

**Religiosity Accused of Impiety:  
Belief in Greek Pantheon in Socratic Ideology**

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## Introduction

Mythology is one of the brightest gifts Ancient Hellas provided us with. The legends about the mighty gods and divine creatures who control and rule the world and the whole universe became an inevitable part of the ancient Greek history. Almost elevated to the level of religion, divine mythology highly influenced the development of the social thought and dominated the scene for many centuries from Bronze Age (3000-2000 BCE) up to the early Classical times (5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> cc. BCE)<sup>2</sup>. Right before the start of the Classical period, in approximately 6<sup>th</sup> c. BCE, Ancient Greece produced another gift – philosophy-, which tightly twined round the mythology at first, then gradually growing into more independent but still connected field<sup>3</sup>.

Many early philosophers considered the ideas of mythology and cosmology, and people’s belief in them. One of such prominent figures, standing in the middle between ancient myths and religion<sup>4</sup> and philosophy, was Socrates (470-399 BCE). His ideas about the Greek myths, existing Athenian religiosity, the place of the human in the system of belief have been the topics of the great discussions for the scholars all over the world. In this diverse discourse, incorporating many opinions and theories, I find the interest in researching Socratic ideas about religiosity. In this paper, I argue that Socrates was an important figure who contributed to the shift in the religious thought. I think that his ideas laid the foundation for the rise of the inner faith and self-cultivation. Thus, the Socratic religion builds on two

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<sup>1</sup> “Know thyself”

<sup>2</sup> Mark P. O. Morford, Robert J. Lenardon, and Michael Sham, *Classical Mythology* (New York, NY, United States of America: Oxford University Press, 2024), p.50.

<sup>3</sup> Keimpe Algra, “Beginnings of Cosmology,” essay, in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 45–65.

<sup>4</sup> Note: actually, Greek mythology cannot be called a religion due to several factors, e.g. absence of the universal laws, sacred books, etc. However, in my project I will call Greek beliefs a “religion” for the ease of reference

main pillars: belief in the divine mighty gods (still in the polytheistic form), and internal connection to the divinity (virtue and righteousness).

## **Methodology**

My project is mostly based on the close reading of the works of the Classical Greek philosophers (and artists – e.g., playwrights) intertwined with the analysis of the Greek polytheistic ideology (Gods' pantheon, role of Gods in the everyday life and spiritual aspects, etc.) supported by the works of the experts in the field. The latter one is presented through such secondary sources as academic articles, books, and the companions which include several essays from different authors on the single topic (mostly on the figure of Socrates and his works).

Secondly, I am planning to ground the analysis on the historical foundation of religious and social life of the Classical Greece (Athens in particular). The historical background is supposed to serve as the contextual basis which would allow me to justify the confrontation which appeared between the existing religious tradition and the “Socratic religion” which presumably caused the shift towards more anthropocentric ideology in the sense of essential self-cultivation.

The main limitation of my research is language obstacles. Unfortunately, lack of proficiency in Greek (Ancient Greek) language hinders the in-depth linguistic analysis of the works which would be of great help due to the variety of meanings contained in the words and their contextual difference from contemporary interpretation. Thus, another crucial approach towards the project is using the secondary sources explaining the linguistic sides of the primary works (especially of Plato's “Socratic dialogues”) and reference to the Greek dictionaries. In general, the methodology to use for this short project limited in volume is going to be qualitative based primarily on close reading of the documents (i.e., works of

intellectuals), their critical evaluation from my perspective as well as their analysis through the prism of experts in the field and historical data.

### **Limitations**

Apart from the abovementioned language limitation, there are a couple more of them, which are important to take into account. First of all, it is the mysterious figure of Socrates himself. Understanding the actual belief of Socrates is mostly about the speculation. The main limitation to face when researching the Socratic ideology is the absence of the documents written by the philosopher himself. So, the only way to study his beliefs is synthesising, comparing, and contrasting the figures of Socrates given by his contemporaries, be it his supporters and successors (e.g., Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle) or his opposers (such as Aristophanes). Although most of the used primary sources are written in the style as if Socrates was really telling exactly what is written, we should bear in mind the possibility of the authors narrating the story through own prism of perception, and therefore potentially having biases and prejudice, as well as assigning own opinions to Socrates.

Secondly, due to the volume of the project, I did not consider thoroughly the post-Socratic works on the topic. When talking about the shift in religiosity, it is important to trace the consequences and observe whether it was indeed a long-lasting and influential shift, as otherwise it is either not a shift or wrong interpretation from my side. Nevertheless, although in this particular project I am not tracing that, it would be a great alternative for the further studies.

Overall, even though the limitations of the research are present, they should not pose an inhibiting obstacle to do the research, and while we possess the notions of him in others' works and a possibility to observe his religiosity, it is worth trying to trace and decipher the Socratic ideology.

## **Brief Summary of Literature on the Topic**

The literature on the topic is quite extensive. There are numerous sources about Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and other intellectuals and artists of that time.

On the subject of the general pattern of those times, it is said that the Archaic and Classical Greece experienced the rise of the polytheistic theology and the strong sense of devotion towards this ideology which resulted in rituals, myths, and more visible and tangible consequences such as sculptures and temples. Yet, there was also a rise to more “revolutionary” thought within Greece regarding all of the abovementioned spiritual attributes. The idea of almighty “virtuous” gods was challenged with the comparison of their deeds (and vices too) with those of the ordinary humans. Also, the very idea of polytheism started to be questioned with the suggestions of something unified above the Gods. For example, in Plato’s considerations about the Forms the “Form of the Good” could serve as that idea that would shatter the polytheistic pedestal. Furthermore, the ideas of knowledge and rationality started to appear which were considered as the resistance against the previous mythical beliefs. At the same time, some philosophers, on the contrary, kept on considering the gods as perfect mighty divinities. However, the system of belief in them could, indeed, be questioned or complemented by new approaches.

Regarding the scholarly research, there are much work done already on the theme. Many essays are focused on the image of Socrates through the existing written documents depicting him, i.e. works of Plato, Xenophanes, Aristophanes, and others. Works of Plato are the subjects of particular attention, especially his Socratic dialogues within which *Apology* is examined a lot. Researchers attempt to understand the reasons behind the occurred conflict between Socrates and the Athenian society, and (not) justify the verdict. Again, the themes of rationality, anthropocentrism, and (im-) piety are raised. However, the special attention is

attracted to the notion of the *daimonion ti*, which is regarded as the new divine form to worship, the inner voice within an individual, or other interpretations.

The image of the gods is another topic throughout the works. Some authors claim Socrates denied them (although not completely on public) replacing with another form of “truth”, others – that he fluctuated between rationality and divineness, or that he favoured certain gods and not the others based on what can be considered really “virtuous” and “vicious”, or, in fact, admitted their divineness and piously believed in them. In all of those essays, there is great variety of interpretations, but it seems that scholars agree on the definite point: there was certain turning point that caused shift in the ideology which was developed in later times.

## **Historical Background**

### **Early Ideas of Cosmology<sup>5</sup>**

Ancient Greeks had a long history of the development of their understanding of the world. Myth became an important agent in the explanations of how the world is structured and how it works. As Broadie says, the history of the evolution of the universe for Greeks was narrated through the genealogy of the gods and divine creatures, whose decisions, desires and thoughts defined the ways of further development of the whole world as well as the destinies of human beings.

The mythical structure of the divine genealogy is built on three consequent generations. Initially before the creation of the universe, there was Chaos (χάος – “emptiness”), which produced the first generation of the divine creatures – Uranus (celestial

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<sup>5</sup> For more information, see A. A. Long, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Walter Burkert and John Raffan, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical* (Hoboken: Wiley, 1991)

hemisphere in which we live), Gaia (earth), Okeanos (ocean surrounding the earth), Tartaros (deep abyss under the earth), and some astronomical objects like the sun, the moon, and the stars. At this point, the divine creatures did not have any physical form, but rather were some kind of a divine abstractness.

They (especially Uranus and Gaia) produced the second generations of titans such as Chronos, Rhea, and others. Some of them already acquired the human-like form, but others were monstrous in shape. They already possess the new realms of divine influence, and inhabited the world as inhabitants of the mountains, water sources, or Tartaros. Titans eventually produced the next and final generation of the divine creatures – the gods.

The gods in the Greek mythology take a central place. Some of them are called Olympians after the name of the mountain they inhabit, others who have own natural habitations are sometimes called Olympians, and sometimes not. New generation is already fully anthropomorphic in shape and are seen as somewhat similar to humans in their behaviours. Nevertheless, they were still divine and mighty. The gods became the central figure of humans' worship and religiosity. Everything that was happening in the world was considered to be the consequences of their actions and desires.

This idea of the world was greatly important for the Greeks and dominated the culture for many centuries. The mythical narration was spread by the poets and storytellers such as Homer and Hesiod and strengthened by the passing of those myths orally from generation to generation. The lack of universality of the narrations led to the appearance of numerous interpretations of those myths, which eventually became quite problematic, but still the myths remained essential for the lives of the Greek people.

Closer to the time of the Classical period, i.e. 5-4<sup>th</sup> cc BCE, the first attempts to challenge the traditional cosmology started to appear. The early cosmologists tried to find the new explanations of the world's structure. Such figures as Thales and Anaximander started



examining the through the prism of nature. Also, the human being was observed as a part of the mythological system. Nevertheless, although the first signs of the rational theology and scientific explanations of the universe started to occur, the significance of the divine Pantheon remained unchangeably high, as the early cosmologists still admitted its existence (at least, did not deny it), and other people who were raised on mythical tradition kept on believing in it.

### **Athenian society belief<sup>6</sup>**

Each Greek polis developed own systems of belief – each favoured certain gods, performed certain rituals, and made different sacrifices. Athens, having one of the most developed and sophisticated societies, was of no exception. Socrates who was the native of Athens had to be raised in the city beliefs, and it must have had an impact on his worldview and ideology. Therefore, before proceeding to the main part, it would be helpful to have a brief look at the system of belief that served as a contextual background for Socrates' philosophy.

The Athenians believed in gods and certainly admitted their existence, yet the city gods were affected by the humanisation. Athenians considered gods' behaviour similar to one of the humans, with the inherent virtues and vices, right actions, and mistakes. Nevertheless, the divinity of the gods was an unquestionable matter – they certainly possessed something people lacked, and they could do something that people could not do. Therefore, gods were an inevitable part of the everyday life of Athenians as the providers of help and divine assistance.

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<sup>6</sup> For more information see Jon Dennis Mikalson, *Athenian Popular Religion* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1983); Philip Matyszak, *24 Hours in Ancient Athens: A Day in the Lives of the People who Lived There*, trans. Kirill Istomin (Moscow: Bombora, 2022); Judith Barringer, *Art, Myth, and Ritual in Classical Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)

Greek gods were involved in almost all activities of Athenians – every war or social gathering or everyday action started with the appeal to the gods with a request of help and blessing. In return for the given goods, people performed certain rituals as a demonstration of the gratitude, such as sacrifices. As a result, the religious chain was quite simple – roughly speaking, people requested the gods of something in the form of prayer, and the gods sometimes fulfilled their wishes in exchange for the gratitude (not necessarily a sacrifice, the establishment of the temple also was a form of gratitude, but not everyone could afford it).

Also, Athenians were quite suspicious of the people who did not fully share the local belief. It would be wrong to say that Socrates was the first “religious outsider”. All over the Greece, pre-Socratic philosophers and his contemporaries emerged claiming something that the traditional belief interpreted differently. Among them there was Anaxagoras of Clazomenae (undivine nature of the sun), Hippo(n) (comparison of the sky to oven damper and people – to charcoal), Protagoras (“Man is the measure of all things” instead of, e.g., “Everything is full of gods” by Thales), and others. So, it would be logical to assume that in Athens such people already existed before Socrates. Most of them were accused of the wrong interpretation of the local beliefs, some of them were executed later because of that. Socrates also was accused of impiety and invention of the new gods, and eventually executed.

## **Socratic Belief**

Below I discuss the ideas of Socrates based on the own close analysis of the primary texts and the information provided by the scholars in the field. Although the main focus among the primary works lies on the works of Socrates’ admirers and followers, it would be wrong to ignore the notions about him in the opposers’ view. While the main ideological observation will be contained in the first part, second one is supposed to admit or reject those views and complement the re-construction of the philosopher’s figure.

## What is Piety?

Socrates of Plato and Xenophon is seemingly “ignorant” about the religious matters and attempts to fill this gap by being inquisitive about the pillars of Athenian religiosity, gods’ virtues, and humane piety. In Plato’s *Euthyphro* those questions stand out to the audience as the whole dialogue is founded on the question: “what is pious?”. However, the essentiality of this particular piece for my research lies in the very questions of Socrates, that could potentially hint on the problematic interpretation of gods nature in the existing society.

The very first question Socrates poses about the gods’ justice appears to undermine the logic of *Euthyphro*, when the latter tries to explain why him persecuting own father must be considered pious and just:

Euthyphro: [what is pious and what is impious?] <...> I claim that that the pious is what I am doing now, prosecuting someone [anyone regardless of status, blood bonds, etc.] who is guilty of wrongdoing <...>, and impious is failing to prosecute. <...> such actions to be correct – not yielding to impious people, that is, no matter who they happen to be. Because these very people also happen to worship Zeus as the best and most just of the gods, and agree that he put his own father in bonds because he unjustly swallowed his sons, and the father too castrated his own father for other similar reasons <...><sup>7</sup>

It is the moment where the doubts about *Euthyphro*’s wisdom start to occur. The very fact of *Euthyphro* prosecuting his own father for the reasons still not definite in their justice confuses the perception of his words to be coming out of great wisdom. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the *Euthyphro*’s decision with the actions of Zeus, given for the purposes of explanation what is pious and what is not, does not seem to support *Euthyphro*’s cause due to the ambiguity of fairness of Zeus’ own actions.

He declares Zeus the most just god of all referring to the sense of justice and fairness as one of his main divine virtues, and by that explains that even he “prosecuted” his own father, Chronos. Here the analysis of his words branches into two, neither of which give

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<sup>7</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, trans. Cathal Woods and Ryan Pack, 4.

clarity of his analogies. Both of those branches are connected to the same stalk: the myth of Zeus devouring his expecting wife Metis out of the fear that her child would dethrone his father (say, we will leave aside all the help and support Metis had provided Zeus with during the dethroning of Chronos. Just taking the mere fact of devouring).

On the one hand, if Zeus is the most just and cannot do what is unfair, then devouring own children and prosecuting own father who has committed a moral crime has to be just. Chronos, in turn, is the one who made an “unfair” thing, but why? Chronos did exactly what Zeus did: the reason for both actions of child-devouring is interpreted to be the same - fear of dethroning or shadowing. The reason for prosecuting their fathers was also the same: both were encouraged by their mothers who in turn were suffering from being separated with their children. Based on this almost total similarity<sup>8</sup> of both actions, the analogy seems to break and not justify Euthyphro’s point: if Zeus was just in his actions, then Chronos, due to the same sequence and reasoning of events, would be considered just too. However, in the words of Euthyphro the titan appears in a negative light of antagonism, which creates a conflict between the just and unjust Chronos, i.e., Euthyphro’s judgement of the prosecuted character is not consistent. On the other hand, if we stick to the idea that Chronos was unjust in his actions, then Zeus must also be considered unjust, which contradicts the initial point of the speaker. As a result, in neither way I see the valid explanation of Euthyphro’s decision.

Furthermore, say, Chronos, indeed, did the wrong thing, and therefore Zeus actions also end up being seen as an immoral action, then the situation allows to question god’s virtuousness. Though, unfortunately, we cannot say for sure whether the Greeks at all considered the gods absolutely viceless. Some say that the Greeks accepted them as some kind

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<sup>8</sup> The only possible difference lies in the fact that Zeus devoured expecting wife, while Chronos devoured already born children. If devouring own already alive children is the crime much heavier than devouring a wife, then there is a possibility that Euthyphro could be right. Yet can it be considered a crime in both situations if both objects of devour were immortal, and, therefore, not killed? The situation of Euthyphro differs in this regard making the analogy even more confusing.

of “divine humans” with their vices and drawbacks as well as virtues and advantages. Others claimed that the gods were perfect in nature, and if they “did” something bad, it was rather the tricks of other non-human creatures<sup>9</sup>. In any case, for Euthyphro in the dialogue, the gods are perfect, at least, in their justice. However, was it intentional in Plato’s dialogue or not, but in this case the perfection of their justice starts to shatter: if the most perfect and just of them can make a moral mistake, then the whole Pantheon can do the same, i.e., they can have vices and mistakes, but they still remain divine.

If there is a possibility that this particular idea could be true, then it can be expanded to the thought that the distance between the gods and people is somewhat shortened. People were not elevated on this scale but instead the gods descended and became closer to people in their nature of being not ideal in their morality and actions. Anyways, even if it is not fully right, the main justification explanation of Euthyphro seems to be flawed if recalling the mythological context. The question is: are his later thoughts about piety in the dialogue worth believing? If Euthyphro serves as a speaker for the Athenian societal norms, shall I say, the collective image of the conventional moral belief, and if he is intentionally depicted here as a man whose ideas of piety are questionable, then Socratic inquiry seems to remain unanswered, and therefore open for the further examination of piety.

The dialogue also raises a question about the virtue dichotomies among the gods which appears to confuse the dispute about the true piety even further. If being pious means serving to the gods and do and believe in what is dear to them, then the believer is put on the crossroads of the difficult choice. Now, it seems logical to ask what Socrates in fact asks:

What about the gods <...>? If they indeed disagree over something, don’t they disagree over these very things [unmeasurable arguments: what is just and unjust, noble and shameful, good and bad]? <...> Then some of the gods think different things to be just, according to you <...> and noble and shameful and good and bad, since they surely wouldn’t be at odds with one another unless they were

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<sup>9</sup> Mikalson. *Athenian Popular Religion*, 19

disagreeing about these things. <...> The same things, it seems, are both hated by the gods and loved <...>? <...> And the same things would be both pious and impious <...>?<sup>10</sup>

It is not quite understandable the way of which god should the pious man follow. Olympian Pantheon which traditionally consists of twelve Olympians<sup>11</sup>, and many more deities and smaller gods, is diversified in terms of the ideas of virtue. To demonstrate, even the twin gods, Artemis and Apollo, although being close to each other out of ideas of siblinghood, each prioritized distinct things (e.g., wilderness and culture), each had own understanding of the good and bad, virtuous and vicious (e.g., virginity and sexual promiscuity). There are many examples of such confrontations: Ares and Athena, Hera and Aphrodite, etc. which originate in the polarity of the controlled realms (i.e., when two gods are the patrons of the initially antonymic things, such as war and peace) or their close proximity (i.e., when two gods are considered the patrons of the similar thing, e.g. war, but have different approach towards it, e.g. virtue is courage for one, and strategy for another).

Besides, according to myths, the gods can possess the humane trait of bias and favouritism which blurs the understanding of what is dear to the patron-god even further. The conflicts between two gods often extend to involvement of other divine participants, especially when it comes to the close emotional relationships. For instance, if we take the conflict between Athena and Ares as an example, the initial virtues to decide between would be wisdom, military strategy, and peace, and war and courage respectively. However, their conflict involves many other gods: Ares, the lover of Aphrodite, would be supported by the goddess of love, and their children which are Phobos (fear), Deimos (terror), Eros (love), Harmonia (harmony), and others. Meanwhile, Hephaestus, the husband of Aphrodite, would confront Ares; Hera would confront the Aphrodite too, so in the particular abovementioned conflict, they will take Athena's side. Each of these gods have own understanding of virtue,

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<sup>10</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 5-6

<sup>11</sup> Sometimes more

and they are divided into two battling camps. Then, what would be pious for the commoner? If a human considers Athena the favourite goddess, then would the supporting the virtues of Ares or Aphrodite or their children be considered impious?

Still, although the understanding of virtues can differ between the gods, for Socrates it takes a deeper examination of the virtues. Socrates agrees that pious, whatever it could be exactly, is loved and dear to *all* the gods, and likewise, what is impious is hated by all of them<sup>12</sup>. Although we do not get an answer of what it is that is loved by all gods, we understand that there is a certain virtue (or vice) that they agree upon, and therefore there is the main virtue above all that defines the piety in religious context, automatically making other virtues, that the gods disagree about, minor ones and of lesser connection to religion. This single virtue is something that connects the gods and the humans in belief, i.e., no one neither in divine nor in mundane realms would deny that this virtue is pious<sup>13</sup>. I would assume that this virtue, when identified, will be accepted to be true by everyone, and therefore immediately understood as religious one due to its absolute piousness rather than the secular one, which, in turn, would cause the debates to emerge.

Besides, if we assume that the service to the gods is also pious, then it should help the gods to accomplish certain sublime goal<sup>14</sup>. What this goal is? Not definite, but I guess it has something to do with the believer. In the dialogue, Socrates makes an analogy with different professions asking what their goal is. Doctors' goal is health, however not in general terms, but of the particular patient(s)<sup>15</sup>. Shipbuilders build the ships for sailing, but again for the sailors to use<sup>16</sup>. The same analogy goes for the housebuilders<sup>17</sup>. So, I will take a risk to

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<sup>12</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Mark L. McPherran, "Socratic Religion", in *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates*, ed. Donald R. Morrison, 117.

<sup>14</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 12.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

assume that the service to the gods finds its ultimate goal in believers, to be more precise to make their lives better or easier. Arguably, the life of the believer becomes easier when the gods “befriend” them<sup>18</sup>, which is possible once the believer develops the nobleness of the soul. Therefore, this single virtue that is shared by gods and that is dear to gods as it is pious helps or at least encourages people to improve their own soul and mind.

Yet, we still do not derive the explanation of the “right” piety clearly and completely from the dialogue. Nevertheless, we notice what should be the correct way to express it. According to Euthyphro, piety seems to be “a certain kind of knowledge, of how to sacrifice and pray<sup>19</sup>”. In other words, the believer needs something and makes the request of gods in prayers, and the gods, in turn, request the sacrifice in exchange for the carried-out wish. However, such formulation of piety appears to disturb Socrates in its mechanical nature, rather than the spiritual one. The philosopher seems to implicitly question the existing system of belief because of the fact that it became based primarily on the trade between the gods and the humans, which does not require much of the internal effort of the soul and mind. The internal sacredness of this god-human connection seems to be lost - is mere mechanical act of service enough for the gods to ask from humans? I think that Socrates disapproves of this idea: divine gods would not be pleased with mere act of mechanical service. Although, they can argue with one another over the minor things or spheres of influence, they still find consensus over certain virtues and principles, and I think that one of them is being internally pious, rather than only externally.

Here, in this view, the humans should find their own place in the belief system. Customary acts of service (sacrifices, prayers as requests) now had to be complemented with the internal genuine belief in the gods and their power, i.e., the cultivation of the inner

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<sup>18</sup> Will be discussed below in the *Virtue* section

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.



religiosity is what should have been considered pious. It contributes to the rethinking of the existing religion: now believers had to transform from, roughly speaking, helpless driven people, who only perform rituals, to more independent and self-cultivating and caring about own faithfulness. Now, people also become the crucial and to certain extent powerful agents of the religion. This idea certainly should not be viewed as an atheistic state, but rather just the change in the perception of the existing belief system.

In fact, it would be quite inaccurate to say that Socrates did not recognise the divinity of the gods. In *Apology*<sup>20</sup>, for example, he clearly states at least one thing that is has always been and will be in the gods' possession, but will be never acquirable for the humans, which is superhuman wisdom<sup>21</sup>. It is kind of a wisdom that cannot be in the human's possession due to its "divine" nature. For Socrates the knowledge of the gods was still the realm of the divine which should be the ideal goal for the humans to be aiming to. So, the gods definitely took the certain place in Socratic ideology. In *Euthyphro*, although Socrates undermines the proposed idea of the piety, he does not attack or accuse the gods of being the reason for that, but rather questions the societal religious norms directed towards the divine realm. In other words, as was mentioned above, although Socrates seems to dislike the idea of mere mechanical trade, it is more about the flaw of the local belief, rather than the vice of the gods. He seems to disapprove of the lack of spirituality or thought in this very trade. Religiosity is not merely external act of service as it was put<sup>22</sup> - participating in the pious tradition is essential, but it does not constitute the real piety in its whole form, but just a part of it, which could be called a custom or a rite. For Socrates, there must be something contributing

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<sup>20</sup> "Men of Athens, this reputation of mine has come of a certain sort of wisdom which I possess. If you ask me what kind of wisdom, I reply, such wisdom is attainable by man, for to that extents I am inclined to believe I am wise" (Plato, *Apology*, 3)

<sup>21</sup> Alexander Markov, *Socrates: I Know Nothing* (Moscow: AST, 2023)

<sup>22</sup> Richard Kraut, "Socrates, Politics, and Religion", in the *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy*, ed. Nicholas D. Smith and Paul B. Woodruff (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 17.

internally to the faith. So, now pious religiosity lies not only in the exchange of prayers and sacrifices but is mainly dependent on the internal attitude towards the faith.

Gods require people to grow spiritually, and if pious is what dear to gods, then what dear to gods becomes the cultivation of self. For Socrates, there are “unwritten laws” given by the gods that dictate “respect” (σεβειν) for them. As Kraut also puts it, “what he [Socrates] thinks the gods of the city wants from us is that we pursue wisdom by examining ourselves and others”<sup>23</sup>. Apparently, Socratic idea, indeed, lies in the development of the mind or of the soul, which requires more internal effort from humans compared to what Euthyphro explained is needed to please them. Pious is not just about the mechanical rituals, but mostly about the cultivation of one’s mind and soul, cultivation of the divine within oneself, or, in other words, the cultivation of daimonion.

### **Daimonion – the Inner Divine**

Every scholar who studies Socrates inevitably meets the notion of daimonion, or daimonion ti (δαίμωνιον τι – “extraordinary”, “divine sign”, “godlike power”), which the Athenian society considered as dangerous “new divinities of his own”<sup>24</sup>. However, no one really can give an exact accurate definition of what this daimonion is. Even the closest contemporaries of Socrates, such as Plato and Xenophon, disagreed in their definitions of this phenomenon, where the former interpreted it as some kind of conscience, and the latter one explained it as the birds and omens<sup>25</sup>. Nowadays, the scope of interpretations has broadened even more, becoming both a limitation to the research and the opportunity for the interpretive freedom.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>24</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 5.

<sup>25</sup> Julia Kindt, *Revisiting Delphi: Religion and Storytelling in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 107.

What we know for sure is that daimonion became one of the reasons for Socrates' accusations and eventual trial:

Socrates: Strange things <...> since **he says I am a maker of gods, and because I make novel gods and do not acknowledge the old ones** <...>  
Euthyphro: <...> It's because you say that the divine sign comes to you occasionally. **He has logged this indictment because of your innovative religious ideas**<sup>26</sup>

It would be logical to assume that, indeed, Socrates invented new gods, which would be considered a blasphemous act for those times. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to deny that Socrates believed in the existing gods. Actually, even in *Apology*, the philosopher frequently refers to the gods<sup>27</sup> and states that he is obedient to them<sup>28</sup>, and truly believes in them<sup>29</sup>. However, one could argue that the appeals to the gods in the forensic context is not about belief, but about escaping the punishment, i.e., Socrates could use the references to the city gods in order to win over the empathy of the Athenians. So, if indeed *Apology's* god-references can be considered ambiguous in their intentions, we should turn then to other dialogues that has less to do with the potential saving lies.

Xenophon's *The Symposium (The Banquet)* is the work that depicts Socrates as someone who shares the local beliefs and traditions. For example, regarding the pious rites, when Socrates is invited somewhere as a guest, he rejects the invitation as an act that is regarded as pious, according to the code of hospitality, where immediate acceptance would be seen as an offense to the gods<sup>30</sup>. Also, he shares the ideas of mythological origin. Socrates talks about the Eros and admits his strength and might among the Olympians. Indeed, this particular god was considered the mighty beast of whom even the gods are scared, but at the

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<sup>26</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Apollo, Hera, Zeus

<sup>28</sup> "For the word which I will speak is not mine. I will refer you to a witness who is worthy of credit, and will tell you about my wisdom – whether I have any, and of what sort – and that witness shall be the god of Delphi"; "yet he is a god and cannot lie; that would be against his nature"; "...the truth is <...> that god only is wise; and in this oracle he means to say that the wisdom of men is little or nothing <...> and so I go my way, **obedient to god**"; "Men of Athens, I honor and love you; but shall I obey god rather than you" (Plato, *Apology*, 4)

<sup>29</sup> "But that is not the case; for I do believe that there are gods" (Plato, *Apology*, 7)

<sup>30</sup> Markov, *Socrates: I Know Nothing*, 72.

same time he is the one who gifts gods and people with the happiness of love. Apart from mere approval, Socrates shares the beliefs about Eros, when talking about the shoulder which ached for several days<sup>31</sup>. According to the myths, Eros shoulder unbearably suffered from the burn caused by the hot candle wax, and every time the god suffered from inner emotional torments, he suffered physically from the aching shoulder. With his saying, Socrates shows the shared idea with the myth of the inner instability being physically displayed and felt, just like Eros felt it once in the myth. So, Socrates cannot be called a betrayer of the common believe, and therefore daimonion should not be seen as an idea contradicting the existence or importance of the Greek gods, but rather something else.

Though, daimonion still possesses the ambience of special divinity. It is always right, and presumably every human being has it. It is some kind of the divine sprout within the human, which dictates the person what to do in order to cultivate wisdom, knowledge, virtue, piety, etc., depending on the type of definition assigned. I would stick to the idea that daimonion cultivates inner virtue and faith, that, in turn, makes the person genuinely pious through the internal contribution to the belief. It seems that through the cultivation of daimonion the person approaches the divine realm and even can befriend the divine creature and acquire their favour.

It would be interesting to refer to Aristophanes here. Although he is considered an opposer of Socrates, his plays contain the tiny hints on Socratic ideas. For example, in *The Clouds*, Aristophanes places Socrates somewhere above the ordinary people. The thoughts that come to him in the form of the divine Clouds, which serve as a direct reference to the concept of daimonion, made him ascend physically into the realm of the divinity:

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<sup>31</sup> "...no doubt, my shoulder ached for more than five days afterwards, as if I had been bitten by some fell beast, and methought I felt a sort of scraping at the heart" (Xenophon, *The Symposium*, ch.3)

“St: *Hey, who’s the man in the basket – up there? (φέρε τίς γὰρ οὐτος οὐπὶ τῆς κορυφῆς ἀνὴρ)*

<...>

*Student: Socrates*<sup>32</sup>”

“St: *you’re looking down upon the gods up there,*

*In that basket? Why not do it from the ground,*

*If that’s what you’re doing?*

*Socrates: Impossible!*<sup>33</sup>”

Here, of course, the language as the whole situation are hyperbolised and pictured in the context of sarcastic impiety, of which Aristophanes accuses Socrates. Yet, despite the negative reconstruction of Socratic ideology, we could trace the idea of connection between the mastery of daimonion and its divine origin and importance. So, daimonion seems to be a kind of tool that helps the person become pious and dear to the gods, and therefore, in order to become really pious, Athenian believers should cultivate this phenomenon within themselves.

However, it is the very moment that made people think of the dangers of Socratic belief. According to Mamardashvili<sup>34</sup>, such conflicts are inevitable for the society to overcome. It is the conflict between the myth and philosophy which creates the climax point for the intellectual and religious development of the people. This theory claims that myth helps people to explain the ways in which the world and surrounding environment work, including the destinies and decision-making of people. Belief in all-mighty gods juxtaposed

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<sup>32</sup> Aristophanes, *The Clouds*, trans. Ian Johnson, 26-27.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>34</sup> Merab Mamardashvili, *Lectures on Ancient Philosophy. Essay on modern European philosophy* (Saint Petersburg, Russia: Azbuka, 2023)

to the driven people makes it easier to understand the inexplicable events and circumstances. Such way of thinking usually lasts for quite a long time and starts to alter when the new idea comes. Usually, those ideas of novelty scare people because it removes the rug from under the feet in their system of beliefs, creating the conflict. As a result, the creator or the ardent propagators of this new idea often find themselves in disgrace and danger. However, gradually more rational idea takes its place among the beliefs and is eventually absorbed by the new generations.

This is the likely explanation of the reasons why Socrates was misunderstood in his “creation”. In fact, even Plato somewhat explained the reasons for the problems that the spread of the idea of daimonion caused. He assumed that common people would not understand it fully, as not every person is capable of philosophising<sup>35</sup>. Still, people need to believe in something, and therefore spreading the idea of daimonion seemed to be a unjustifiably dangerous action. However, I would argue here, saying that daimonion could serve as a foundation for the shift in the religion, that would require more internal work and effort like cultivation of the virtue and belief. Although even if we assume that the mere idea of daimonion and its cultivation can be quite challenging for the usual person to fully understand, it could be shortened to the thesis-type of explanation that would be comprehensible for the commoners to follow in the religious sense. In fact, it is compatible with what “Socrates” says in *Republic*, when talking about the myths. Briefly, the idea is that if we tell children “correct” and unified stories since early ages, they will absorb and believe in the principles and concepts they were told<sup>36</sup>. It can explain the potential influence of Socratic ideology. Denial of his thoughts by Athenians was apparent as they were not raised in this tradition, nor they were capable of reaching it on their own, so Socratic words would

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<sup>35</sup> Plato, *Republic*, trans. Andrey Egunov (Moscow: AST, 2023), 240-241.

<sup>36</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 80-85.

not have influence on them. Yet, his ideas could influence the next generations, who are still pure in their beliefs. So, if the students of Socrates, seven of whom were especially influential<sup>37</sup>, continued the propagation of their teacher's ideas, it would be easier and more natural for young Athenians to follow the new ideas of religiosity.

In any case, the religious “invention” of Socrates appears to be this very daimonion that seems to be closely related to the internal development of self, making the person virtuous and pious, developing the important concept of kalos kagathos.

### **Kalos Kagathos**

The concept of kalos kagathos (Καλοκαγαθία or καλὸς ἀγαθός) is another essential notion for the Classical Greece. Literally it is translated “beautiful” and “virtuous” and implies the ideal of the Greek person to possess both those features. However, this notion is prone to numerous interpretations. For the times of post-Socratic philosophers this idea meant the symbiosis of the beautiful appearance and the virtue of the soul, but for the times of Socrates was purely mental/moral concept<sup>38</sup>. Beauty and virtue were two sides of the soul intertwined between themselves. It was not that important to be physically attractive as to be internally good.

Socratic daimonion could incorporate the idea of kalokagathia, where internal virtue was, in fact, this very beauty, and therefore it should have been cultivated in attempt to approach the ideal of a man. Generally, I assume that idea of pious daimonion is founded on

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<sup>37</sup> Klaus Döring, “The Students of Socrates”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 24.

<sup>38</sup> Anatoliy Semushkin, “Ancient Collocagation as an Ideal of Perfection, Common to All Mankind”, RUDN Newsettler, no.3 (2007): 54, <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/antichnaya-kalokagatiya-kak-obschechelovecheskiy-ideal-sovershenstva>

the main pillars of virtue (will be discussed below) and conscience, which was also on the rise during approximately the same times.

Conscience, in turn, was the concept that the pious person should have. In Socrates' Proposal for his Sentence, he says: "Someone will say: Yes, Socrates, but cannot you hold your tongue<...>? Now I have great difficulty in making you understand my answer to this. For if I tell you that this would be a disobedience to a divine command, and therefore that I cannot hold my tongue"<sup>39</sup>. By "hold your tongue", "become quiet/calm" is meant (Ἠσυχάζω) in the sense of not feeling ashamed or guilty<sup>40</sup> – the feelings that conscience usually invokes in people for doing certain things. In this particular passage, Socrates implies that he could not disobey the god, because his conscience would not let him do so. Therefore, if the god gave you specific task, you cannot stay calm and should do your best to accomplish. It shows both the important idea of conscience as a cultivation of self, and the partial idea of Socratic piety.

Daimonion uses conscience<sup>41</sup> as one of the tools to dictate people to do what is right and pious. Another thing that daimonion can encourage people to do is cultivate the virtue to "live well"<sup>42</sup>. However, what features exactly should the person cultivate then?

## **Virtue to Praise**

The idea of virtue is not fixed and has changed several times throughout the course of history. For Homer, for example, courage, bravery, co-operation, military strategy belonged

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<sup>39</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 13.

<sup>40</sup> Markov, *Socrates: I Know Nothing*.

<sup>41</sup> I think that it is just a part of the daimonion (reason: we can follow the right path not just by conscience, but duty, or inspiration, or habit).

<sup>42</sup> Julian Dutra, "What Did Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle Think About the Wisdom?", *The University of Chicago*, 2022. <https://wisdomcenter.uchicago.edu/news/wisdom-news/what-did-socrates-plato-and-aristotle-think-about-wisdom>



to the main virtues, and were supposed to be gifted by the gods and was a privilege of certain people, i.e., either you are born with it or without it. However, by the times of Socrates the things have changed, and the idea of virtue was directed to more intellectual or mental course<sup>43</sup>.

Generally, virtue for Ancient Greeks meant “excellence” in any possible field, be it military sphere or knowledge. Mythology does not really help us to understand what the virtue was. Greek Pantheon included the goddess of virtue, whose name is Arete<sup>44</sup>, which is now acquired a common name for virtue as excellence. However, she was an enigma for the mythology too, as did not appear much in the myths that we know of today. For the first time she appears in Xenophon’s account<sup>45</sup> suggesting Heracles two options, namely either following hard but virtuous way, or easy but vicious one. The hero chooses the virtuous way, which is considered to be dear to gods. However, what virtues it dictated is not clearly comprehensible.

It is claimed that by the times of Socrates, knowledge<sup>46</sup>, wisdom, inquiry, and examination of the world<sup>47</sup> were considered virtuous among the thinkers. However, if we talk about the abovementioned universal virtue sharable by gods and humans, I think that wisdom is not the one. Certainly, wisdom is more universal than other things like courage or beauty, as the human must possess the wisdom of when and how to use them for them to be virtuous. Still, the mere wisdom, I believe, does not seem to be the pious virtue. The reason is simple: suppose, the believer has the wisdom of when and how the one should improve the nobleness

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., para 21.

<sup>44</sup> Daughter of Paraxidike (goddess of justice) and sister of Homonoia (oneness of the mind). Became very important in the understanding of justice

<sup>45</sup> Nili Alon Amit, “Xenophon’s Virtue Personified”, *Kentron* 32(32): 138, 2016.

<sup>46</sup> In the sense of knowing how to behave, what to do, what is right and what is wrong

<sup>47</sup> Lorraine Smith Pangle, *Virtue is Knowledge: The Moral Foundations of Socratic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 99-100.

of the soul, but if the believer lacks something to *perform* it, then the piety is not reachable. Therefore, the question of virtue is still quite acute, but the unity and universality of it seems a central idea for Socrates.

This ideology is traceable in other dialogues in relation to the gods of the city. In Xenophon, Socrates says: “Whether indeed Aphrodite be one or twain in personality, the heavenly and the earthly, I cannot tell, for Zeus, who is one and indivisible, bears many titles...”. This is the part which Plato paid more attention to. Pausanias claimed that there were two Aphrodites: one – the goddess of physical attraction and desire, another one – the goddess of the sublime love with the inner beauty, - c belief that was a common thing in Athens. However, Socrates did not approve of duplication/multiplication of the existing gods. It should not be homonymy which after the split broadens the Pantheon, but rather synonymy – one god with different manifestation. Thus, Socrates tried to narrow the scope down, leaving the fixed number of gods with their diverse spheres of influence. In connection with the corresponding virtues, along with the narrowing the Pantheon, Socrates implies the specification of the virtues too, or rather their unification.

What I assume is that the unity of the virtue (in contrast to the individual understanding of virtues, like physical strength for ones, intelligence for others) could serve as an answer to the question of what to consider virtuous if Pantheon gods understand them differently. Each of those gods favour different characteristics, but all of them could agree on sharable virtues that would be considered dear to them, and from Socratic times those are dependent on the choice of the humans whether to cultivate them or not<sup>48</sup>, rather than the external imposition of them. In other words, the humans seem to have certain inherent virtues that are dear to gods, but the responsibility of them lies on humans only.

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<sup>48</sup> Dutra, “What Did Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle Think About Wisdom?”.

Even though the exact virtues seem to remain indefinite, Socrates connects the significant ones to the “nobleness of the soul”<sup>49</sup>. Furthermore, he thinks that gods can be friends with humans, but only with those whom they want to protect and secure. A major part of *The Symposium* is dedicated to the idea that the gods befriend those who are truly virtuous and who master them throughout their lives. One example given of such people was Ganymede:

...gods and heroes, set greater store by friendship of the soul than bodily enjoyment.  
 Thus those fair women whom Zeus, enamoured of their outward beauty, wedded,  
 he permitted mortal to remain; but those heroes whose souls he held in admiration,  
 these he raised to immortality <...> As I maintain it was not for his body’s sake,  
 but for his soul’s that Gannymede was translated to Olympus, as the story goes, by Zeus.  
 And to this his very name bears witness, for is it not written in Homer?  
 Γανυται δετ ακουων<sup>50</sup>  
 <...> and again, in another passage he says:  
 Πυκίνα φρεσι μηδεα ειδωζ<sup>51</sup>  
 <...> Ganymede, therefore, <...> is honoured among the gods, not as one “whose body”,  
 but “whose mind” gives pleasure<sup>52</sup>

In this sense, if we assume that befriending the god or being dear to them is considered pious, then the idea of being pious here is implied to being morally and consciously virtuous. Mainly it depends on the daimonion of the human, which is always friendly to its owner, and tries to lead the human along the righteous way.

The external service to the gods seems to descend already to the background in comparison with the inner cultivation of self. In the very same *Symposium* Socrates notices the boy and the girl who perform some dangerous acrobatic tricks to please the gods. However, he mildly criticises these actions, claiming that it would not please the gods to the same extent as internal virtue would: “Just now I am speculating by what means your boy and girl may pass a happy time, and the spectators still derive the greatest pleasure from beholding them”<sup>53</sup>. Mere static imitation of the gods from the outside, and mastery of the

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<sup>49</sup> “the gods themselves, it would appear, delight in nobleness of soul” (Xenophon, *The Symposium*, ch.4).

<sup>50</sup> “pleased to listen to his words”

<sup>51</sup> “knowing wise counsels in his mind”

<sup>52</sup> Xenophon, *The Symposium*, ch.8.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, ch.7.

inner virtue or knowledge is what could be both simple and dear to gods<sup>54</sup>. Hereby, internality and more importantly sincerity<sup>55</sup> of virtue is what ascends to the pedestal of Socratic religiosity.

Daimonion, in turn, in the sense of the inner voice that dictates what choice to make and what to do, serves as a provider and propagator of the virtue for the humans. Moreover, it becomes the constitute of the new Socratic religiosity. The anthropocentric shift in the religion happens not through neglecting the might and importance of existing gods assigning divine features to the human, but through imposing the responsibility on the humans' inner growth. Now, humans acquire own significant independent place in the system, where the question of piety is based on their daimonion. They still believe in the gods and praise them as divine, and prove this faithfulness both through the rituals ("trade" between humans and gods) and own choices in favour of righteousness and moral virtue.

### **Aristophanic Socrates: a City Madman or Misunderstood Genius?**

As we do not possess many accurate accounts on the life of Socrates, it would be wrong to neglect the works of his rivals and opponents. One of such famous accounts could be considered to be Aristophanes' play called *The Clouds* that portrays the philosopher in a mocking unflattering way. Even though at the first glance the sarcastic account on Socrates may seem a strange thing to explore, I believe that Aristophanes, intentionally or not, describes the ideas of Socrates, and implicitly presents him in a somewhat a favourable light.

Generally, the exact relationships between both is not known. One of the theories say that Aristophanes, "the Father of the Comedy", did not like Socrates and therefore made him

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<sup>54</sup> Markov, *Socrates: I Know Nothing*, 122-123.

<sup>55</sup> "Never fear (he answered), if only people see your loyalty to virtue is genuine, not of mere repute. A false renown indeed is quickly seen for what it is worth, being tested; but true courage(virtue perpetually amidst the storm and stress of circumstance pours forth a brighter glory" (Xenophon, *The Symposium*, ch.8)

the main antagonist of his plays. However, later they became friends and gathered together already in Plato's *Symposium*. Others claim that they did not know each other at all, and Aristophanes just gathered the collective image from the words and rumours of the Athenians, later inventing the character from the popular opinion. In any case, it is almost impossible to understand their real attitudes towards one another, at least with existing evidence. We also cannot rely on Plato in this matter, as due to the age difference, he simply could not witness their potential argument during the times of *The Clouds* already, i.e. 423 BC. Therefore, we only have the text of the play to judge on their relationships, and although it is conventionally thought of as the totally critical work, I trace the moments which both present Socratic ideologies and even partially redeem his name.

The play is based on three main characters: Strepsiades, Pheidippides, and Socrates. The first two are the Athenians, the father (old generation) and the son (young generation) respectively. However, their characters, who should have been the positive antipodes of Socrates, are far from being ideal. The issues with them occur already at the beginning of the play. Contextually, Strepsiades is suffering from large debts, and tries to find the way to escape them, and therefore wants to learn the Worse Argument<sup>56</sup> (Αδικος Λογος) from Socrates to do it. In Classical Athens, the debt topic was quite strict, and not paying it was considered highly wrong action<sup>57</sup>. So, Strepsiades appears on the stage already under the negative light.

Yet, suppose Strepsiades is later rehabilitated in front of the Athenians once he burns down the Thinkery, the ambiguity of his and Pheidippides' "protagonism" remains

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<sup>56</sup> "That those men have two kinds of arguments – /The Better, whatever that they mean, /and the Worse. Now, of these two arguments, /**The Worse can make an unjust case and win**" (Aristophanes, *The Clouds*, 15)

<sup>57</sup>Laurent Gauthier, "The Meaning of Debt in Classical Greece", *HAL*, 2022.

ambiguous. The strangeness of their behaviour is tightly connected to the religious theme.

For example:

*“Strepsiades [hereinafter in quotes: St]: Tell me this – do you love me?”*

*Pheidippides [hereinafter in quotes: Ph]: Yes, I do, **by Poseidon**, lord of horses*

*St: Don’t give me that lord of horses stuff*

*He’s the god who’s causing all my troubles<sup>58</sup>”*

Different sources give different interpretations and spellings of the word Poseidon, which confuses the clarity of understanding. In original it says “νή τὸν Ποσειδῶ τουτοῖ τὸν ἵππιον”, where Ποσειδῶ in archaic Greek stands for the god Poseidon<sup>59</sup>. This is the first point in the comedy where the traditional religiosity of the youth can be questioned. Given that the geographical parameter of the work is set in Classical Athens, the oath given in the name of Poseidon seems quite unusual. The reason behind it lies in the mythological contest between Athena and Poseidon over the Athens and its inhabitants’ loyalty. Although god of water has gifted people with beautiful white horses, he yielded the patronage to Athena, and the city fell out of his favour, i.e. Athenians did not only lack support and help from Poseidon, but even considered him to be a kind of enemy to the city. This belief was rooted deep in society right from the moment Athens were called as such, and therefore the appeal to the rival-god which came out from the mouth of Pheidippides, the Athenian, becomes a moment to consider.

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<sup>58</sup> Aristophanes, *The Clouds*, 11-13.

<sup>59</sup> A Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “Ποσειδῶν,” accessed Feb 23, 2024, [https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=\\*poseidw=n](https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=*poseidw=n)

One of the possible ways to interpret it is the conflict between the fathers and children, where the latter leaned to different societal and religious norms. If we consider Pheidippides the representative of the new generation of Athenians, then it could serve as a literary trope used to show the corruption of the youth in terms of the religious re-thinking. However, if Aristophanes accused Socrates of being a corruptor of the youth, but Pheidippides was corrupted before the encounter with Socrates, could the philosopher still be considered as such? Many scholars agree on the point that Aristophanes, actually, did not depict Socrates as a corruptor, but, in fact, criticised young generation of their own unwelcomed behaviour<sup>60</sup>. The gods, the mythological contexts of their actions, and the conventional principles of faith become less important for new generation. The dissatisfaction of Strepsiades with the answer of his son demonstrates the clear nonsense-type reaction to the non-traditional beliefs.

Still, there is another possibility of understanding this passage the main idea of which lies in the primitive “silliness” of the character, which seems to be the more likely option of interpretation. Pheidippides (Φειδιππιδης) in the comedy is pictured as a young man obsessed with horses and races. Even his name is a telling name, where the second half (“ἵππος”) literally means “horse”. The only god in the Greek Pantheon who is considered a patron of those animals is Poseidon. So, his promise in the god’s name can also be regarded as nothing more than mere literary hyperbolism to strengthen the horse-association assigned to Pheidippides. The swear by Poseidon in this case seems just a ridiculous talking out of turn, and the flippant response originated in the silliness of the character. Also, the further

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<sup>60</sup> Artemiy Razumnov, “The Figure of Socrates in Aristophanes’ Comedy *The Clouds*”, *Young Scientist* 52(394): 351.

narration refutes the corruption of this particular young man by the philosophers, which supports his innate non-traditional religiosity:

*“Ph: Who are these men? [in Thinkery].*

*St: I’m not sure*

*Just what they call themselves, but they’re good men,*

*Fine, deep-thinking intellectual types*

*Ph: Nonsense! They’re worthless bunch. I know them –*

*You’re talking about pale-faced charlatans...<sup>61</sup>”*

Despite the abovementioned passage denies the inclination of Pheidippides to the new belief system, I still consider this moment worth further examination. Somehow it gives two interesting moments to think about: 1) If appeal to Poseidon was not because of lesser religiosity, but because of, shall I say, silliness, then why would Aristophanes apply it to someone like Pheidippides, the explicit opposer of Socrates, who is actually an antagonist in the comedy?; 2) Why would old generation representative support the idea about “corrupting” philosophers, rather than deny it? Thus, Socrates already seems less a villain in the play. He is still undeniably an antagonist, but the Athenians pictured here are no less strange in their ideas and words.

Antagonism of Socrates is then represented, if not through corruption of the youth, then through the invention of new gods<sup>62</sup>:

*“St: you’re looking down upon the gods up there,*

*“In that basket? Why not do it from the ground,*

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<sup>61</sup> Aristophanes, *The Clouds*, 13-15.

<sup>62</sup> It is not verified that Aristophanes accused Socrates particularly of those two things. I apply here the two main accusations of Socrates during the trial, which happened quarter a century after *The Clouds*.



*If that's what you're doing?*

*Socrates: Impossible! <...>*

*St: <...> I promise you I'll pay – by all the Gods!*

*Socrates: What gods do you intend to swear by?*

*To strat with, the gods hold no currency with us (τῶ γὰρ ὄμνυτ ἢ σιδαρέοισιν ὡσπερ ἐν Βυζαντίῳ;”<sup>63</sup>*

Again, the formulation of the passages is quite ambiguous: if we consider it a negative view of Socrates, then the philosopher dares to put himself above the Pantheon and reject the sacred promises given in the name of the gods; however, if we consider more positive view of Socrates, then the tables are turned – Socrates does not believe the escaper of the debts and does not want him to sin by making the knowingly impossible oath. Regarding the position of Socrates, it could possibly refer to the divine realm which appears reachable for certain people, supporting the point of Socrates of befriending the gods through virtue. Generally, philosophy of the thinker is certainly hypertrophied in the play, but still mentioned:

*“Socrates: No—they're heavenly Clouds, great goddesses for lazy men—from them we get our thoughts, our powers of speech, our comprehension, our gift for fantasy and endless talk, our power to strike responsive chords in speech and then rebut opponents' arguments” <...><sup>64</sup>*

*“Socrates: You didn't realize these goddesses support a multitude of charlatans—prophetic seers from Thurium, quacks who specialize in books on medicine, lazy long-haired types with onyx signet rings, poets who produce the twisted choral music for dithyrambic songs, those with airy minds— all such men so active doing nothing the Clouds support, since in their poetry these people celebrate the Clouds”<sup>65</sup>*

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 29-31.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 41.

First of all, the brightest moment to see is the declaration of the Clouds to be the goddesses, and the assignment of the might to them. Aristophanes makes the speech clearly sarcastic and mocks the representatives of the “intellectual” occupations and activities who are pictured here as the worshipers of the Clouds. Still, it is interesting to observe the Socratic thought reflected through the prism of Aristophanes’ view. Clouds are faceless, indifferently, yet very powerful gifting people with the precious abilities to speak, to think, to dream, which seem to be the most important abilities for Socrates and the society of the Thinkery. There is certainly something new in the understanding of divinity, which could refer to daimonion. Plus, the “polytheistic” nature is saved as the Clouds are plural and always come in groups (particularly here in choirs), which could hint on the shared belief in the Pantheon-type of faith.

In certain way, the hints on the rise of the anthropocentrism can be traced. Roughly speaking, the traditional Pantheon provides people with its help somewhat externally, i.e. impose the help on them, excluding people from the responsible role in the system. It is not usually the people themselves who independently generate and decide and take the action. Rather it is the gods who lead them, rendering temporary but divinely powerful assistance, i.e. the person is accompanied by the god implicitly for a period of time (the period until the appeal for the help “expires”) and is shown the signs or hints or manifestations of the gods themselves that the person is supposed rigorously follow. Thus, the person becomes mostly dependent on this assistance and providence, and rarely they decide something on their own giving it up for the unconditional predominantly doubtless belief.

The Clouds for the Aristophanes’ Socrates are of another approach. They raise the ability of a human to decide for themselves basing their choices on the foundation of thought, fantasy, assumptions, prognostics and knowledge. The tables are sort of turned here: it is not

only the gods who have power now, but the humans too. The Clouds are of higher significance for the Thinkery, because they encourage their subordinates to think and to reflect on their own, i.e. they grow the divine from the inside, from the mind and from the soul. Something that the mythical gods were imposing on the humans externally only under their omnipresent supervision, the Clouds seem to increase internally by planting the sprouts inside the humans while the latter are among them and then letting people keep on growing those on their own terms. Again, in certain sense the idea seems to be consistent with the notion of Socrates' daimonion – something divine within oneself, where the development of it depends on the human. That is the reason that “elevated” Socrates to his basket – the daimonion of the self in the form of the Clouds helped the philosopher to reach the divine realm. In such progression the ideas seem to mirror the ones in *The Symposium* of Xenophon.

The deity-worth reference to the Clouds seems to be consistent with the point about the thoughts which are airy in nature, and therefore should surround the thinker for him to reach the divine truth (“*if I did not suspend my mind up high, to mix my subtle thoughts with what's like them – the air*<sup>66</sup>”). The only apparent criticism of Aristophanes here would be this very assignment of the airy substance to divinity. According to the canons of the Classical Greek playwriting, airy metaphors implied something that is big or voluminous, that has shape yet empty or meaningless inside<sup>67</sup>. Therefore, the author is still highly suspicious of the new inventions of Socrates, though seems not very critical of Socrates' figure, as it is usually assumed. The whole play remains a separate topic for a thorough research, but already the passages mentioned presents Aristophanes' work in a new light. His play acquires the sense of constant dichotomy: it is about old or new, praising or criticizes, Athenians or Socrates,

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>67</sup> Matthew Wright, *The Comedian as Critic: Greek Old Comedy and Poetics* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2022).

etc. The absurdity and paradox of *The Clouds* is pointed out by many scholars<sup>68</sup>, still it gives us the possibility to make Socrates “dear” to Aristophanes in certain sense<sup>69</sup>. If more friendly rather than sarcastic reading is plausible, then the play can be, indeed, examined as a reflection of the philosophy/religiosity of Socrates that worth researching. For my research, Aristophanes’ play surprisingly became the support for Socrates’ associates’ accounts, shedding the light on the topic of religion, daimonion, and its connection with the existing Pantheon.

### **Apollo in Favour?**

Many scholars try to research the special connection between Socrates and god Apollo. Some say that Socrates favoured Apollo in a special way, putting him on a high pedestal among other gods. Others say that their relationships were too foggy to draw any conclusion<sup>70</sup>. Sometimes, Socrates is even compared to the favourites of Apollo, like prophetess Cassandra<sup>71</sup> who was an outcast for the society she lived in. Whatever the real attitude of Socrates towards Apollo was, there are indeed reasons to think about the potential connection between them.

To demonstrate, the figure of Apollo seems especially significant for Socrates during the trial in *Apology*. It was counted that the philosopher appealed to this god 23 times. However, the question arises whether all 23 times Socrates refers to Apollo only. Explicitly Socrates

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<sup>68</sup> Nikolay Grintser, “Who is Greek Comedy Laughing At?”, lecture by Nikolay Grintser, *Arzamas Academy*, March 24, 2016, <https://arzamas.academy/courses/36/2>

<sup>69</sup> In fact, often making the protagonist the object of mockery was purposeful. Superstitions implied that laughing at the person brought him luck and happiness. Also, if one is being laughed at, it means that he is important or well-known to the existing society.

<sup>70</sup> C.D.C. Reeve, “Socrates the Apollonian?”, in *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy*, ed. Nicholas D. Smith and Paul B. Woodruff (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 24.

<sup>71</sup> Jean-Jacques Alrivie, “Socrates with Cassandra. Two Chosen by Apollo Led by Their God Until Death”, in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 85, no.1 (2015).

refers to him just several times by saying “the god of Delphi” (ho theos ho en Delphois)<sup>72</sup>, or using the same construction to refer to this particular god. It is claimed that there is a possibility that Socrates refers to several gods as he does not utter Apollo’s name. Yet, I would say that it is arguable. Not calling him by his name would be consistent with one of the ideologies raised in *Cratylus* that humans misuse the names of the gods in the customary sense, which lessens the level of its sacredness. In any case, Socrates still explicitly refers to Apollo as a “wise” and virtuous god-protector, but does it really imply the favouritism? We should still remember the forensic context, which makes all the appeals to the gods questionable in their nature, and appeal to the most favourite, “most Greek of the gods”<sup>73</sup> adds the power to the pathos, which already confuses the real reasons of such references.

Therefore, we should derive our knowledge of Apollo from other dialogues, and again we encounter a curious phenomenon: Apollo of Socrates is flawless and fully virtuous. It is something that the mythology would argue about. As Reeve observed, Socrates can be called an Apollonian, but not because he favours this god in a special way, but rather because Apollo in references is purely Socratic invention<sup>74</sup>. Examining the dialogue in this new light, it seems that Socratic Apollo is no longer the god in its sense, but rather the phenomenon of the soul which does not yet have its own name.

It seems that Apollo is mostly used as a divine metaphor of a certain kind of inspiration that is gifted to a certain kind of people: “That showed me in an instant that not by wisdom do poets write poetry, but by a sort of genius and inspiration; they are like diviners or soothsayers who also say many fine things, but do not understand the meaning of them”<sup>75</sup>. In

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<sup>72</sup> “and that witness shall be the god of Delphi” (Plato, *Apology*, 3)

<sup>73</sup> Reeve, “Socrates the Apollonian?”, 24.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>75</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 3-4.

*The Clouds* too, some people are influenced by the Clouds more than others: prophets, healers, poets, and those with “airy minds” – all of them are considered to be the representatives of the Apollo’s patronage. Hereby, Socratic Apollo is something or someone that makes people artistic or simply inspired.

One of the possible readings of this notion of “Apollo” is its potential relation to daimonion. In certain sense, both constitute something that would resemble the human brain, where, roughly speaking, left hemisphere (rationality, analysis, thinking) is represented in daimonion, and right one (artistry, creativity, intuition) is somewhat a Socratic Apollo. However, I would also say that in Socrates’ understanding it is also has not much to do with religiosity, unlike daimonion. Socratic Apollo gifts people with the sublime genius features that can possess only certain people. In fact, it complements the abovementioned belief that certain virtues are imposed on people externally, but they are not shared by everyone. In contrast, daimonion is something that has its roots in every human, and therefore can be the pillar of religiosity through cultivation.

Overall, although it remains foggy to surely understand, it is still possible to suppose that Apollo the God was not, in fact, separated from the whole Pantheon of Olympians, but Apollo the Inspiration, as a Socratic invention, was referred to as the certain individual virtues and talents imposed on certain people. Therefore, the notion of Apollo neither neglects the importance of the Pantheon, nor contradicts the concept of daimonion.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, after doing the research, I came to the conclusion that Socrates was a man who believed in divine things, including city gods, and who also developed the spiritually shifted idea of piety. Socratic religiosity required the inclusion of the human’s inner effort into the belief, i.e., the inner demonstration of piety. Socratic daimonion in this understanding

serves as a spiritual invisible guide to self-cultivation. It is not a new god that came to replace the existing Pantheon, but, on the contrary, it is a part of the divinity that is inherent in human and that dictates what to do in order to establish the internal connection to the gods. Thus, the person could reach the divine realm spiritually and become closer to the gods which “befriend” people with the “nobleness of the soul” acquired through cultivation of virtue. From this moment on, the idea of religiosity takes a slight shift towards humans in the sense that people become an inevitable and constant part of the belief system – now they are responsible for own piety, and have to cultivate the inner self to become a pious believer.

### **Further Studies**

One of the limitations of my research was exclusion of the post-Socratic works on the topic of religiosity. Therefore, one vector of the further observation can be the tracing the progression of Socratic religiosity in the works of the following generations, starting from Plato, Aristotle in Greece, to Cicero in Rome, up to modern days. If the idea persists, it would be the great support for this projects. Besides, if the idea not just persists but develops, it would be possible to choose another vector of research such as the examination of the influence that Ancient Greek ideas of piety had on the development of the Abrahamic religion, which also require the cultivation of self and sincere inner faith.

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