INTIMATIONS OF SOCRATIC PHILOSOPHY

EXPLORING THE APOCRYPHAL DIALOGUE: ON JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT. This essay providers an analysis of the apocryphal "Platonic" dialogue On Justice and develops a unique notion of Socratic philosophy that is present within this ancient example of Sokratikoi Logoi but requires elucidation. It unfolds in three main sections focused on: (1) Dialectic as an example of a "speech-act," where the use of words "commits" Socrates and his interlocutors to the task of developing an ethical soul in and through reasoned discourse; (2) Socrates' embrace of a form of ethics termed "practical-and-contextual ethics," as related to eudaimonic ethics, which reveals that unlike "action-based" ethics, Socratic ethics is concerned with ethical behavior within specific and unique contexts and situations, indeed, in great part, the many situations within Socrates finds himself actually guide and direct his ethical behavior - the deliberation concerning the virtuous choices made at the appropriate or right time; and (3) The question concerning how ignorance is related to the ethical choices made in praxis, and it is argued that following Socrates, ethical decisions are indeed possible despite lacking a full and complete knowledge of virtue or the virtues such as courage, temperance, piety, wisdom, or as related to the apocryphal dialogue, "justice." Ultimately, the analysis seeks to offer the reader an intimation of what an authentic notion of Socratic philosophy might look like despite the Platonic inauthenticity of the source material.

KEYWORDS: Socratic dialectic; Plato's dialogues; Apocrypha, Sokratikoi Logoi; Eudaimonic ethics.

Towards Elucidating a Notion of "Socratic Philosophy"

This essay draws inspiration from an unlikely source: it explores and pursues an understanding of Socratic philosophy through the reading of a dialogue that Plato did not author, namely, the apocryphal dialogue, *On Justice.* The dialogue, along with *On Virtue, Demodocus, Sisyphus, Eryxias,* and *Axiochus,* is classified by A. E. Taylor as one comprising the *notheumenoi* all of which "seem to be undisguised imitations of Platonic 'discourses of Socrates,'" and most of them are traceable to

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"the work of the early Academy."[1] W. K. C. Guthrie claims that *On Justice* (Greek: *Peri Dikaiou;* Latin: *De Justo*), along with its companion, *On Virtue*, is "hardly worth mentioning," for it amounts to nothing beyond a "trivial schoolboy" effort, a flawed and *jejune* exercise on the "Platonic model by pupils of Sophistic of Socratic schools" seeking to further the tradition of "Socratic literature [*Sokratikoi Logoi*] as a special genre."[2] It must be noted at the outset that this essay is neither grand nor sweeping in scope, in fact it is written in the spirit of offering gestures toward and reflections on what I am interpreting and defining as "Socratic philosophy" as this view emerges and is developed by attending to the themes present to this dialogue, while recognizing the radically truncated nature of the dramatic elements of the ancient author's presentation. So, as readers will note, I am dealing with subject matter that D. S. Hutchinson, in his English translation of the dialogue, accurately describes as offering "familiar Socratic ideas, presented in an unusually bald and unattractive format,"[3] but despite this pejorative assessment, my claim is that there is a way to approach and develop the ideas presented in this apocryphal dialogue that contribute to the scholarly understanding of Socratic philosophy now viewed within contemporary academics as originating from a decidedly "non-doctrinal" and "non-systematic" reading of Plato's corpus, e.g., as found in the recent scholarship of Sallis (1998), Gonzalez (1998), Kirkland (2010), and Fried (2021).

Dialectic as Philosophical Speech-Act

To begin, when considering justice (*dikaiosunē*) in terms of its use or practical manifestation, Socrates introduces into the discussion an analogy focused on "measure-taking" and "weighing," and stresses that what is required is both an accurate measuring-stick and a trustworthy scale, *instruments* for calculating measure and weight, but also required out of necessity are competent persons possessing the *skill* at determining and judging the accuracy of such "measure-taking"; much like a scientist's expertise is required when performing analyses and conducting meta-analyses. Socrates then moves to consider what is required when attempting to "distinguish what's just and what's unjust," he wonders, "what *instrument* do we use to examine them? And, besides this instrument, what *skill* do we

[1] Taylor 2010, 521.

[2] Guthrie 1978, 384-389. Guthrie serves as another reliable source for the chronology of and commentary on what he terms the "doubtful" and "spurious" dialogues that comprise the ancient philosophical and literary practice of producing Platonic-like dialogues; the tradition of *Sokratikoi Logoi.*

[3] Hutchinson 1997, 1176.

use in dealing with them" (*On Justice* 273a)?[4] What emerges from this analogy is nothing other than a vista into *Socratic Philosophia*: The *instrument* is critical dialogue (dialectic) consisting of reasoned, dialectical argumentation (*philosophy-as-speech-act*)[5] and one of the *skills* required might be identified as "interpreting" the value of the philosophical virtue of the soul or disposition termed "*sophrosunē,*" which is made possible through enlightenment or *phronēsis,* a view of knowledge relatable to the dialectically developing philosophical and *practical understanding* of the virtues. This skill assists in providing a clear-headed and even-tempered understanding of how the virtues, in this case justice, should best be applied or enacted in appropriate ways within ever-changing contexts and circumstances when encountering unique individuals. It must be noted that this form of *phronētic understanding* is always limited, for it is a form of "human wisdom" that fails to rise to the level of divine omnipotence, indeed, as Socrates continually stresses, "Human wisdom is of little or no value" (*Apology* 23b).

Thus, it is possible, at the outset, to define *philosophy* as the (*instrument*) process "which contemplates truth" in the service of "cultivation of the soul, based on correct reason" (*Definitions* 414b). Related to what was stated above, *sophrosunē* is that quality or virtue (*skill*) providing "good discipline in the soul," contributing to the "rational agreement within the soul about what is admirable and contemptible," the state of one's disposition (*hēxis*) or soul (*psychē*) "by which its possessor chooses and is cautious" about the decisions he makes between right and wrong, virtue and vice, justice and injustice, good and evil (*Definitions* 411e-412a). In *On Justice,* readers encounter three familiar Platonic/Socratic themes that will be discussed herein, and they are, in order of their manifestation in the conversation between Socrates and his interlocutor: (1) Justice and virtue are pursued through language (speech) in dialectical examination – though Socrates shows little concern for the "*eidos*" or *Form* of justice; (2) What is just and unjust is determined within specific situations and one must come to know the right time (*kairos*) to choose what is just and avoid what is unjust; and (3) Knowledge of virtue (e.g., justice and *sophrosunē*) is essential, i.e., if one is ignorant of justice, one cannot willingly or knowingly be just or unjust.[6] Despite certain dialogues in the *apocrypha* being

[4] Cooper 1997. Readers will note that all quotations from Plato's corpus that are included in this essay originate from this source text.

[5] I refrain from employing the term "*elenchus*" when referencing Socrates' method of investigation and simply refer to it as both "dialectic" and more directly, "Socratic philosophy." For an explanation of the uses and misuses of "*elenchus*" in Platonic/Socratic scholarship, see: Brickhouse, Smith 1994. See also, Freydberg 2007, 11-29.

[6] If the apocryphal dialogues *On Justice* and *On Virtue* are read in tandem, there is a fourth theme related to Socratic philosophy that emerges, namely, that of whether virtue

comparable to Platonic writings, to reiterate point (1) from above, *On Justice* does not explicitly undertake the task of seeking an essential definition of the virtue justice; in academic terms, it does not attempt to provide an "account" or give a *logos* for the essence, Being, or *Form* of justice (*On Justice* 372a; 373d-e). In addition, Socrates refrains from seriously pursuing the typical "*ti esti;*" question, such as "What *is* Justice?" or "What *is* virtue?" that typically provides structure and direction to Socratic questioning in many authentic Platonic dialogues, especially those identified as "early aporetic dialogues."[7]

Since the pursuit of the essence (*ousia*), Form (*eidos*), or Being of justice is not taken up as a formalized line of inquiry, Socrates and his friend agree to question the manner in which justice manifests within the lived (*existential*) context of the experience of it, specifically, seeking to understand it by inquiring into the way in which it manifests through inquiry (*phronēsis*) and then is "used," employed, or better, instantiated in and through enlightened *praxis* (*On Justice* 372a). Socrates suggests that if this route into the understanding of justice is taken, it is perhaps best accomplished by examining the way in people tend to "speak" about justice, for Socrates concludes that it is through dialogue, by way of "speech" that we converse, argue, and then rationally decide "what's just and what's unjust" (*On Justice* 373d). However, Socrates insists that if we are to learn about justice then the right people must be examined, those who might be considered experts in the matter of justice, for example, judges. When ruling or rendering judgments in the cases before them, it is through dialogue and deliberation ("by speaking") that judges ultimately offer a "prescription of law which produces justice [*dikaion*]" (*Definitions*

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is discoverable in nature (*physis*), is teachable, or is instead something divinely inspired and communicated, as conveyed within Socrates' *reductio ad absurdum* argument in the *Meno* 100a-b. The apocryphal dialogue *On Virtue* hints at what is dramatized and explicated in Plato's dialogues as Socrates' "*daimonion*", a spirit associated with the Delphic god Apollo that reticently "speaks" to Socrates regarding the avoidance of ill-conceived action, but never explicitly provides advice or gives instruction regarding what actions Socrates should or must perform. In addition to inspiring his pursuit of philosophy, the *daimonion,* as well as the Delphic god, is held up by Socrates as a moral exemplar and indeed invoked as a check against the hubristic view that human wisdom is a superior form of knowledge. See the *Apology* for an explanation of the Delphic god's importance in Socrates' life of examining the virtues.

[7] Cf. Bobonich (2011, 293-332): "The early dialogues are sometimes called 'Socratic' dialogues in the belief that they especially reflect Socrates' influence on Plato…The stylometric evidence for putting these dialogues earlier than the rest is fairly strong and is accepted by some scholars" (p. 294).

414e). It would be impossible, as Socrates contends, for judges to legitimately render just decisions in cases without knowledge or understanding of justice, for a "just person is just because of his knowledge [*phronēsis*]" (*On Justice* 375c). Their "skill" in judging, which includes properly and ethically meeting out justice, adjudicating justly, is revealed by means of rational discussion and debate, thus it is concluded that this "skill" is contingent on and inseparable from the sustained participation in a dialectical "speech-act," the "instrument" that consists of questioning, responding, refuting, and ultimately arriving at a rigorously reasoned, agreed upon conclusion.

Opening the discussion, Socrates' friend declares that justice cannot be decided by "custom" or beliefs that have been passed along and codified by authorities, by the many (*hoi polloi*), and in addition, Socrates contends that the understanding of the virtues is neither given by "nature" (*physis*) nor transferred through education or teaching (*didaskalia*) grounded in didactic or the sophistic method of "transfer" (*On Virtue* 379c). Instead, as introduced above, the potential exists to arrive at an understanding of justice through the common Socratic practice of employing and engaging in a dialectical and rhetorical form of argumentation (*epaktikoi logoi*), which accepts that premises and subsequent conclusions are open to further questioning, with the potential for revision and clarification, working toward a temporary and tentative rational consensus among participants. What is unique about this type of argumentation, and the reason we might identify it as a *philosophical speech-act,* is that it is dependent upon the beliefs, feelings, and disposition of those involved in the dialogue, i.e., the participant's opinions, feelings, and ethical attitude are all at issue, in essence, their entire *Being-in-the-world*, which includes their *Being-with-others*, is of central concern. Hence, by means of dialectical examination the disposition (*hēxis*) or constitutional makeup of the soul (*psychē*) is called into question and the potential arises that it will undergo or suffer (*pathos/pathein*) a change or alteration; the soul within "Socratic learning" might be said to be "turned around" (*periagogē*) in such a way that it is changed and attuned by the freshly ignited light of truth and revelation, it "turns" back on itself in an enlightened manner.[8] Ultimately, Socratic dialectic aims at altering and changing

[8] When engaged in dialectical examination, when *speaking* about what is just and unjust, Plato claims that we work through "names, definitions, and visual and other perceptions," and when these are "rubbed against each other and tested," through the process of asking and answering questions, "in good will and without enmity," and it is then, "when reason and knowledge are at the very extremity of human effort, can they illuminate the nature of any object" (*EP VII* 444b). In joint pursuit of the *phronēsis* of the virtues, revelation occurs only after "long-continued intercourse," then "suddenly, like a light flashing

for the better, in the light of a new and developing understanding of justice, the manner in which one makes crucial "ethical" decisions about life, and this is the aspect of *prohairesis tou biou* (critical, informed decisions about one's life) that is expressive of the intimate interconnection between one's *logos* (word/thought) and *bios*/*ergon* (life/deed), indicative and expressive of the "normative" knowledge or understanding of virtue consistent with "philosophical understanding" (*phronēsis*), "practical wisdom…of what is good and bad…productive of human happiness (*Definitions* 411d). For example, in relation to the judges Socrates discusses, much like the dialectician, it is through debate and discussion that they become informed and enlightened when providing "good counsel [*euboulia*]…by virtue of reasoning" (*Definitions* 413c).

However, despite this conclusion, as indicated above, it is not the case that those practicing dialectic ultimately arrive at a level of certitude that forecloses further discussion, e.g., in the courtroom, judges do not assent to an axiomatic first principle or arrive at the dialectical "truth" of the essence (*Form*) of the virtue (*dikiaosunē*) itself. Indeed, even Socrates does not and cannot offer definitive "proof" for what justice in its essence is, but rather through conversation and interpretation he is committed to revealing or wresting from concealment new and unique aspects of justice, aspects of justice that had, prior to dialectical examination, remained concealed and obscured. And yet, despite such talk of "incomplete" knowledge, Socrates always holds an *idealistic eye* toward virtue's perfected and unattainable essence or nature (*On Virtue* 379c), and this idea relates to an understanding of both *practical-and-contextual* and *eudaimonistic* ethics as will be discussed below. It must be noted that when there is talk in Plato's dialogues regarding "proof" for various claims, the term most often employed is "*apodeixis*," and this term does not mean that Socrates and his interlocutors are revealing and acquiring the knowledge of something that transcends the context of discourse, in the sense of gliding from *hypothesis* to *noetic* grasp of an *intelligible* axiomatic (transcendent) first principle, as in the idealized description of the philosopher kings and queens in the *Republic.* Instead, the Attic Greek *apodeixis* indicates that what is revealed does so only because it is inextricably linked to the issue that is under interrogation, e.g., in the case of the discussion in *On Justice,* what is revealed concerns the virtue and its practical place and role in a "good" (*eudaimonic*) life (Sallis 1984). So, Socrates' dialectic works to reveal or "show" (*deiknumi*) aspects of the virtue that had previously remained concealed, and this showing or displaying is not the equivalent of proving or definitively defending a case or claim for justice,

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forth when [the] fire [of truth] is kindled [*alētheia*], it is born in the soul and straightaway nourishes itself [*periagogē*]" (*EP VII* 341d).

but rather *apodeixis* is a *letting be seen of what shows itself* in the midst of the discussion, in a way that is inextricably bound up with the *existential* immediacy of the lives of the participants. These moments of revelation contribute to the positive development of the understanding of justice in the dialectic, e.g., the proper way to question and investigate it, the right way to approach the experience of justice as it manifests in unique but understandable ways depending upon circumstances. Socrates is ultimately concerned with understanding (*logos*) the right way (*ergon*) and appropriate time (*kairos*) to act in concrete situations that call for specific ethical or virtuous actions. As is consistent with Socratic philosophy, which is nothing other than the practice of *cultivation of the soul,* the investigation of justice and the other virtues is a necessary, ethical, honorable, and question-worthy endeavor or life-task.

To reiterate my previous claim, the showing or revelation of "truth" through rational questioning and argumentation (*reasoned speech*) holds the potential to transform the character (*hēxis*) and hence alter the course of one's *Being-in-the-world* with others, which is why the dialectic represents an "engaged" and "inspiring" *philosophical speech-act.* For in a non-technical manner it is possible to state that as the Socratic dialectic works to provide new inraods of understanding into the virtue under discussion, it simultaneously inspires, because it conditions in an enlightened manner, the choice and performance of *phronētically* informed actions, actions for Socrates that are ethical in nature, actions that might be labeled "normative" in their unfolding (Taylor 2010). Indeed, in the case of the Socratic dialectic the speech involved, as it is inspired by and facilitated in its movement by the emerging and developing understanding (*phronēsis*) of virtue, already lives as *praxis.* As stated, this is associated with *prohairesis tou biou* and is expressive of the intimate ethical connection between one's *logos* (word/thought) and *bios*/*ergon* (life/deed).[9] Further, it is possible to state that as *philosophical speech-act,* when

[9] Cf. Austin 2005. Among many linguistic classifications, Austin makes the distinction between "constative" and "performance" utterances, the former is associated with statements of facts or descriptions providing insight into what "is," the latter is said to inspire action, indicating, and beyond, dictating what we should or *ought* to do. Performance utterances are grounded in and ineluctably bound up with *praxis,* and are irreducible to propositions, e.g., when committing to a "vow" or making a "promise," we are at once actively committing ourselves to because we are beholden to performing actions consistent with the keeping of said promise. We note, in relation to what we have indicated about Socrates, in Austin's linguistic analysis, performance utterances (speech-acts) are linked to actions of a "normative" nature; performance utterances demonstrate what we have labeled the relationship between one's words and deeds (*logos*-and-*ergon*). See also Waugh 1995, 177-193.

dialectically interrogating the virtue of justice, "speaking" of and about justice, the participants in the dialogue instantiate, to greater and lesser degrees, the virtue itself. For example, if *dikaiosunē* is to be understood as "the unanimity of the soul with itself, and the good discipline of the parts of the soul with respect to each other and concerning each other" (*Definitions* 411d), then through the very practice or exercise (*askēsis*) of questioning and pursuing the understanding of justice, both Socrates and his interlocutors instantiate the virtue to some degree even without being able to fully define it or express it through propositional utterances (Gonzalez 1998). However, according to Socrates, definitive knowledge of any of the virtues is impossible, for as stated, Socrates is dealing specifically with "normative" issues, concerns that are expressed not through propositions but *normative statements,* the truth or falsity of which cannot can be determined with certainty, for they concern what *ought to be done,* they transcend the *Either/Or* epistemological register consistent with propositional locutions.

The Practical-and-Contextual Ethics of Socrates

Burnyeat is correct when observing that Socrates is primarily concerned "with virtues and vices, with what it is to be a good man and why one should aspire to perfection [cultivation] of the soul," in contrast to this view, "the focus of much modern ethics is on actions rather than on character, the primary concern being with [discernable] principles of right conduct." (Burnyeat 1971). If Socrates was able to capture the essence of the virtues he so doggedly pursues in the dialogues, it would be possible to establish an ethics of an objective nature, where an unwavering duty exists to adhere to immutable principles that inform and determine action and are acquired through certain knowledge. Such immutable and universal principles must be followed to in a way that transcends, and hence *excludes,* considerations regarding circumstances, intuitions, feelings, or interpretive philosophical judgments. This "objectivist" view of ethics emerges from certain "doctrinal," "orthodox," and antiquated readings of Plato, Socrates, and the dialogues, which embrace in an unadulterated manner the infamous Socratic dictum: *knowledge = virtue,* indicating that neither Socrates nor the interlocutors he encounters can truly *be* ethical without sure and certain knowledge of the virtues.[10] This view harbors the distinction between having (*echein* – "to have") knowledge of the virtues and seeking (*zetein* – "to seek") knowledge of the virtues and erroneously privileges the former, seemingly ignoring that Socrates continually talks of philosophy as the ever-re-

[10] Sahakian (1977). For a lucid and detailed critique of what might be termed the "misreading" of the Socratic dictum: *knowledge = virtue,* see: Nehamas 1999.

newed, erotic pursuit of wisdom, the completeness of which always eludes the human's limited and finite grasp (e.g., *Apology, Euthyphro. Meno, Laches, Charmides, Alcibiades I*). Socrates does not subscribe to objectivist ethics,[11] for it is undeniable that he embraces a form of ethics that considers the circumstances and unique situations that contribute to and in great part shape ethical responses, and this includes a concern for the uniqueness of the characters, dispositions, or "souls" of the individuals encountered. However, I note that this type of *practical-contextual* ethics espoused and practiced by Socrates eludes the trap of ethical *relativism*,[12] which wrongly and dangerously indicates that what is just and unjust, and value itself, can be arbitrarily and subjectively determined based on one's whim or mood; this is to say that Socrates does not endorse *ethical subjectivism* for important reasons we discuss below.

Socrates asks his friend whether telling the truth, avoiding deception, and helping others, is in every case, in every circumstance, the just and right thing to do. To which his friend replies that these actions are always, despite changing circumstances, the right thing to do (*On Justice* 374e). Socrates, in a response that closes the path to *ethical relativism,* is quick to point out that in the case of enemies, those who wish to do harm and kill, lying, deceiving, and doing harm is precisely the just and right (virtuous) thing to do within the context of warfare. Beyond this, Socrates also gets his friend to assent to the claim that even among friends it is sometimes the case that lying and deceiving is the just and right thing to do, but again, as Socrates stresses, depending on the circumstances (*On Justice* 374d). This leads to an agreed upon conclusion, for it is shown [*deiknumi*] that "both lying and telling the

[11] Cf. Pojman 2006, 414. Pojman provides an example of what a "doctrinal" reading of Platonic/Socratic ethics might look like when observing that orthodox readings argue that Socrates embraces an "objective world of values or divine law that ensures that those who act selfishly will be punished," and if we take away the "transcendent moral order that affect us, Socrates' picture breaks down."

[12] Cf. Rachels 2018. Rachels points out that most who adhere to relativism do so in a form called "cultural relativism," and its claims go beyond what facts it can establish. Simply because there is a difference of moral practices, this does not prove that there is no truth in ethics that is trans-subjective. Here, we do not need to establish an ethical objectivism to understand Rachels' point. For example, Rachels reminds us of a story from Herodotus' *History*, and shows that although the Callatians vehemently disagreed with the Greeks regarding burial practices and funeral rites, and so we ask, from this fact is there no common ground on which to agree ethically? Rachel states that there is common ethical ground and that is that both share respect for the treatment of the deceased within their culture – this core, common ethical belief is expressed, however, through radically different cultural practices.

truth are both just and unjust…harming and helping are just and unjust" as dependent upon circumstances (*On Justice* 374d). Here, it has been determined that these actions Socrates has been discussing are not, in and of themselves, intrinsically or inherently ethical or unethical, as would be consistent with a *deontological* or *action-based* ethical view as discussed above, where it is the case that lying is always and without question an unethical action to be avoided. Instead, Socrates argues that actions take on meaning, assuming and acquiring their "living" ethical weight and immediacy, when someone with an understanding of what is just and unjust appropriately performs actions as circumstances demand (*On Justice* 375a). This notion of *practical-contextual* ethics, in relation to the aforementioned line of thought, shares the following common theme with *eudaimonistic ethics*: It avoids the "priority of being over doing" argument – or the necessity of "knowledge" as antecedent requirement for any and all ethical behavior – and instead stresses that the good life (*eudaimonia*), "one that manifests virtue in general or a particular virtue, is less a matter of explaining [proving] it than of finding in it the actions, thoughts, and feelings characteristic of a good person."[13]

This indicates that the ethical, virtuous, and just individual will perform actions that are virtuous and just when assessing, deliberating (*boulē*), judging, and choosing within the appropriate conditions, at the "right" time (*kairos*) and for the right reasons, actions that are virtuous, and this is, as Socrates stresses, "because of his knowledge…because of his wisdom [*phronēsis*]" in matters of an ethical nature (*On Justice* 375e).[14] However, this is not to indicate that Socrates here is referring to absolute knowledge or understanding of the virtues, and it is possible to envision the functioning of this type of Socratic ethical practice stressing what might be termed a *developing-and-viable* ethical understanding that has been experienced, wrested from concealment through rigorous and repeated Socratic examination. It is this well-informed but incomplete understanding of the virtues, which is ever evolving through continued dialectical examination that informs the choices made in *praxis,* and it is possible to identify this *phronētic* ethical wisdom with the tentative and fluctuating grounds of *eudaimonistic ethics. Eudaimonia,* according to Bobonich, plays a key role in Socrates' views on "how to live and how to act" and is crucial when thinking about "other important notions, such as virtue and

[13] Burnyeat 1971, 234.

[14] This notion of knowing the "right" time of decision is also described as "*eukairia,*" or the propensity or informed disposition toward "good timing," i.e., "hitting on the right time to do something" (*Definitions* 413d). This, like *kairos* stresses "opportunity" for knowing and finding the "ideal time for something beneficial; the time that contributes to obtaining something good" (*Definitions* 414b).

knowledge." [15] In line with the interpretation presented, Bobonich recognizes that although "happiness" or *human flourishing* as *eudaimonia* may be the primary ethical and virtuous "object of desire, humans cannot completely or permanently attain it."[16]

Concluding these thoughts on "ethical" circumstances, I briefly return the role of the judges that Socrates describes in *On Justice,* for they indeed have to make legal determinations when rendering ethical judicial decisions in the court, and this of course takes into account the specific criminal act to be adjudicated, the differences between individuals, and the unique circumstances surrounding the legal issue that is before them. As stated above, it is only when judges take these matters into account that they are truly informed and prepared because of their deliberations to render just verdicts, offering just "prescription[s] of law that produces justice [*dikaion*]" (*Definitions* 414e-415a). Now consider Socrates' practice of dialectical examination as portrayed in many of Plato's dialogues, for it is the case that readers encounter Socrates employing a wide array of tactics or techniques when interrogating the virtues in the company of his many and varied interlocutors. In the service of *cultivation of the soul,* which is directed toward pursuing the understanding the virtues, Socrates strives to better the character and hence the behavior of those who are co-participants in the interrogative process, because if the interlocutors are strong and courageous enough to persevere and hold themselves in the context of questioning, the potential exists for their souls or dispositions to be transformed and shaped in light of the dawning understanding of the virtues that the questioning reveals. Although it is the case that so-called "end" or overarching *eudaimonic* goal of the Socratic project remains consistent throughout the dialogues, the same cannot be said of the "means" employed in the attempt to relentlessly interrogate the virtues. To offer but one example, which relates directly to the conversation between Socrates and his friend in *On Justice,* I stress that often, depending on the intellectual, emotional, and psychological (*psychagogic*) constitution of the interlocutor, Socrates alters and indeed consciously molds his philosophical tactics and rhetorical techniques, choosing actions in the opportune moment (*kairos*) that best suits the person and the uniqueness of the situation, specifically as these actions best contribute to the ethical development of the other's soul or disposition.

Regarding Socrates' conclusions about just and unjust actions, it is possible to agree that taunting, tormenting, and humiliating a friend would do injustice to the idea and experience of friendship, as it would appear to inflict harm on an ally,

[15] Bobonich 2011, 293.

[16] Ibid., p. 295.

friend, representing the type of actions that are best directed toward our enemies or against those who we hold in contempt, as stressed in *On Justice*. Yet Socrates, in addition to demonstrating what we identify as care and respect for many of his interlocutors, often resorts to shaming and embarrassing those with whom he engages in discussion. For example, in the case of young Lysis, Socrates tends to handle him in a somewhat nurturing manner, employing the technique of *protreptic,* which manifests in the hortatory praise of Lysis in the attempt to gently guide him to the understanding that wisdom and truth are the true "friends" or companions he should seek. Contrarily, Socrates is much harsher and even vitriolic with the youth Menexenes, who is skilled in *eristic.* In this unique situation, the context of dialoging with the two young men, these seemingly contradictory actions are in fact necessary when seriously taking into account the philosophical development and emotional and psychological temperament of the youths. Here, Socrates makes the correct and good choice regarding the ethical course of action to take with respect to each young man, based on both the situation and their respective development. Indeed, in each instance Socrates does what is required for true friendship, had he not chosen these specific actions rightly and appropriately, he would have impeded the philosophical project and stifled the youths' development, acting in stark contrast to what authentic friendship entails.[17]

Are People Unknowingly and Unwillingly Unjust?

In *On Justice*, Socrates introduces the wisdom of the comic poet Epicharmus of Syracuse to begin reflection on whether people do unjust things knowingly: "No one is willingly wicked, nor willingly blessed" (*On Justice* 374a). The short discussion that follows is related directly to the Socratic dictum introduced above: *knowledge = virtue*, and it is indeed agreed upon by both participants in dialogue that people tend to "act unjustly and are unjust and wicked unwillingly," and therefore it appears at first blush, as already discussed above, it is necessary to "have" or "possess" (*echein*) full knowledge of justice in order to act in a just, ethical manner (*On Justice* 375d). Before simply accepting Socrates' statement, because he is not attempting to vigorously defend this claim, it is necessary to consider several issues. To accept *prima facie* the Socratic dictum, is to endorse and indeed impose a sense of *directionality* upon his philosophy, namely, the necessary and direct movement from

[17] It is also the case that there are numerous instances within Plato's dialogues where Socrates takes what he determines to be an ethical and virtuous stance as he defies the established laws of the Athenian state, which he deems to be immoral. For an analysis of these various instances where Socratic ethics conflicts with the laws of Athens, see: Magrini 2021, epecifically, Chapter Five, §3.

"knowledge" acquisition (*epistemology*) ⇒ "virtuous" behavior (*axiology*), which assumes the logical, deductive form, "If *P,* then *Q,*" and this view wrongly assumes that epistemology is antecedent to ethical concerns in a way that wrongly stresses chronology and causality. It also reveals a notion of ethics that requires sure and certain knowledge of the virtues in a way that smuggles in the *relationship of identity.* Based on the conclusions from the previous section, if virtue is contingent on possessing full knowledge of it, and further, to know virtue is to enact it, then performing wicked or unjust actions, would be involuntary, carried out because of ignorance or lack of education (Guthrie 1971, 39). Such a view suggests that humans are capable of having sure and complete knowledge of such things as the virtues, yet this is a view that Socrates eschews repetitively in the dialogues, for as he often stresses, human wisdom, which is grounded in ontological *finitude,* is radically limited in breath and scope, falling far short of divine wisdom. It is also requires embracing the position that those who are ignorant of the virtues, and subsequently the actions emerging from out of this ignorance, are not and cannot be determined to be fully culpable for their actions, and this is a severely problematic, naïve, and dangerous position to espouse and endorse. So, I move to briefly explore what Socrates might indeed mean when he gets his friend to endorse the conclusion that unjust individuals "act unjustly and wicked unknowingly" (*On Justice* 375d), i.e., "The unjust person is unjust, then, because of his ignorance" (*On Justice* 375c).

I provide two examples that offer insight into Socrates' meaning of these remarks regarding the ignorance of the virtues resulting in uninformed actions of an unjust nature. These are instances from Plato's dialogues that appear to contradict what Socrates indicates in his brief remarks in *On Justice* but will offer clarification and an explanation for what Socrates might indeed mean. In the *Republic* Socrates and Glaucon are discussing and debating "justice," and Glaucon offers the following hypothetical to which Socrates' response will be of interest: Consider that it is actually most profitable for a human to embrace injustice, amassing a fortune and gaining immense power and influence, all the while putting on the air of justice, feigning the guise of a just individual. This will, according to Glaucon, afford an advantage over others, and most importantly, over others that are truly just and virtuous. The fact that Socrates takes this hypothetical seriously indicates that it is clear the fictitious individual does indeed have at least an understanding of the difference between what is just and unjust, and further, is basing his choice of actions on the understanding of this difference, i.e., his decisions are informed by this understanding and he is therefore acting in such a way that he is willingly to shun virtue and embrace vice for profit and gain (*Republic* 359a-360d). Consider also Socrates' friend and companion, Alcibiades, perhaps the most infamous rouge to

have ever kept company with Socrates. In the *Symposium,* Alcibiades states explicitly that when he is not engaged in dialectic with Socrates, which is the philosophical process of *self-cultivation,* he falls back into his common, nefarious ways, caving to the will of the crowd or the many (*hoi polloi*). In the case of Alcibiades, it is also clear that there is an understanding of the difference between virtue and vice, but it is his weakness for and in the face of the allure of the power and ambition, along with his resistance to continually and in a dedicated manner practice dialectical examination, that causes him, admittedly, to "willingly" and "knowingly," out of convenience, ambition, and licentiousness, shun virtue and embrace vice, turning his back on the philosophical life Socrates offers (*Symposium* 216c-223d).

Ultimately, what is represented and dramatized in these examples, is that the individuals are neither unknowingly nor unwillingly acting in a manner that runs counter to the virtuous life as envisioned and practiced by Socrates, but rather that those who embrace injustice and choose it both knowingly and willingly, are in fact "ignorant" of the benefits of a just and ethical life, i.e., they do not know or understand *eudaimonia*, and importantly, they do not feel the need to pursue knowledge of it, which is to say, understand it in a deep and philosophical manner, and hence they remain ignorant of it. Exploring this notion of ignorance as it might inform our understanding of Socrates' words from *On Justice,* I focus on what Socrates might mean when stating that people doing things that run counter to virtue and *arête* do so "unknowingly" and "unwillingly." There are at least three ways to understand "ignorance" in Socratic philosophy, and we can draw examples from the *Symposium, Republic,* and *Apology*. Diotima, the priestess or sorceress from Mantinea, who was a teacher of Socrates, providers two specific instances of ignorance that relate to the discussion of the Being of *Eros,* but also serves as a crucial and accurate analogy for the philosopher as *interpreter/hermeneuein* (*Symposium* 201d-209e): (1) There are those who are ignorant of things and neither know nor care that they are ignorant and so they are forever trapped in this uninformed state. Recall the prisoners shunning the return of the enlightened philosopher and instead choose to remain ignorant to all that is going on outside the subterranean realm of the cave (*Republic* 514a-520a); (2) There are those who recognize their ignorance and hence dedicate themselves to rectifying this situation, e.g., those who know they do not know the virtues (*learned ignorance*), and much like philosophers cut from the mold of Socrates, seek to deepen their understanding of it, with the important stipulation that they will never actually reach a state of full knowledge; they can never outstrip the condition of human ignorance, which as stated, Socrates links with the radical limitations (*finitude*) of all human wisdom; and (3) There are those who actually do possess an impressively vast store of

knowledge about certain and specific things, in specific areas, e.g., those who practice with knowledge and excellence their crafts or arts – architects, engineers, shipbuilders, shoemakers, artisans, etc. However, these individuals wrongly believe their unique knowledge extends beyond the limits or horizons of their field of expertise, and extends to all areas of human life, most particularly regarding what is most important in a life of *eudaimonia.* In essence, Socrates finds that even these knowledgeable people, because of their hubristic arrogance, remain ignorant of the ethical life (*Apology* 22d-23a).

It is then possible to state that these types of individuals - (2) and (3) - do indeed perform certain actions out of ignorance, most particularly those actions related to ethics and virtue; their decisions, choices, and actions are performed without knowledge ("unknowingly") of the "good" life, or without an understanding that emerges from practicing "the science of good and evil," in a manner, from the perspective of Socratic philosophy, that is "ignorant" and hence "willed" in a way that is "uninformed". They act without the understanding, or the developing sense of *phronēsis*, of the virtues that Socrates relentlessly pursues, and according to Socrates, there is undoubtedly a very real culpability and burden of responsibility that accompanies even these uniformed choices. To return to what was earlier discussed, when speaking of understanding the virtues, when practicing dialectical examination, Socrates does not arrive at a level of certitude that forecloses further discussion. Recall Socratic philosophy works to reveal or show (*deiknumi*) aspects of the virtue that had previously remained concealed, and this showing or displaying is, as stated, not the equivalent of "proving" a case for justice by offering a rigid and axiomatic definition, but rather this showing (*apodeixis*) is a *letting be seen of what shows itself* in the midst of the discussion and the unfolding of the questioning. It is possible to state that the philosopher, although "ignorant" in terms of lacking a complete knowledge of the virtues, longs for and strives to pursue that which he lacks, that which he has only an intimation or burgeoning understanding of. Indeed, it is through this longing or *erotic* desire for knowledge that he gains a veiled insight or intimation of the Being of virtue as it momentarily shines through and inspires the ever-renewed philosophical project. This intimation of virtue or justice, although it can evolve into a deeper *phronētic* understanding in the soul, can never rise to the level of a possession, and remains, as is consistent with Socrates understanding of the dialectic and the limits of human knowledge, the longing or love of wisdom, but never its possession (Scott, Welton 2000). Thus, what Socrates demonstrates and reveals in *On Justice* is that instead of acting out of ignorance it is best to be inspired to act in relation to the human ignorance that is recognized, acknowledged, and embraced as part and parcel of the human condition.

Much like Socrates, we should be inspired to act out of our acknowledged ignorance, our lack of full and complete knowledge about the most important things in human life, namely, invigorated in the pursuit of understanding the virtues, through which such knowledge is revealed when attending to and being guided by the *normative* "science of good and evil."

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