional athlete. Socrates knows that this is not what

---

215 Reeve (and others) contend that Thrasymachus’ intended definition here is that justice is “nothing other than the advantage of the stronger” (as opposed to “justice is the good of another,” or “justice is obedience to the law”) (Reeve, “Socrates Meets Thrasymachus,” 1985). I take it that this is correct. However, as I am attempting to show, this definition tells us as much about justice as does Euthyphro’s definition of piety. Short of assigning godlike infallibility to a ruler, Thrasymachus’ definition can only survive if it settles for the weaker definition that it is just to obey the law. See George F. Hourani, “Thrasymachus’ Definition of Justice in Plato’s Republic,” for a defense of the position that Thrasymachus’ intended definition is that “just action is obedience to the state” (110). Hourani champions the conventionalist account, placing it against the standard reading which he renders, “justice is serving the interest of the stronger” (110). Hourani goes on to state that Thrasymachus ‘defines ‘justice’ (a loose word for ‘just action’) as doing what is in the interest of the stronger” (110). This establishes a reading of the definition which conveniently supports Hourani’s point that it is meant to serve as a conclusion, but not a definition (111-112). By establishing the idea that Thrasymachus’ opening pronouncement amounts to claiming that just action is the kind of thing that benefits rulers, the question is opened, what are these just actions? This seems to assume a misplaced modifier, as though Thrasymachus means, justice is [a kind of action that brings about] the advantage of the stronger.
Thrasymachus meant, and it is perhaps fair that he is irritated. However, Plato marks the response as an overreaction. The mere suggestion that an authoritative pronouncement might be received with any meaning other than the one intended by the wise orator prompts Thrasymachus to call Socrates loathsome \( \beta \delta \varepsilon \lambda \nu \rho \omicron \zeta \) (338d). Amongst the reasons that the authoritarian is reluctant to engage in dialogue is that the interlocutor can show that his words can mean something else, a move that the authoritarian considers a distortion of his originally intended meaning. When Thrasymachus says to Socrates, “your trick is to take hold of an argument at the point where you can do it the most harm” (338d), he is not wrong. Socrates is forcing Thrasymachus to demonstrate the point that he will use to undermine this definition of justice—that even the strongest mortal is, and pronouncements therefrom are, liable to error (339b-c). This move is also forcing Thrasymachus into dialogue, emphasizing the significance of dialectical interrogation in intellectual pursuit. It is, as Thrasymachus is aware, a dirty trick. The alternative, however, is to match authority with authority, hence effecting the total destruction of the power of dialectic.\(^{216}\)

Thrasymachus agrees to make his meaning clear:

Don’t you know that some cities are ruled by a tyranny \( \tau \omicron \nu \pi \omicron \lambda \varepsilon \omicron \omicron \alpha \iota \mu \epsilon \nu \tau \rho \alpha \nu \nu \omicron \omicron \nu \omicron \tau \alpha \iota \) \( \gamma \), some by a democracy, and some by an aristocracy? Of course. And in each city this element is stronger \( \kappa \rho \sigma \tau \epsilon \iota \), namely, the ruler \( \alpha \rho \chi \omicron \nu \)\(^{217}\)? Certainly. And each \( \xi \kappa \alpha \sigma \tau \eta \iota \alpha \rho \chi \chi \iota \) \( \gamma \) \( \alpha \rho \chi \chi \iota \)\(^{217}\) makes laws to its own advantage. Democracy makes democratic laws, tyranny makes tyrannical laws, and so on with the others. And

---

\(^{216}\) A further benefit of this distinction is that it emphasizes something that should be obvious by indicating that we are not interested in the question of physical strength. This shift from the physical, however, is a subtle step away from the concerns of the degenerate world of the senses and towards the eternal world present to the soul.

\(^{217}\) Reeve (or perhaps Grube) declines to translate \( \alpha \rho \chi \chi \iota \). This choice (though I do not assume nefarious intent on Reeve’s part) smooths over the imprecision in Thrasymachus’ language. The omission also ignores the significant leap from the specificity of city (this would necessarily be the referent had Plato only used \( \xi \kappa \alpha \sigma \tau \eta \iota \)\), to the more abstract (and loaded) use of \( \alpha \rho \chi \chi \iota \). Shorey translates: “each form of government;” Jowett: “different forms of government;” Bloom: “each ruling group;” Cornford: “in every case … the ruling party.” Reeve’s 2004 translation: “each type of rule.” This is the first instance of the noun.
they declare what they have made—what is to their own advantage—to be just for their subjects, and they punish anyone who goes against this as lawless and unjust. This, then, is what I say justice is, the same in all cities, the advantage of the established rule \( \tau \tau \eta \kappa \alpha \theta a e p \eta k i a i \zeta \alpha \rho \gamma \eta i \zeta \). Since the established rule is surely stronger \( \alpha \gamma \iota \tau \epsilon \pi \delta \pi \varsigma \kappa \rho a \tau \tau \zeta \), anyone who reasons correctly will conclude that the just is the same everywhere, namely, the advantage of the stronger \( \kappa \rho e i t \tau \rho o \varsigma \) \( \text{Republic I 338d-339a).} \)

If Thrasymachus hopes to avoid the dialectical ploy of leveraging definitional ambiguity, his clarification must shift his claim from the relative concept of strength to the objective concept of authority.\(^{218}\) Socrates’ semantic quibble notwithstanding, Thrasymachus is likely aware that the conceptual looseness of “strength” invites ambiguity. There are relativist consequences to Thrasymachus’ definition, but it looks as though his clarification attempts to avoid this problem. The qualification of “the stronger” begins with the remark that some cities are tyrannical, some democratic, and some aristocratic. This identifies distinct situations with distinct entities where what might be identified as the advantage of the stronger (i.e. the referent of advantage) would be different in each instance. What is good for the tyrant is not necessarily what is good for the aristocrat. The relativist consequences would be strengthened by the additional observation that laws are made to secure this advantage—and irredeemably so if justice is simply equivalent to the law. However, if we are to assume, in the character of Thrasymachus, at least some degree of intellectual capability, we cannot accept that he maintains that it is the specific laws of any given ruler that constitute justice and that “the just is the same everywhere.”

\(^{218}\) According to Havelock, the language around justice in the \textit{Republic} strongly suggests that Plato is attempting to present such a conceptual shift (even more broadly) in traditional thought: “To emerge in formal conceptual dress, justice must meet one more requirement; the reference of its predicates must be as abstract as its own, so that the way becomes open to identify it by properties or attributes, categories or relationships, which are as permanent, as little subject to conditional changes, as justice itself” \textit{(The Greek Concept of Justice: From its Shadow in Homer to its Substance in Plato, 313).}
The kind of definition that suffices for men such as Euthyphro, one that lacks universal application, is not acceptable for Thrasymachus. His definition is meant to avoid equivocation and end discussion (336c-d). Theoretically, the short speech is successful in recognizing the distinction between example and definition, and this is evidenced by the maneuver from the specific ruler to the abstract authority. Thrasymachus recognizes that there are various constitutions with distinct laws. For all the differences, in each case, it is the ἀρχή whose advantage is served. Laws are supplemented to facilitate the political advantage of the stronger; and it is just for subjects to follow these laws, not because laws and justice are equivalent, but because following the laws serves the advantage of the stronger. In any given city, the stronger will be the ruler, and the ruler simpliciter is the ἀρχή. By raising the definition from discrete instances to a universalized expression, Thrasymachus has effectively glossed and settled the problems attendant to Euthyphro’s second definition of piety. If Socrates did not take this matter as settled—particularly considering the fact that Thrasymachus has explicitly opened the case for the distinction of individual constitutions—this would have been an easy and obvious target for the dialectic. Socrates does not seize on this point; rather, he turns to the question of human error.

Shorey also emphasizes this point in a note to Thrasymachus’ insistence that “it works out that the just is the same thing everywhere”: “Thrasymachus makes it plain that he, unlike Meno (71 E), Euthyphro (5 ff.), Laches (191 E), Hippias (Hippias Major 286 ff.), and even Theaetetus (146 C-D) at first, understands the nature of a definition” (339a, n.1).

Definition: “what is dear to the gods is pious, what is not is impious” (Euthyphro 7a). Refutation: “according to your argument, my good Euthyphro, different gods consider different things to be just…the same things then are loved by the gods and hated by the gods” (7e-8a). Reformulation: “what all the gods hate is impious, and what they all love is pious” (9d). The correlation is not direct, Thrasymachus is not saying that justice is the advantage common to all rulers. However, it does preempt what would be an analogous criticism—without moving from the particular case of the ruler to the universal case of the ἀρχή, Socrates could have said something like, “according to your argument, my good Thrasymachus, different rulers consider different things to be just … and the same thing would be both advantageous and disadvantageous to the rulers” (echoing Euthyphro 7e-8a). As we shall see, Socrates’ next question is similar, but contains a significant difference.

It is more significant to note that Plato chooses to let this point rest. The historical Socrates has not yet had this conversation with Euthyphro (though this does not preclude the possibility that the middle-
When Socrates moves on from the Thrasymachean ἀρχή, as the dialectical process is righted, it looks as though he is mistaking Thrasymachus’ position as (or intentionally conflating it with) a conventionalist account of justice. After claiming that he sees what Thrasymachus means (339a), clarifying that “the just is the advantageous…‘of the stronger’” (339a), and admitting that he agrees that “the just is some kind of advantage” (339b), Socrates does indeed ask, “don’t you also say that it is just to obey the rulers?” (339b). This short exchange, however, in which Thrasymachus admits that obedience to the law constitutes just action, ultimately affords him the opportunity to distance his position from the conventionalist account. This is not a blundered strawman, it is boilerplate elenctic procedure. Thrasymachus has just entered the conversation, and Socrates is establishing hypothetical agreement for the purposes of the investigation. Between 339b and 339e, Socrates secures agreement from Thrasymachus on one significant point and establishes the groundwork for the security of a second. The first point is that law does have a necessary correlation with justice; the second will arise from the agreement to the fallibility of rulers. From these points, Thrasymachus will be required to either commit to a conventionalist position or to ratchet up the claim to universality. He will choose the latter.

*a* aged Socrates would have been able to identify this sort of weakness in a definition). While, as I have discussed, the dating of dialogues is complicated and unsettled, on any account of which I am aware, and with good reason, we can safely suggest that the Euthyphro was written before the Republic (admittedly, questions of the separability of Book I further complicate this assumption). In any event, the possibility must be allowed that Socrates the man, in the heat of elenchus, could have simply missed the point or fumbled the opportunity to pick at this weakness. On the other hand, it is harder to imagine so painful an error in the meticulous author, who labored over these words, and carefully crafted this speech with the directed intent of exposing it to the destructive power of the dialectic.

222 It is generally read this way regardless of which position any given commentator hopes to ascribe to Thrasymachus. Hourani assumes as much to argue that Thrasymachus’ definition is a conventionalist account (“Thrasymachus’ Definition of Justice,” 112-113); Annas takes this reading to show that the intended definition is the oft ignored “justice is the advantage of the other” formulation (An Introduction to Plato’s Republic, 40-41); and Reeve accepts this reading to argue for the popular (and more intuitive) reading that Thrasymachus’ means to maintain that justice is the advantage of the stronger (Philosopher-Kings, 11).
The fact that “it is just to obey the rulers” (339b) does not, prima facie, conflate justice and the law, but enactment and obedience to the law will be required in order to facilitate the advantage of the stronger. This does not stand as a refutation—there is justice, and there are required conditions for justice. Thrasymachus happily assents, and nothing in this endangers his definition of justice, provided we understand (as Socrates seems to understand) that we are working on a conceptual level. Trouble only emerges when Socrates returns to the conceded point that rulers are liable to error. It is easy to forget, given how deep into the dialogue we are, that this is still the beginning of the dialectical engagement with Thrasymachus. This should be kept in mind as the argument progresses, as Socrates is still carefully establishing the point of departure.

Haven’t we agreed that, in giving orders to their subjects, the rulers are sometimes in error as to what is best for themselves, and yet that it is just for their subjects to do whatever their rulers order? Haven’t we agreed to that much? I think so.
Then you must also think that you have agreed that it is just to do what is disadvantageous to the rulers and those who are stronger, whenever they unintentionally order what is bad for themselves…doesn’t it necessarily follow that it is just to do the opposite of what you said, since the weaker are then ordered to do what is disadvantageous to the stronger? (Republic I 339d-e).

At this crucial moment in the dialectic, Socrates may be regretting the pact he made with Polemarchus when this ally amplifies the offensive against Thrasymachus. Polemarchus mistakes what is intended to be an attunement for a rebuttal—precisely the attitude that dialectic seeks to avoid. Cleitophon (silent but for this brief incursion) thrusts himself unto the breach in defense of Thrasymachus. Like Polemarchus, unfortunately, Cleitophon has not fully grasped the

223 Republic I 335e.

224 I happily concede that a weaker interlocutor would have been numbed by this complication. Indeed, a yet weaker interlocutor might not have been able to progress beyond the Polydamus distinction (338c-d) without the aid of some intellectual midwifery.
argument. The two proxies emerge as though a reminder of the dangers of authority as the dialectic teeters toward destruction.\(^{225}\)

Cleitophon’s defense forms an unintentional corollary to the deficit in Thrasymachus’ argument that Socrates is targeting. The misstated retort to Polemarchus’ overstated rebuttal is that Thrasymachus “said that the advantage of the stronger is what the stronger believes to be to his advantage” (340b). Cleitophon has incorrectly remembered (or improperly interpreted) the ἀρχή of Thrasymachus’ account, and if this were accepted as the intended meaning, it would work to the disadvantage of the argument. While Polemarchus hopes to continue jousting, Socrates intervenes to allow Thrasymachus the opportunity to revise his position: “if Thrasymachus wants to put it that way now, let’s accept it… is that what you wanted to say the just is, namely, what the stronger believes to be to his advantage, whether it is in fact to his advantage or not?” (340b-c).

Thrasymachus does not relent. His response raises the referent of advantage, the service of which effects the conditions of justice, to total abstraction:

When someone makes an error in the treatment of patients, do you call him a doctor in regard to that very error? … I think we express ourselves in words that, taken literally, do say that a doctor is in error … But each of these, insofar as he is what we call him, never errs, so that, according to the precise account (and you are a stickler for precise accounts), no craftsman ever errs … No craftsman, expert, or ruler makes an error at the moment when he is ruling … But the most precise answer is this. A ruler, insofar as he is a ruler, never makes errors and unerringly decrees what is best for himself, and this his subject must do.” (Republic I 340d-341a).

At this moment, knowledge of justice is pushed beyond the limit of mortal reach. The ἀρχή, in the precise sense, is eternal and infinitely powerful (as the concept of authority will persist through all

\(^{225}\) It is interesting to note that the use of four speaking characters at such narrative proximity would have broken a well-established convention (in dramatic writing). Even assuming Plato was writing for readers, he was likely sensitive to the fact that tetralogue would have stuck out as peculiar to his fourth century audience (Mark Damen provides a helpful overview of the dramatic “three character rule” in “Actor and Character in Greek Tragedy,” with some discussion of audience reception, 337-40).
revolutions); it is changeless (being indiscrète and admitting of no error); and it demands subservience to rules that would serve its advantage—and the nature of that advantage is, by design, unknowable.\(^\text{226}\) This is what remains in a discourse on justice after all of the careful work of extracting any reference to the divine. If just action amounts to blind acquiescence to the laws of any given state with the unconfirmable hope that so doing might please a distant and unknowable authority, it amounts to little more than ritual practice.\(^\text{227}\) If this is the nature of justice, it would be right for subjects to obey the law in the interest of realizing a just society, but no hope remains that knowledge of justice itself, or even something like it, could ever be achieved.

In spite of the erroneous reading of the original pronouncement presented by Cleitophon, and immediately following his admission that “it’s in this loose way that you must also take the answer that I gave earlier” (340e), Thrasymachus wraps up his correction by proclaiming, “thus, as I said from the first \([\varepsilon \varsigma \delta \rho \chi \eta \varsigma]\), it is just to do what is to the advantage of the stronger” (341a). Thrasymachus is immovable, and with every return to the starting point of his argument he becomes more entrenched. With no open passage towards knowledge from this position, and with an interlocutor resistant to hypothetical adjustment, Socrates reaches back to the moment before Thrasymachus’ violent entrance. Having removed harm from a potential understanding of justice,\(^\text{228}\) Socrates opened a question in pursuit of a positive definition of justice. This line was

\(^{226}\) The language of precision here presages the greatest aporia in the *Parmenides*. Of particular interest, it is the precise knowledge distinction that will establish the second part of the greatest aporia, where the gods (those who exclusively possess the precise knowledge) are revealed to lack knowledge of, and authority over, mortals (134c-e). In the *Parmenides*, this is part of the revelation that causes the young Socrates to want to run from his own argument. Here, the structure of the same impasse is encountered—but it is not mortals being robbed of knowledge of the divine, it is mortals being robbed of knowledge of mortals (by illicitly raising the precision of mortal knowledge to divine capability).

\(^{227}\) This is not unlike Euthyphro’s final attempt to define piety: “if a man knows how to say and do what is pleasing to the gods at prayer and sacrifice, those are pious actions such as preserve both private houses and public affairs of state” (*Euthyphro* 14b).

\(^{228}\) “It isn’t the function of a just person to harm a friend or anyone else” (*Republic* I 335d).
interrupted, and authority in the precise sense was established through a brief (but raucous) elenchus. Socrates now resumes with a question: “you think I asked the questions I did in order to harm you in the argument?” (341a). Thrasymachus confirms that he feels attacked and the dialogue descends briefly into light bickering before Socrates calls it to an end. “Enough of this [ἀδὴν … τῶν τοιούτων],” (341c) Socrates cries before redirecting the discussion from the advantage of the ἀρχή to the care of the subject. The placement, and also the language, is reminiscent of the Euthyphro when Socrates redirects the conversation from the argument (about who is more like Daedalus, hence who is to blame for the apparent derailment of the discussion) towards the bifurcation of justice.229 This is the point of the Euthyphro where the remainder of the just is identified as the care of human beings.

What Remains is Justice

With the introduction of Thrasymachus, and his authoritative account of justice, the image of the distorted soul at the estate of Cephalus is complete. When the theoretical work of establishing the ideal city is near completion in Book IV, the three virtues are discovered with little friction (in a few short pages, 428a-432b). With this work complete, justice (or something like it) presents itself for examination. In Book I, Plato presents a monstrous image of each of the first three virtues. It should become clear—to an audience returning to the beginning of the Republic—that the structure of Book I reflects the image of a soul gripped by “a kind of civil war between the three parts, a meddling and doing of one another’s work, a rebellion by some part against the whole soul in order

229 “But enough of this [καὶ τούτων μὲν ἄδην]” (Euthyphro 11e). Shorey notes the similarity in language in his 1969 translation (citing also Charmides 153d).
to rule it inappropriately” (Republic IV 444b). Being in such an unhealthy state provides part of an explanation as to why justice proves so elusive at the outset.

The account of justice begins, when the appetite assumes authority, with the sacral-mercantile definition. When the dialectic prompts a peaceful transition of authority to an appetite charmed by reason, the account of justice is afforded progress—but only towards a negative recognition of what justice is not. Progress stalls when authority is seized by the disenfranchised spirit, and the grounding principle of the account becomes authority itself. After discovering quasi-moderation, negative wisdom, and misdirected courage, what remains is a corrupt image of justice. The image is, in fact, an inversion. Where justice ought to be directed towards improvement by way of care, it is declared to be advantage by way of subjugation.

In this recapitulation, I have attempted to draw out another level of analogy operating in Book I of the Republic. A city is composed of three kinds of people and justice facilitates virtue through the proper ordering of authority. An individual person ought to be ruled by a tripartite soul, and justice maintains human virtue when internal authority is rightly balanced. The inverted analogy presented at the estate of Cephalus, as I hope to have shown, expresses the same triad in the character of the three major interlocutors. The final layer of analogy now exposed is in the argument. The ἀρχή of the account moves through three stages, each presented by, and representative of, the corrupted image of the soul. Once these three parts of the argument have been discovered, what remains is dialectic. Political justice, insofar as it cares for virtue, operates as a kind of “power that makes it possible for them to grow in the city and that preserves them when they’ve grown for as long as it remains there itself” (Republic IV 433b-c). Dialectic, too, is a power—and a power that functions by targeting illicit claims to authority. When functioning well, dialectic is concerned with caring for an account in the interest of fostering knowledge.
Invariably, the knowledge that dialectic aims to cultivate and preserve is knowledge of virtue. The fate of justice as an object of knowledge, in Book I of the Republic, rises and falls in direct correlation with the beleaguered function of the dialectic. Justice, in this sense, in its aims and operation, is dialectical.

**Conclusion**

Thrasymachus presents a serious threat. It is no meager accomplishment that any progress is made, even if that progress is not wholly satisfying, from this point in the dialogue. As Socrates moves to twist the account of justice towards care of the subject, the dialectic assumes a parallel twist towards caring for the argument. In this case, improving the argument requires careful grooming. Thrasymachus will continue to offer resistance, but he is slowly tempered, even if his eventual assent is offered ironically.\(^\text{230}\)

Socrates blames himself, at the end of Book I, for the disorderly state of the discourse. Such humility is not uncommon, but there is reasonable cause for the self-censure in this instance. It is to his credit, however (or more so to the credit of dialectic), that matters progress even as far as they do. Aporia could well have seized the discussion several times over, but the turmoil has been largely quelled, even if the points of inquiry remain unsettled. Of most significance is the fact that a rebellion of the spirited class has been averted, and intellectual tyranny no longer threatens the estate of Cephalus (though actual tyranny soon will). From this position, Socrates is able to apply dialectical leverage to reorient the argument towards positive discussion. Through the

\(^{230}\) Republic I 350e-351d: Thrasymachus complains that since he is not permitted to give a speech, he will simply “nod yes and no, as one does to old wives’ tales.” However, he immediately starts providing, in Socrates’ words, “very fine answers.” When Thrasymachus replies, “that’s because I’m trying to please you,” it cannot be said in complete sincerity (this would be all too sudden and drastic a character change). And yet, Thrasymachus really has been supplying helpfully terse interlocution.
careful work of the next three books, justice, or something like it (provided it comes to be in a certain way) will be, at least theoretically, identified.

In Chapter Two, I suggested that Plato portrayed Socrates as deeply concerned about the pervasion of intellectual tyranny in Athenian society. I attempted to show, in the image of Euthyphro, a reflection of the latent Athenian assumption that human knowledge is practically equivalent to divine wisdom in spite of proclaimed, and codified, observance of piety. I opened the question of how human knowledge might fare in the pursuit of justice without recourse to the concept of divine wisdom. Attaining knowledge of justice, in the event that such knowledge would require access to the minds of the gods, is an outrageous expectation by intrinsic necessity. In this chapter, I hope to have shown that while Plato devotes substantial energy to unpinning divine wisdom from the discussion of justice, the same structure of assuming direct access to the changeless pervades. Thus, as I said at the beginning, for Socrates, authoritative claims to knowledge constitute the greatest danger to the loving pursuit of wisdom.

The aim of Chapter One was to examine Plato’s narrative returns to the beginning of Socrates’ philosophical career. I presented the story of a budding philosopher, praised for his potential, whose most ailing fault was his authoritative commitment to inchoate doctrine. It was my suggestion that the character of Parmenides, in a didactic performance, leads Socrates by his own thesis towards a devastating aporia before teasing a tincture of hope. Dialectic, I argued, would act as a curative against the dangers of authority. In the present chapter, I hope to have shown, through this reading of Book I of the Republic, how the power of dialectic works to expose, and possesses the potential to abate, the serious problems attendant to the authoritative claims which are systemic to Athenian intellectual and political life.
No sensible man would insist that these things are as I have described them, but I think it is fitting for a man to risk belief—for the risk is a noble one—that this, or something like this, is true… (*Phaedo* 114d).

At the beginning of this dissertation, I claimed that Plato makes the deliberate choice to write Socrates as a character at odds with authority. I suggested that Plato’s choice to develop such a characterization has important consequences for understanding certain philosophical commitments expressed in the Socratic dialogues. My hope is that I have presented a reading of a selection of dialogues that draws out an image of an antiauthoritarian Socrates, and in so doing sketched a framework that might tentatively contribute some insightful, if nuanced, perspective to Platonic scholarship.

My broadest aim has been to examine instances of Socratic engagement with authority and to show that the concept of authority is one worthy of academic attention. I hope to have established some of the groundwork for reading authority—particularly as expressed in the use of the word ἀρχή and the term ἐξ ἀρχῆς—as a concept admitting of technical significance (for Socrates, and potentially for Plato). In Chapter One, I discussed how the danger of assuming an authoritative commitment to an intellectual position threatens misology and the destruction of the power of dialectic; in Chapter Two, I suggested that the structures of authority within the discursive practices of Athenian society betrayed an uncritical assumption that human wisdom paralleled the divine; and the authoritative image of human wisdom I offered in Chapter Three presented as a
malignant impediment to the pursuit of wisdom. My intention was to read Socrates as the antithesis of these conditions. In developing an antithetical characterization, my conclusions have been, by and large, negative. I left the young Socrates uncertain of where he should turn, knowledge of piety unattainable, and progress towards mortal wisdom fundamentally stalled. The upshot, presented alongside each of these aporetic cases, emerges from the recognition of the necessity for an account of the soul and the recursive power of dialectical engagement.

The young Socrates of the Parmenides learns that humility is a better ally than polemic. Zeno and Parmenides are impressed by Socrates’ ability to follow an argument (Parmenides 128b-c), formulate his own hypotheses (130a-b), and engage in dialogue (135e-d). On my account, what Socrates lacked was the willingness to embrace ignorance. When Parmenides walks the budding philosopher through his theory of the forms, it is short work for him to expose its inadequacies. Certainly, this is partly owing to the experience gap between these two interlocutors, but the inadequacies exposed are shown to be a result of Socrates’ failure to check his own authority. This is the explicit training regimen prescribed: “if you want to be trained more thoroughly, you must not only hypothesize, if each thing is, and examine the consequences of that hypothesis; you must also hypothesize, if that same thing is not” (135e-136a).

The focus of Chapter One was directed towards the peculiarity of the headstrong caricature of the young Socrates, the deflation of the theory of the forms, and the destruction of the power of dialectic. Each of these problems, I suggested, was a problem of authority. The first part of the Parmenides ends in an impasse so great that only misology would remain, and dialectic would be disempowered, but for the introduction of the ἐξ ἀρχῆς function. Parmenides demonstrates how consistent returns to the beginning of an account work to destabilize its authority. The positive
potential of this power is the ability to reorient discussion and continue the pursuit of wisdom in spite of aporia (and instead of ending in misology).

I suggested that Socrates had learned this lesson—and yet, the two pieces I went on to discuss (the *Euthyphro* and Book I of the *Republic*), featuring a mature Socrates, end in aporia. Part of my argument was intended to show that Plato’s Socrates engaged in discourse for the good of his fellow citizens and his city. In Chapter Two, I attempted to make the case that Euthyphro’s authoritative, and ultimately hubristic, assumption of wisdom, was (to some degree) indicative of a broader problem in fifth-century Athenian society. It is not for a want of dialectical commitment on Socrates’ part that discussion of piety in the *Euthyphro* is brought to an impasse. Euthyphro is not philosophical, and the attempts to lead him towards a recognition of the insecurity of his intellectual authority are met with impatience. Euthyphro’s unphilosophical nature leaves the investigation of piety incomplete. The unphilosophical nature of Socrates’ fellow citizens leads to his death.

I phrase the discussion in Book I of the *Republic* as a return to the central question of the *Euthyphro*. Having suggested that pursuing the concept of piety opens the danger of assuming divine knowledge, Chapter Three is an attempt to resolve the aporia of the *Euthyphro*. What remains to be discussed, after Euthyphro has fled the discussion, is the profane part of justice. I presented the investigation of justice in Book I of the *Republic* as initially optimistic, given that it would evade the impious implications of assuming knowledge of piety. For the sake of the pursuit of wisdom, assuming only human knowledge of human things is less forbidding than assuming divine knowledge. Hope of discovering justice, however, is dashed when Thrasyarmachus enters the discussion. This is a character so secure in his own position as an authority on justice that his
attempted definition, that justice is the advantage of authority (in the precise sense), effectively strips mortals of knowledge of mortal things.

In the final chapter, I also introduce the significance of a well-ordered soul.\textsuperscript{231} I suggest that a figurative reading of Book I of the Republic offers a view to the success of the extended discourse on justice that will follow. Abdication of one’s own intellectual authority is the virtue of a soul where reason is granted the right to rule. I believe that in Book II of the Republic, when Glaucon assumes responsibility for an argument he does not endorse, thereby suspending his own intellectual commitments and preparing to question the authority of his assumed position, a complex and precarious set of conditions is established for the careful pursuit of knowledge of justice that will ensue.

I end Chapter Three with a reaffirmation of my claim that Socratic philosophy is fundamentally antiauthoritarian. It will not have gone unnoticed that this assertion is restated following my reading of an aporetic episode that turns out “to have been only a prelude” (Republic II 357a). Consequences of my reading of the Socratic engagement with authority extend through the remaining nine books of the Republic; the problems of authority extend into the structures of the kallipolis; and Thrasymachus’ authoritarian definition of justice does not end the discussion. The questions that remain, following everything I have presented here, I hope to establish as the starting point for future research. This is not the place to begin, but I would like to offer a cursory response to potential, lingering concerns.

In my reading, I have maintained that the problems of authority require us to understand Socratic philosophy as anti-doctrinal. As the culmination of my thesis ends at the precipice of an

\textsuperscript{231} Though, again, negatively. This is effectively a return to the beginning of my own account as I discussed, in Chapter One, that a significant fault in the young Socrates is his lack of an account of the soul.
extensive discussion of justice, I should address the fact that in Book IV of the Republic Socrates does deliver a positive definition of justice. After founding the city, all agree that it will be possible to discover the four virtues of wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice. Justice, for all of its significance, is encountered as what remains in the city when the other virtues have been found. As the definition of justice is carefully, even timidly, approached, the language is also tinged with qualifications of uncertainty. The scouting location is described as “impenetrable and full of shadows” (Republic IV 432c); Socrates says that “in a way, we were talking about justice” (432e); “justice, I think, is exactly what we said must be established throughout the city when we were founding it—either that or some form of it” (433a). It is a curious definition that Socrates settles on in his discussion with Glaucon that “doing one’s own work—provided that it comes to be in a certain way—is justice” (433b). And when Glaucon agrees that “justice is that and nothing else” (434d), Socrates quickly adds, “let’s not take that as secure just yet” (434d).

In future research, I would like to address the cagey language and noncommittal attitude that does ultimately produce positive results through the lens of the antiauthoritarian reading that I have started to develop in the present work. I would tentatively suggest that, as a whole, the Republic is intended to prompt dialogue. This is not to say that Plato presents the positive content

---

232 The operation for discovering justice is different from that of discovering the other three virtues. Wisdom, courage, and moderation are each pursued individually and directly; however, it is not so clear that any of their discoveries is to be taken as entirely satisfactory. Socrates admits that he is not certain how they came to discover wisdom in the city, but Glaucon thinks whatever the process, it was good enough (429a). Wisdom allows for an account of courage, but Socrates is careful to qualify that this is really only civic courage, promising to provide a better account at some other time (430c). The path towards finding moderation begins by suggesting that the general concept is unclear, and self-mastery seems an absurdity (430e), but that this offers vague clues that will lead us to the soft suggestion that moderation is actually similar to a kind of harmony (431a-432a). The conclusion of this brief and noncommittal discussion of the three virtues necessary to the discovery of justice is capped off with the final qualification that these virtues were found only within the framework of their immediate (and highly speculative) suppositions (432b).

233 W.K.C. Guthrie describes the definition as a disappointing, “mouse-like result that emerges after his [Plato’s] mountains of discussion” (The Greeks and their Gods, 126-7).
of this (or any) dialogue as merely chum, thrown out to attract dialecticians. Rather, my assumption is that Socrates’ (and I mean Plato’s) commitment to discovering truth cannot sustain accepting the security of his own intellectual authority. When reason is granted authority in the well-ordered soul, it is constantly questioning—and that questioning must include critique of the legitimacy of its own authority. This, I suspect, is true of the best kind of soul and the best kind of people who “approach ruling not as something good or something to be enjoyed, but as something necessary, since it can’t be entrusted to anyone better than—or even as good as—themselves” (Republic I 347c-d).

---

234 In the conclusion to his lengthy study of the dialectic, Dialectic and Dialogue, Francisco J. Gonzalez suggests that “what is probably most responsible for having led much Platonic scholarship astray is an unwillingness to share, even for interpretive purposes, a fundamental presupposition of Plato’s dialectic: that words, propositions, and images should never be allowed to take the place of truth” (274). This final word is offered with a warning that such a reading should not be understood to suggest that Plato’s dialogues are devoid of philosophical significance. The dialectic, for Gonzalez, is “the discursive activity of ‘rubbing together’ our defective means of inquiry with the goal of sparking an insight that barely transcends them” (273).
Bibliography


Throughout the dissertation, I pay close attention to Plato’s usage of ἀρχή. It is therefore required of me to provide a brief account of how this word could have been available to Socrates (and his fifth century interlocutors) and Plato (and his fourth century audience). I offer here a timeline as a reference for the discussion.

- **11th Century**: Highly dubious attribution of the title “life archon” to Medon.235
- **752/1 BCE**: Dubious attribution of the first year of Charops’ decennial archonship.236
- **8th Century (late)***: Homer uses the noun ἀρχός for leader (often commander of a military unit).237 In Hesiod, usage of ἀρχή accounts for .034% of total words; in Homer, .004%.
  - In Hesiod and Homer, usage of the noun ἀρχή solely specifies “origin/beginning.”
  - In Homer, the phrase ἐξ ἀρχῆς, meaning “it was ever thus,” lends authority to the truth of a statement.238

235 As Chester G. Starr remarks, “the tradition of the Atthidographers, according to which the kings of Athens declined from life tenure to ten-year terms and then to election for one year” could not represent “more than a schematic reconstruction of the unknown” (“The Decline of Early Greek Kings,” 135 n.21). For discussion of the locus of authority in political organization from the archaic period to the establishment of the archon: Jean-Pierre Vernant offers a clear description of the progression from the Mycenean Wanax to the Athenian archon in *The Origins of Greek Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962). A substantially more detailed account is provided by Pierre Carlier in *La Royauté*. For views on the specific function and authority of the Mycenean wanax see: Carol G. Thomas, “The Nature of Mycenean Kingship” (*Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici Nuova Serie* 7, 1976) and Thomas G. Palaima, “The Nature of the Mycenean Wanax: Non-Indo-European Origins and Priestly Functions” (*Annual Meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America*, 1992). Finally, Chester G. Starr presents a concise account of the waning authority of the basileis during the dark ages in “The Decline of Early Greek Kings” (*Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 10, 1961).


237 *Il.* I.144; II.685; IV.464; XV.337 — for a few of many examples.

238 There are only four instances of this precise phrase in Homer (and only in the *Odyssey*: *Od*. 1.188; 2.254; 11.438; 17.69. In *Stilistische Untersuchungen zu Hesiod* (Hamburg: O. Schneider, 1934), Inez Sellschopp suggests that this is a “abgeschwächten Bedeutung” [weakened sense] of the phrase (66). She contrasts this with the “ausschließlich prägnante Bedeutung” [exclusively precise sense] (67) employed by
• 684/3 BCE: Kreon established as the first archon.  

• 7th (late) – 6th Century: Aristotle claims Thales is the first to posit an ἀρχή as “that from which all beings come…and into which they pass away in the end” (this is unsubstantiated).  

• 6th Century (or late 7th): Use of μοναρχία attributed to Alcaeus of Mytilene (620-580).  

• 5th Century (early): In the surviving works of Pindar there are 11 instances of ἀρχή. Only two are used to mean authority.  
  - ἀρχή accounts for .023% of total words in corpus; 18% used as authority.  

• 5th Century (tragedians):  
  - Aeschylus (525-456).  
    - 16 instances of ἀρχή, of which 10 have the meaning of authority.  
      - ἀρχή accounts for .023% of total words in corpus; 63% used as authority.  
  - Sophocles (496-406).  
    - 20/1 instances of ἀρχή, of which 13 have the meaning of authority.  
      - ἀρχή accounts for .015% of total words in corpus; 65% used as authority.  
  - Euripides (484-407).  
    - 33 instances of ἀρχή, of which 12 have the meaning of authority.  
      - ἀρχή accounts for .014% of total words in corpus; 36% used as authority.  

Hesiod. This forms part of an argument suggesting that the Iliad was composed before the Theogony, but the Odyssey was composed later (42-81).  

239 The Parian Marble (though not inscribed until the mid-third century) chronicles a list of basileis, not archons, until Kreon’s appointment. T.J. Cadoux provides an incredibly detailed account of the extant records for all historical dating of the Athenian archons. He makes a strong case for the veracity of the dating system as far back as the establishment of the first annual archonship of Kreon (684/3 BCE), but he is essentially agnostic concerning the authenticity of the preceding office of the decennial and life archon.  

240 Metaphysics A.3, 983b 8-9. Aristotle continues to cite usage of ἀρχή in this metaphysical sense (983b1-20). Usage in Thales cannot be substantiated, given that he left no texts. Usage of the word in his successors is recorded, but scholars suggest that (to varying extent), Aristotle over-reads the metaphysical understanding of a “starting point” in nature (see discussion, below).  

241 Fr. 6.27, this is the earliest recorded use of the word. It is often translated as tyranny and is almost certainly used pejoratively.  

242 Olympian 2.58 (478 BCE) and 13.61 (464 BCE).  

243 Euripides has, by far, the largest number of extant works (341,776 words, contrast with Sophocles: 137,776 and Aeschylus: 123,571). The date range for performances of Euripides’ plays (438-406) also provides a broader record than those of Aeschylus and a more consistent record than those of Sophocles. The record of known performances for Aeschylus spans only 16 years (472-456); the record for Sophocles spans 49 years (450-401 including posthumous performances), but there are numerous gaps between known performances (upwards of 20 years). It is interesting to note, then, that in Alcestis (438), Medea (431), and Hippolytus (428), ἀρχή is used, collectively, five times but never with the meaning of authority. Of four occurrences in Andromache (425), two are used as authority, but line 699 is generally rejected as interpolation. Used as authority, ἀρχή does not occur again until 412. In the final decade of performances
5th Century (prose): There is an incremental increase in usage of ἀρχή by the Attic Orators of the fifth century. In the mid-late fifth century, Herodotus (484-425) and Thucydides (460-400) continue the trend. Given the focus of their work, increased usage of a word designating authority is not surprising. Across all instances, however, ἀρχή is employed more frequently than δύναμις, -εως, ή and κράτος, -ους, τό combined. In these works, ἀρχή is more clearly used as the abstract notion of authority.

(7 extant tragedies—roughly 412-406), of 21 instances, 10 are employed with the meaning of authority (noting that βασιλέων ἀρχά at line 190 in Iphigenia at Taurus [412] is flagged as irremediable owing to textual corruption).

244 By way of a sample: Antiphon (480-411) .041%; Lysias (459-380) .051%; Andocides (440-391) .156; Isocrates (436-338) .165%. There is also an increase in the usage of ἐξ ἀρχῆς, carrying technical significance, being employed in a speech when an orator means to give detailed evidence of a case: Antiphon .005%, Lysias .007, Andocides .039, Isocrates .026 (searching only the precise phrase).

245 There are 147 instances of ἀρχή in the Histories (.079%) and 131 in The History of the Peloponnesian War (.088).

246 Herodotus: δύναμις 17, κράτος 52 (69); Thucydides: δύναμις 0, κράτος 138 (138). Ἀρχή: 278; δύναμις/κράτος: 207.

247 In the earlier uses, ἀρχή is often referring to an office (as a locus of authority).