

DIVINE EPIPHANY AND POLITICAL AUTHORITY IN PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*

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Abstract: This article offers a new interpretation of the second 'theological' pattern in Plato's *Republic*. Situating Plato within his religious context, it argues that this pattern calls into question the traditional ancient model of divine epiphany. Divine epiphany was a central element in Greek religion. Yet, in the absence of a centralized religious organization, this model threatened the philosophers' authoritative position. Plato's second pattern seeks not only to undermine this potential threat but also to pave the way towards a new, philosophical model of divine epiphany, thus further establishing the philosophers' authority and legitimacy within and outside his ideal city.

Keywords: Plato, *Republic*, Divine epiphany, Greek religion, Political authority.

Introduction

In Book II of the *Republic*, when outlining the educational programme for the young guardians of the ideal city (*Kallipolis*), Socrates establishes two patterns (*topoi*) for a proper discourse about the gods (*theologia*) to be used by the city's poets as they compose their stories (*logoi*) and fables (*muthoi*).² The first pattern establishes that god is perfectly good, and as such can only be the cause of good things. The second pattern determines that 'god is entirely simple and true (*haploun kai alēthes*) in both word and deed, and neither changes himself nor deceives (*exapata*) others by means of appearances, words, or the sending of signs' and that the gods 'are neither themselves sorcerers (*goētas*) who change themselves nor do they mislead us by falsehoods (*pseudesi*) in word or deed' (382e–383a).³

Studies of these passages have tended, in general, to focus on the first pattern and on the claim that god must be perfectly good and cause only good. There are, of course, excellent reasons for such focus. Socrates' claim that the god must be good fits well with the theological position found in earlier Platonic dialogues — most notably the *Euthyphro* and the *Apology*.⁴ Furthermore, it corresponds to what scholars consider to be Socrates' most fundamental

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² I will use the term 'theology' throughout the article in this literal sense of a discourse, *logos*, about the gods. As will be made clear in the article, however, Greek religion was quite different from the systematic and comprehensive system of beliefs and dogmas that we typically associate with the term.

³ All citations given in the text are to Plato's *Republic*. Translations are my own, unless otherwise noted, and are based on the latest OCT edition: *Respublica*, ed. S.R. Slings (Oxford, 2003).

⁴ In both dialogues, Socrates criticizes the theological principles that are found in epic poetry and the religious beliefs held in Athens and offers his radical new ideas about the nature of divinity and piety (for example, *Apol.* 21b, *Euthy.* 6b–c).

and radical teaching about the gods⁵ and to earlier developments in Greek theology.⁶ Perhaps most crucially, the first pattern plays an important role in Plato's attack on epic poetry in the *Republic* and his critique and rejection of the work of Homer and Hesiod. These works, so central to Greek theology and understanding of the divine, often depict the gods as violating every imaginable moral norm and as the authors of harm to humans and other gods, and thus must be rejected or at least heavily censored (379d).⁷

Unlike the first pattern, the second pattern has received significantly less scholarly attention, and its meaning remains very much debated. This is due, at least in part, to the ambiguity that is built into the pattern, which includes at least three distinct — although connected — claims: (a) god is perfect and simple, and thus would not change to anything inferior; (b) god will not appear to humans in waking visions or dreams; and (c) god will not lie or deceive. As Long has observed, it is not clear why Plato should insist on these divine attributes at this point.⁸ Why, then, does Plato include these claims at such a crucial moment in the *Republic*? What is the meaning of Plato's second pattern, what does it aim to achieve, and what is so important about it that deserves its inclusion among the *Republic*'s two theological principles?

Among those who have addressed these questions, two general lines of argument are common. First, some have argued that the second pattern should be understood as part of Plato's theory of the divine Form of the Good and as anticipating this later metaphysical-theological discussion in *Republic* VI. Long, for example, argues that in the two patterns of Book II, 'Plato is preparing his readers here for the Form of the Good'.⁹ Similarly, Benitez holds that 'although the subject of this passage is theology, the language is the same as that used elsewhere of Platonic forms, and clearly exhibits a tendency towards

⁵ Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca, 1991), pp. 158–76; M.F. Burnyeat, 'The Impiety of Socrates', *Ancient Philosophy*, 17 (1977), pp. 1–12; Mark L. McPherran, 'Socratic Religion', in *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates*, ed. Donald R. Morrison (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 111–37.

⁶ For example, it corresponds well to Xenophanes' earlier critique of Homer's and Hesiod's attribution of immoral behaviour to the gods. Walther Kranz, *Die Fragmente Der Vorsokratiker*, Vol. 1 (Zürich, 1985), frg. B11.

⁷ G.R.F. Ferrari, 'Plato and Poetry', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, ed. G. Kennedy (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 92–148; Jessica Moss, 'What Is Imitative Poetry and Why Is It Bad?', in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, ed. G.R.F. Ferrari (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 415–44.

⁸ Anthony Long, 'Politics and Divinity in Plato's *Republic*: The Form of the Good', in *Themes in Plato, Aristotle, and Hellenistic Philosophy*, ed. Fiona Leigh, Vol. 141 (Chicago, 2020), p. 71.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

metaphysical abstraction'.¹⁰ Alternatively, a significant group of scholars has argued that Plato is mainly concerned here with the problem of lying and deception and that the key message of the second pattern is that the gods would never lie or deceive.¹¹ Mikalson, for example, argues that the second pattern shows that 'divinatory signs, including dreams and day-visions, come from god; god by his nature is truthful; therefore "signs" from god "can be trusted"'.¹² Similarly, Vlastos holds that we should read the second pattern as an extension of the first. According to him, 'Socrates' god is invariably good, incapable of causing any evil to anyone in any way at any time. Since to deceive a man is to do evil to him, Socrates' god cannot be lying'.¹³

While such explanations are very plausible and well-supported by the text, they nonetheless fall short of providing a full account of the meaning of the second pattern and the reason for Plato's insistence on it. Although the theological patterns of Book II should certainly not contradict the general characteristics of the divine Form of the Good in Book VI, the context and language of the passage — where Socrates discusses the content of the stories that will be told to children — suggest that Plato is mainly concerned here with the Olympian gods found in popular stories and mimetic representations, and not the abstract divinities of the Forms. Similarly, while the question of divine deception is surely crucial for our interpretation of the second pattern, the interpretive focus on this problem has resulted in a number of unanswered questions. First, while the primary motive behind the first pattern is to prevent the depiction of immoral divine behaviour from corrupting the souls of the guardians, this cannot be the reason for the second pattern, since Plato explicitly permits and even encourages the philosophers to use lies and deception (382c, 414c, 459c–460a).¹⁴ Similarly, such interpretation is not easily reconcilable with the fact that for Plato in particular and the ancient Greeks in gen-

¹⁰ Rick Benitez, 'Plato and the Secularisation of Greek Theology', in *Theologies of Ancient Greek Religion*, ed. Esther Eidinow, Julia Kindt and Robin Osborne (Cambridge, 2016), pp. 309–10.

¹¹ Jon D. Mikalson, *Greek Popular Religion in Greek Philosophy* (Oxford, 2010), p. 122; Vlastos, *Socrates*, p. 176; Gerd van Riel, *Plato's Gods* (Farnham, 2013), pp. 40–2; Nicholas R. Baima and Tyler Paytas, 'True in Word and Deed: Plato on the Impossibility of Divine Deception', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 58 (2) (2020), pp. 193–214.

¹² Mikalson, *Greek Popular Religion*, p. 122.

¹³ Vlastos, *Socrates*, p. 176.

¹⁴ Cf. Malcolm Schofield, 'The Noble Lie', in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, ed. C.R.F. Ferrari (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 138–64; Michael A. Rinella, 'Revisiting the Pharmacy: Plato, Derrida, and the Morality of Political Deceit', *Polis*, 24 (1) (2007), pp. 134–53; Carl Page, 'The Truth About Lies in Plato's Republic', *Ancient Philosophy*, 11 (1991), pp. 1–33.

eral, lying was not perceived as categorically wrong.¹⁵ Finally, and most importantly for the purposes of this paper, this interpretation fails to account for the pattern's preoccupation with divine *appearance*. Even if the gods, being perfectly good, should never lie to humans, why should they not deceive humans *in their appearance* (appearing to them in disguise) in order to convey *true* messages and knowledge?

This article addresses these difficulties by offering a novel interpretation of the second theological pattern in *Republic II*. Following in the footsteps of scholars who urge us to take Plato's religious context seriously,¹⁶ it argues that the primary purpose of Plato's second pattern is to challenge and call into question one of the central features of Greek theology: divine epiphany. Arguing so, this article interprets Plato as continuing a long tradition of philosophical engagement with theology and divinity. Situating Plato within the 'soil of Hellenistic faith' in which he grew,¹⁷ it follows Nightingale's claim that 'to understand his philosophy, we need to locate his ideas in the context of Greek religious discourses and practices'.¹⁸ It is hard to overstate the centrality of divine epiphany to this religious context. As Platt has shown, epiphany 'might be understood as the purest form of contact between mortals and immortals' and 'play a crucial role within Greek "theology" in that they provide . . . "cognitive reliability", both for the gods' very existence and the iconographic conventions or innovations by which they were known to their worshippers'.¹⁹ As we will see, the ability of gods and goddesses to appear to human beings in the shape of humans or animals was central to the Greeks' understanding of divinity and divine power, and the occurrences of divine epiphanies are described or documented in epic poetry, historiography, inscriptions and cult practices.

Reading the second pattern in this context, this article argues, allows us to see that its primary purpose is to call into question the theological principle of divine epiphany. Specifically, it argues that the second pattern is meant to achieve two goals: first, to undermine the traditional theological model of divine epiphany, which holds that the gods can, in principle, appear to any

¹⁵ Jane S. Zembaty, 'Plato's Republic and Greek Morality on Lying', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 26 (4) (1988), pp. 517–45; Malcolm Schofield, *Plato* (Oxford, 2006), p. 297; W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. IV (Cambridge, 1975), p. 457.

¹⁶ E.R. Dodds, 'Plato and the Irrational Soul', in *Plato, A Collection of Critical Essays II: Ethics, Politics, and Philosophy of Art and Religion*, ed. Gregory Vlastos (New York, 1971), p. 206; Long, 'Politics and Divinity', p. 64.

¹⁷ Peter Hünemann, 'Das Göttliche Gute Platons', *Philosophisches Jahrbuch*, 75 (1967), p. 268.

¹⁸ Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Philosophy and Religion in Plato's Dialogue* (Cambridge, 2021), p. 18.

¹⁹ Verity Platt, 'Epiphany', in *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Greek Religion*, ed. Esther Eidinow and Julia Kindt (Oxford, 2015), p. 787.

individual; and second, to prepare the ground for Plato's alternative model of divine epiphany in *Republic VI*, where the possibility of such epiphanic experience will be limited to the domain of philosophy. The first goal, I will argue, is meant to address the challenge posed by the standard model of divine epiphany to both political and religious authority. As we will see, divine epiphany could be experienced, in principle, by any individual, and such an encounter with the divine has often led to substantial sociopolitical outcomes and conferred significant authority and status on the individual who has experienced it. By calling into question this traditional understanding of divine epiphany, Plato seeks to limit the possibility that such experience may generate an alternative to the knowledge and authority of the philosophers within and outside the ideal city. The second goal — preparing the ground for Plato's alternative model of divine epiphany in *Republic VI* — can be viewed as the other side of the same coin. As I will argue, Plato's discussion of the nature of philosophical knowledge and the Form of the Good in Book VI explicitly *appropriates* the theological discourse of divine epiphany in order to limit the possibility of the epiphanic experience — together with the divine knowledge and authority that are associated with it — to the domain of philosophy, which contributes to his attempt to establish the philosopher as the only legitimate political authority.

The article proceeds as follows: the first section offers a brief account of the role of divine epiphany in Greek theology and religious experience. As we will see, divine epiphanies are commonly found in epic poetry, historiography, inscriptions and cult practices and had some real and significant sociopolitical implications. The second section focuses on these sociopolitical implications and discusses the ways in which divine epiphany may pose a fundamental problem to political order and authority and thus undermine the Platonic political project of the *Republic*. In light of this, it offers a novel interpretation of the second theological pattern in *Republic II* and argues that it is primarily designed to call into question the traditional model of divine epiphany. Finally, the third section turns to *Republic VI* and to Plato's discussion of the nature of philosophical knowledge and the divine Form of the Good. It argues that Plato's use of the language and terminology of divine epiphany in this context corresponds to his rejection of the traditional model of divine epiphany in *Republic II*. By appropriating the language and terminology of divine epiphany and applying it to the practice of philosophy, Plato seeks to further establish the political and theological authority of the philosophers and to undermine any alternative claims to authority from poets, priests or laymen alike.

I

Divine Epiphany in Greek Religion and Theology

It is hard to overstate the importance and centrality of divine epiphany to Greek theology and religious experience. The anthropomorphism of the gods was one of the key features of the Greek concept of divinity, a feature that grounded the possibility of the physical manifestation of the gods in dreams and waking visions. Thus, as Henrichs' concludes, 'if we could go back in time and put the question [what is a god] to an ordinary Greek from the classical period, he might tell us that "I know one when I see one", thus relying on his own inner certainty and experience of seeing gods in dreams and waking visions'.²⁰ For the Greeks, divine epiphany — normally described by variations of the verbs *phainesthai* (come to light, appear) or *epiphainesthai* (show oneself, appear) — denoted direct and manifest revelations of a god or a goddess, in sleep or waking reality, in the form of a human or an animal. During such episodes, 'humans detected the god's presence by the radiance and miraculousness of its bodily form'²¹ and by 'his or her extraordinary beauty, stature and majesty'.²² This (mostly) anthropomorphic disguise appears as a necessity, since 'a sudden encounter with the divine . . . when undisguised and in full majesty, may result in a wide spectrum of disasters for its human perceiver(s)'.²³

Given the anthropomorphism of the Greek gods and their disguised appearance in epiphanic episodes, it should come as no surprise that divine appearances were mediated by and experienced through the Greek cultural context.²⁴ Within this cultural context, the influence of Homer on Greek theology and religious education is probably unrivalled by any other source. The Homeric text is full of depictions of divine epiphanies. In *Odyssey* III, for example, Athena appears to Nestor as an old man, and 'so spoke the goddess, flashing-eyed Athena, and she departed appearing (*eidomenē*) as a vulture; and amazement (*thambos*) fell upon all who saw it, and the old man marvelled (*thaumazden*), when he saw it with his eyes'.²⁵ In *Iliad* I, to mention another example, Athena appears to Achilles alone,

while he pondered this in mind and heart, and was drawing from its sheath
his great sword, Athene came from heaven . . . She stood behind him, and

²⁰ A. Henrichs, 'What Is a Greek God?', in *The Gods of Ancient Greece*, ed. R. Bremmer and A. Erskine (Edinburgh, 2010), p. 19.

²¹ Nightingale, *Philosophy and Religion*, p. 11.

²² Maria Michela Sassi, 'Where Epistemology and Religion Meet: What Do(es) the God(s) Look Like?', *Rhizomata*, 1 (2) (2013), p. 287.

²³ Georgia Petridou, *Divine Epiphany in Greek Literature and Culture* (Oxford, 2016), p. 30.

²⁴ Platt, 'Epiphany', p. 787; Gabriel Herman, 'Greek Epiphanies and the Sensed Presence', *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte*, 60 (2) (2011), p. 144.

²⁵ Homer, *Odyssey* 3.371–3, trans. A.T. Murray.

seized the son of Peleus by his fair hair, appearing to him alone (*oiō phainomenē*). No one of the others saw her. Achilles was seized with wonder (*thambēsen*), and turned around, and immediately recognized Pallas Athene. Terribly her eyes shone.²⁶

Divine epiphanies also appear frequently in Greek historiography. While Thucydides is famous for his reluctance to include the gods as actors in the narrative of his work,²⁷ Herodotus' *Histories* include several important epiphanic episodes. Among them, perhaps the most famous is the epiphany of Pan to Philippides — the Athenian long-distance runner sent to Sparta by the Athenians in Marathon. According to Herodotus,

as Philippides himself said when he brought the message to the Athenians, when he was in the Parthenian mountain above Tegea Pan fell-upon him (*periptei*). Pan called out Philippides' name and bade him ask the Athenians why they paid him no attention, though he was of goodwill to the Athenians, had often been of service to them, and would be in the future. The Athenians believed that these things were true, and when they became prosperous they established a sacred precinct of Pan beneath the Acropolis. Ever since that message they propitiate him with annual sacrifices and a torch-race.²⁸

Finally, we should note that divine epiphany was not only found in literary sources but was also an integral part of everyday religious life.²⁹ Evidence for this is found both in inscriptions — such as the Meneia or Isyllos Inscriptions³⁰ — and cult practices. Among such cult practices, the Eleusinian Mysteries were probably the most famous Greek festival and the most central Athenian cult practice. Nightingale explains:

The Eleusinian mysteries featured two initiation ceremonies: the individual (male or female) went through the first initiation as a *mystēs* at Agrai in Athens, and the second as an *epoptēs* at Eleusis. In the first initiation, the *mystēs* learns about the gods but remains blind to the divinities (*muein* means 'to close' the eyes or lips); in the second initiation, the individual sees a divine revelation as an *epoptēs* ('he who sees'). At the climax of the second initia-

²⁶ Homer, *Iliad* 1.193–200, trans. A.T. Murray.

²⁷ Religion, however, is by no means absent from Thucydides' account, and the *History* is full of references to religious practices and beliefs. See Borimir Jordan, 'Religion in Thucydides', *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 116 (1986), pp. 119–47.

²⁸ Herodotus, *Histories* 6.105.1–3, trans. Godley.

²⁹ Henrichs, 'What Is a Greek God?', p. 34.

³⁰ For a thorough review of such evidence, see Verity Platt, *Facing the Gods: Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature and Religion* (Cambridge, 2011).

tion ceremony, the *epoptēs* saw (or were supposed to see) an epiphany of the goddess.³¹

Epiphany, therefore, was central to the religious practice and experience of the Mysteries, which included the enactment of the myth of Demeter and Persephone by the Eleusinian clergy with the initiates as spectators.³²

As this short review suggests, divine epiphany was central to ancient Greek theology and an integral part of the Greek religious life and experience. The anthropomorphic gods and goddesses, which every Greek would recognize from their poetic and artistic representations, were normally thought to be able to reveal themselves in various forms to individuals and groups, in waking thoughts or dreams. Stories of divine revelations and epiphany are found not only in Greek theology, mythology and historiography but also in inscriptions and cult practices. This, in turn, suggests that divine epiphany was a serious religious experience for the ancient Greeks. As we will see in the next section, this experience had some profound social and political implications which, as I will argue in detail, were taken seriously by Plato.

II

Plato's Second Topos and the Problem of Epiphany

Having briefly discussed the nature of divine epiphany and its role in ancient Greek theology and religious life, we may now begin to evaluate Plato's treatment of epiphany in the *Republic*. As I will argue in this section, the traditional model of divine epiphany posed some serious problems for Plato. Specifically, given the decentralized nature of divine epiphany and the close relationship between such epiphanic experiences and local social and political practices, the traditional model of divine epiphany posed a challenge to the political authority of the philosophers within and outside Plato's ideal city. I begin this section with an outline of this challenge, followed by a reconstruction of Plato's second pattern in *Republic* II. By placing the second pattern in the relevant religious and cultural context, we see that it is primarily designed to reject the traditional model of divine epiphany and pave the way to a new, philosophical model of epiphany.

³¹ Nightingale, *Philosophy and Religion*, pp. 34–5; cf. Kevin Clinton, 'Epiphany in the Eleusinian Mysteries', *Illinois Classical Studies*, 29 (2004), p. 87.

³² Robert Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens* (Oxford, 2007), p. 355; Jan N. Bremmer, 'Initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries: A "Thin" Description', in *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices: Studies for Einar Thomassen at Sixty*, ed. Christian H. Bull, Liv Lied and John D. Turner (Leiden, 2012), pp. 383–4.

1. *The Challenge Posed by Divine Epiphany to Political Authority*

While the extent to which Plato (and other ancient philosophers) were concerned with the problems of authority and legitimacy is debated,³³ recent scholarship on Plato has highlighted his attempt to undermine traditional sources of authority and replace them with philosophy. Lloyd, for example, has demonstrated Plato's engagement with the longstanding debates in the classical world about the nature and sources of scientific knowledge and his attempt to call into question traditional forms of authority, such as poetry, prophecy or magic.³⁴ Others have stressed the ways in which Plato's philosophical-political project includes not only an attempt to undermine such traditional sources of authority but also to establish philosophy as the only legitimate source of scientific, religious, moral and political knowledge.³⁵ In this context, the standard model of divine epiphany — most importantly, the belief that the gods can, in principle, appear to any individual and the authority that such an encounter with the divine may confer on an individual — could pose yet another challenge to the authority of philosophy.

The first element in Greek religious life that made the phenomena of divine epiphany potentially problematic was the lack of a centralized religious organization. As McPherran notes, in the ancient world, 'no ancient text such as Homer's *Iliad* had the status of a Bible or a Koran, and there was no organized church, trained clergy, or systematic set of doctrines enforced by them'.³⁶ Furthermore, 'in antiquity, there was no Church, no single institutional hierarchy, no divinely revealed holy scripture, which could authorize a definitive distinction between right and wrong in such matters'.³⁷ Within this institutional context, it becomes clear why a highly individualist phenomenon such as divine epiphany — which could, in principle, occur to anyone, at any time, or in any place — might create some serious challenges. Specifically, how can the community judge whether a divine epiphany occurred or not and whether an individual who claims to have experienced an epiphany is to be trusted? The very nature of the traditional model of epiphany seems to make these questions especially hard to solve. As Henriches remarks, 'authenticity,

³³ M.I. Finley, *Authority and Legitimacy in the Classical City-State* (Copenhagen, 1982), p. 12.

³⁴ G.E.R. Lloyd, *The Revolutions of Wisdom: Studies in the Claims and Practice of Ancient Greek Science* (Berkeley, 1987).

³⁵ Danielle S. Allen, *Why Plato Wrote* (Malden, 2013); Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy: Theoria in Its Cultural Context* (Cambridge, 2004); John Roger Tennant Jr., 'Proverbial Plato: Proverbs, *Gnōmai*, and the Reformation of Discourse in Plato's Republic' (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2019).

³⁶ McPherran, 'Socratic Religion', p. 112.

³⁷ Glenn W. Most, 'Philosophy and Religion', in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy*, ed. David Sedley (Cambridge, 2003), p. 303.

historicity and credibility are fundamental criteria for truth and truthfulness, but they are intrinsically inapplicable to a belief system that promotes personal encounters with the divine in the form of epiphanies'.³⁸

This fundamental problem, and the lack of a clear epistemic way to determine the validity of an epiphany, was further exacerbated by the fact that the Greeks were generally very open to accepting accounts of epiphanic experiences, which often led to the establishment of new cult practices, religious festivals or shrines. We have already seen one example of such a historical instance with the epiphany of Pan to Philippides. In that case, Herodotus tells us, 'the Athenians believed that these things were true, and when they became prosperous they established a sacred precinct of Pan beneath the Acropolis. Ever since that message they propitiate him with annual sacrifices and a torch-race'.³⁹ This example gives us some sense of just how seriously the Athenians, and the Greeks more generally, took such instances of divine epiphany.⁴⁰

The social and political significance of epiphanic experiences can be further demonstrated by another example from Herodotus: the return of Peisistratus to Athens and the false epiphany of Athena. After being driven out of the city by his rivals, the Athenian tyrant Peisistratus and his allies devise a plan for his return to the city and to power. In Herodotus' words:

they devised (*mēchanōntai*) a plan to bring Peisistratus back which, to my mind, was so exceptionally foolish that it is strange (since from old times the Hellenic stock has always been distinguished from foreign by its greater cleverness and its freedom from silly foolishness) that these men should devise such a plan to deceive Athenians, said to be the subtlest of the Greeks. There was in the Paeonian deme a woman called Phya, three fingers short of six feet, four inches in height, and otherwise, too, well-formed. This woman they equipped in full armor and put in a chariot, giving her all the paraphernalia to make the most impressive spectacle (*phaneesthai*), and

³⁸ Henrichs, 'What Is a Greek God?', p. 35. One should note here that while this epistemic problem was not easy to solve, the Greeks did have certain measures to mitigate some of this epistemic uncertainty. The most central among them was, of course, the Delphic oracle. In principle, disputed epiphanic episode could have been inquired with the oracle (Hyperides, *In Defence of Euxenippus*, pp. 14–15), which maintains some role even in Plato's political writings (*R.* 540a; *Laws* 729c, 856c–e). Yet the presence of the oracle could not have solved the fundamental epistemic uncertainty caused by the standard model of divine epiphany, nor could it have been used to confirm all epiphanic experiences (given the time, cost and risk associated with the trip). Finally, this solution would be applied only in disputed cases, and thus could not assist in confirming or rejecting undisputed or generally accepted epiphanic encounters.

³⁹ Herodotus, *Histories* 6.105.3, trans. Godley. For a detailed account of the cult of Pan in both Athenian and Greek religion more generally, see Jennifer Larson, 'A Land Full of Gods: Nature Deities in Greek Religion', in *A Companion to Greek Religion*, ed. Daniel Ogden (Oxford, 2007), pp. 56–70.

⁴⁰ Petridou, *Divine Epiphany*, p. 14; Platt, 'Epiphany', p. 790.

so drove into the city; heralds ran before them, and when they came into town proclaimed as they were instructed: 'Athenians, give a hearty welcome to Pisistratus, whom Athena herself honors above all men and is bringing back to her own acropolis'. So the heralds went about proclaiming this; and immediately the report spread in the demes that Athena was bringing Pisistratus back, and the townsfolk, believing that the woman was the goddess herself, worshipped this human creature and welcomed Pisistratus.⁴¹

Despite Herodotus' surprise that the Athenians fell for such a 'foolish' contrivance, the centrality of epiphany to the Greek religious experience, and the abundance of mimetic representation of epiphanies in art and of enacted epiphany in cult practices and festivals make this story somewhat less surprising. Furthermore, this story reveals an important political aspect of epiphany: the fact that those who have experienced divine epiphany were often perceived as having a special status of being 'favourable' by the gods. Such status, naturally, could easily be translated to both good reputation and political power and legitimacy.⁴²

Therefore, given the anthropomorphism of the Greek gods, the lack of a centralized religious organization, and the general willingness to accept epiphanic experiences, the fact that the gods could, in principle, appear to anyone posed a potential challenge to the establishment of political authority. Specifically, in the absence of any agreed-upon epistemic standard for determining the validity of a given epiphany, and in light of the special status conferred on individuals who have experienced a divine epiphany, the standard model of divine epiphany may produce an alternative source of authority to philosophy. As such, it may undermine the authority of philosophy and philosophers both within and outside the ideal city.

Plato's awareness of this problem is stated explicitly, for example, in the *Laws X*, where the Athenian stranger holds that

It is no easy task to found temples and gods, and to do this rightly needs much deliberation; yet it is customary for all women especially, and for sick folk everywhere, and those in peril or in distress (whatever the nature of the distress), and conversely for those who have had a slice of good fortune, to dedicate whatever happens to be at hand at the moment, and to vow sacrifices and promise the founding of shrines to gods and demi-gods and children of gods; and through terrors caused by waking visions or by dreams,

⁴¹ Herodotus, *Histories* 1.60.3–5, trans. Godley; cf. Aristotle, *Ath. Con.* 14.

⁴² Petridou, for example, argues that 'epiphany provided a minority of privileged individuals with the essential god-sent prestige and validity to resolve certain crises (authorizing function) and subsequently proved itself to be a useful heuristic tool to perpetuate or, alternatively, challenge the current sociopolitical formations and power structure'. Petridou, *Divine Epiphany*, p. 16. Similarly, Platt notes that 'for a mortal to experience an epiphany may be a sign of special status, a privilege granted to mythical heroes and those who are particularly pious, blessed, or desired by the gods'. Platt, *Facing the Gods*, p. 788.

and in like manner as they recall many visions and try to provide remedies for each of them, they are wont to found altars and shrines, and to fill with them every house and every village, and open places too, and every spot which was the scene of such experiences.⁴³

Plato's awareness of this problem has led him to insist in the *Laws* on the public nature of religious rituals and sacrifices, and to enact a law that

no one shall possess a shrine in his own house: when any one is moved in spirit to do sacrifice, he shall go to the public places to sacrifice, and he shall hand over his oblations to the priests and priestesses to whom belongs the consecration thereof; and he himself, together with any associates he may choose, shall join in the prayers.⁴⁴

In the *Republic*, on the other hand, it has led him to radically call into question the traditional model of divine epiphany and undermine its possibility within his theological principles.

2. *Plato's Second Theological Pattern*

In light of this religious context, we are now in a position to re-evaluate the meaning and function of Plato's second pattern in *Republic* II. The second pattern determines that 'god is entirely simple and true (*haploun kai alēthes*) in both word and deed, and neither changes himself nor deceives (*exapata*) others by means of appearances, words, or the sending of signs', and that the gods 'are neither themselves sorcerers (*goētas*) who change themselves nor do they mislead us by falsehoods (*pseudesi*) in word or deed' (382e–383a). As mentioned, the pattern includes at least three distinct yet interconnected theological claims: (a) god is perfect and simple, and thus would not change to anything inferior; (b) god will not appear to humans in waking visions or dreams; and (c) god will not lie or deceive. The most common interpretations of this pattern focus on claims (a) and (c), and either argue for the relationship between this pattern and the nature of the divine Form of the Good in *Republic* VI⁴⁵ or hold that Plato is mainly concerned here with the problem of lying and deception and that the key message of the second pattern is that the gods would never lie or deceive.⁴⁶ In light of the centrality of divine epiphany to Greek theology and religious experience, however, it seems that claim (b) — the idea that the gods cannot and will not appear to humans — is, in fact, the most central claim of the pattern, and perhaps one of the more radical theological principles proposed by Plato in the *Republic*.

⁴³ Plato, *Laws* X 909e–910a, trans. Bury.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 909d–e.

⁴⁵ Long, 'Politics and Divinity', p. 69; Benitez, 'Plato and the Secularisation', pp. 309–10.

⁴⁶ Mikalson, *Greek Popular Religion*, p. 122; Vlastos, *Socrates*, p. 176; van Riel, *Plato's Gods*, pp. 40–2; Baima and Paytas, 'True in Word and Deed'.

In support of this reading, we may first turn to a close interpretation of the relevant passages. The second pattern is first introduced when Socrates asks Adeimantus whether he thinks that ‘god could be a sorcerer (*goēta*) and can treacherously appear (*phantazdesthai*) in different forms at different times, one time changing himself and altering his own form into many shapes, another time deceiving (*apatōnta*) us and making us believe such things about him, or that he is simple (*haploun*) and least likely to step out of his own form?’ (380d). This then leads to the further claim that since god is perfect, any change to a god will be for the worse. Since no god or human would voluntarily choose to change for the worse, ‘it is thus impossible even for a god to wish to change himself but, as it seems, being as beautiful and best as possible, each of them always remains simply in his own form’ (381c).

This discussion, which was identified above as claim (a), is normally referred to as establishing the principle of divine immutability — a theological principle of great importance for Plato’s theory of the Forms as well as for later Christian theology. While these lines undoubtedly deal with the problem of divine immutability, this discussion does not appear to be the primary concern of Socrates and his interlocutors. Their primary concern is, instead, the possibility of divine epiphany. This is made clear, first and foremost, by Socrates’ introduction of the second pattern, which questions a god’s ability to appear to us (*phantazdesthai*) in various forms.⁴⁷ This idea is further supported by the practical conclusion that Socrates draws from his discussion of claim (a) and the literary examples that he uses. ‘Let none of the poets’, Socrates concludes,

say to us that ‘the gods, appearing as strangers, take many shapes as they visit the cities of men’. Nor let no one tell falsehoods about Proteus and Thetis, nor in tragedy or in any of the other poems represent Hera being disguised as a priestess begging for money for the ‘life-giving sons of Inachus, the Argive river’ (381d).

The examples of the sort of ‘discourse about the gods’ that is prohibited by claim (a) — drawn from Homer, Pindar and Aeschylus⁴⁸ — all depict well-known episodes of divine epiphany, which strengthen the impression that this, and not the establishment of the theological principle of divine immutability, is the primary concern behind the discussion of claim (a). This impression is further supported by the final claim with which Socrates summarizes

⁴⁷ The verbs *phantazdō* or *phantazdomai* are both etymologically and substantively close to the verbs that are associated with divine epiphany (*phainesthai* and *epiphainesthai*), and generally mean ‘to become visible’ or ‘to appear’.

⁴⁸ The first quote is taken from Homer (*Odyssey* 17.485–486). The first example is also taken from *Odyssey* (4.456–8), where Thetis transformed herself to avoid the wooing of Peleus and was also depicted by Pindar (*Nem.* 4). Finally, the second example is attributed to Aeschylus, although it is unclear why Hera had to disguise herself in this episode. See James Adam, *The Republic of Plato* (Cambridge, 1902), p. 120.

his discussion of claim (a): ‘Let no mother’, he says, ‘who was misled by these things frighten her children, telling these bad stories, how certain gods walk around at night appearing (*indallomenoi*) as many strangers of all sorts’ (381e).

Immediately after this conclusion, the dialog progresses towards the introduction of claim (c): that the gods, being perfectly good, will not deceive humans. This discussion, too, is introduced by questioning the possibility of divine epiphany. ‘Yet’, Socrates asks, ‘since the gods are incapable of changing themselves, do they make us believe that they appear in every shape (*pantodapous phainesthai*), deceiving and bewitching us?’ (381e). This question leads to a long discussion of the nature of lies and falsehoods. Here, Plato draws a distinction between the ‘true falsehood’ (*alēthōs pseudos*) and the ‘falsehood in speech’ (*to en tois logois pseudos*) and argues that while the first is hated by gods and men alike, the second may be viewed as a ‘useful’ (*chrēsimon*) falsehood and be used by humans *alone* in service of friends or against enemies, or in cases where we are ignorant about the truth (382a–e).⁴⁹ Since such cases simply do not apply to the gods, Socrates concludes that ‘there is no need for god to lie . . . the divine and divinity are altogether free from falsehood (*apseudēs*)’ (382e).

Given this lengthy discussion and the overall importance of Plato’s claims about lies and falsehoods in the *Republic*, it is clear why interpretations of the second pattern tend to focus on claim (c) and the problem of divine deceptions. In light of the religious context outlined in this paper, however, and given the general structure of the passages discussing the second pattern, it seems that the theory of divine deception, just like the theological account of divine immutability, does not represent Plato’s primary concern in the second pattern. Just like claim (a), it is presented here as support and evidence for Plato’s rejection of the traditional model of divine epiphany. As we saw above, this is made very clear by the question with which Socrates introduces the discussion of claim (c), asking whether the gods will ‘make us believe that they appear in every shape (*pantodapous phainesthai*), deceiving and bewitching us?’ (381e). This reading is further supported by the conclusion drawn from claim (c), that ‘god is entirely simple and true (*haploun kai alēthes*) in both word and deed, and neither changes himself nor deceives (*exapata*) others by means of appearances, words, or the sending of signs’ (382e–383a). Finally, just like claim (a), it is further made clear by the literary examples used to support it. ‘While Homer is praised for many other things’,

⁴⁹ Plato’s discussion of falsehood plays, of course, a very important role in the *Republic* and applies to his general theory of education and to central aspects of the ideal city’s ideological apparatus, such as the Noble Lie and the rigged marriage lottery. See Jill Frank, *Poetic Justice: Rereading Plato’s ‘Republic’* (Chicago, 2018); Page, ‘The Truth About Lies’; Schofield, ‘The Noble Lie’.

Socrates states, 'this we will not approve, the sending of a dream to Agamemnon by Zeus' (383a).

Thus, both claims (a) and (c) are used in service of the more fundamental purpose of the second pattern. Taking the three claims together, we may now conclude that Plato is using (a) and (c) in order to rule out the possibility of (b). Given that the gods do not have a human form, the standard model of divine epiphany, and the traditional claims about divine appearances, must assume that the gods can change their form and appear as humans or animals. If they cannot change their form, then they must be able to deceive humans into seeing them in visions and dreams. The second pattern, as reconstructed here, thus demonstrates that *the traditional model of divine epiphany is impossible* by ruling out both of these potential explanations. Thus understood, the second pattern states that the traditional model of divine epiphany (b) is impossible because (a) the gods cannot and will not change their shape and because (c) the gods cannot and will not deceive humans.

If Plato's second pattern is, indeed, designed to call into question the validity of the traditional model of divine epiphany, then it represents one of Plato's most radical theological critiques. Scholars have often pointed out how radical was the Socratic depiction of the god as perfectly good and as capable of no harm, which serves as the basis for Plato's first pattern in *Republic II*.⁵⁰ As Vlastos sharply remarks, there would not be much left of the traditional Olympian gods if they were to conform to Socrates' moral doctrine. 'Required to meet these austere standards, the city's gods would have become unrecognizable. Their ethical transformation would be tantamount to the destruction of the old gods, the creation of new ones.'⁵¹ This article's new interpretation of the second pattern suggests that it is just as theologically radical as the first, and perhaps even more. As we saw, the ability of gods and goddesses to appear to humans in various forms was one of the most fundamental principles of Greek theology, a constitutive aspect of artistic and mimetic representations of the divine, and a defining feature of everyday religious experience. Calling this traditional model of divine epiphany into question was, therefore, just as radical as reforming the principles of divine morality. Even more so, given the numerous traditions, festivals, cults and structures that were established on the basis of or as a celebration of divine epiphany, Plato's rejection of the traditional model of divine epiphany undermines not only a general Greek theological principle but also many of the religious practices that shaped and gave content to the Athenian identity.

⁵⁰ Mikalson, *Greek Popular Religion*, p. 238; Burnyeat, 'The Impiety of Socrates', pp. 6–9.

⁵¹ Vlastos, *Socrates*, p. 166.

III
Appropriating Epiphany:
Divine Authority and The Philosophers' Rule

Thus far, I have argued that divine epiphany, which was a central aspect of Greek theology and religious experience, posed a serious problem for Plato. As I argued above, Plato's second pattern in *Republic II* is meant to address this problem and to radically call into question the traditional model of divine epiphany, and thus remove this potential threat to the political authority of the philosophers. As I will argue now, however, Plato's second pattern does not exclude the possibility of *any* kind of divine epiphany. Instead, it paves the way towards Plato's alternative model of divine epiphany, one that is tied to the nature of philosophical knowledge and the Form of the Good. Unlike the traditional model of divine epiphany, Plato's philosophical epiphany includes a clear epistemic standard for determining the validity of an epiphany and a strict limit on who has access to epiphanic experiences. While one of the basic premises of the traditional model of epiphany was that any individual could, in principle, experience an encounter with the divine, Plato's new model of divine epiphany equates such epiphanic experience with the philosopher's encounter with the divine Form of the Good, and thus limits its possibility only for those who have completed the rigorous philosophical training which allows them to arrive at such knowledge. The second pattern in *Republic II* was thus designed not only to reject the traditional model of divine epiphany but also to pave the way towards Plato's new model of philosophical epiphany. As such, it should be viewed as part of Plato's broader linguistic and argumentative strategy, where he often appropriates the terms and concepts of religious and poetic discourse and employs them in the service of establishing the authority and legitimacy of the philosophers against competing traditional sources of authority.

The relationship between Plato's concept of philosophical knowledge and his use of the language of divine epiphany to describe the philosophical encounter with the divine Form of the Good are already well-established and were discussed in detail, for example, by Adam and Shields, and most recently by Nightingale and Long.⁵² Therefore I will provide only a brief summary of these points. The first thing to note here is the divine nature of the Form of the Good, which, as Long demonstrates persuasively, is the *Republic's* principal deity.⁵³ In the Analogy of the Sun, for example, the Form of the Good is represented in relation to the sun, itself expressed in terms of the

⁵² Adam, *The Republic of Plato*; Christopher Shields, 'Surpassing in Dignity and Power: The Metaphysics of Goodness in Plato's Republic', in *Socratic, Platonic and Aristotelian Studies: Essays in Honor of Gerasimos Santas*, ed. Georgios Anagnostopoulos (Dordrecht, 2011), pp. 281–96; Nightingale, *Philosophy and Religion*; Long, 'Politics and Divinity', pp. 63–82.

⁵³ Long, 'Politics and Divinity', pp. 63–82.

Divine (508a).⁵⁴ Like the sun in the physical realm, the Form of the Good not only gives ‘its truth to the things we come to know [i.e. the Forms] and the capacity of knowing to those who know’, but also gives them their ‘very existence and essence’ (508a–509b). Finally, Plato often refers to the Forms as ‘divine’, and describes them as perfect, unchanged, eternal and intelligible, ideas that were associated with divinity in the earlier philosophical-theological investigation of pre-Socratic philosophers such as Xenophanes and Heraclitus.⁵⁵

In accordance with the divine nature of the Forms, Plato’s description of the philosophical journey towards knowledge of the Forms is often described in terms of an encounter with the divine. As Nightingale shows in detail, ‘Plato marks the divinity of the Forms by using the language of poetic narratives of epiphany to represent the philosopher beholding a divine Form’. Specifically, she argues that ‘in poetic narratives of epiphany, a god appears to humans as a lightning bolt or some other dazzling celestial body. In addition, in poetic epiphanic narratives, the human viewers respond to the god with fear, awe, and reverence. Plato uses the same language in his narratives of the philosopher seeing the Forms’.⁵⁶ This is perhaps most clearly evident in the *Phaedrus*, where Plato describes the philosophical encounter with the divine Forms in terms familiar to us from narratives of divine epiphany: for example, the Forms are said to be radiant in their beauty,⁵⁷ and when encountering them the philosopher experiences terror, awe and fear.⁵⁸ This is also made clear in the *Republic*, particularly in the narrative of the ascent from the Cave. Just like Nestor or Achilles in their encounters with Athena,⁵⁹ so too the philosopher, upon his ascendance from the Cave and his first encounter with the divine forms, is experiencing pain (*agloi*) and is dazzled upon seeing (*blepein*) the ‘sparkling’ (*marmarugas*) light of the Forms (515e–516a).

Finally, we should note that the philosophers themselves become divine or ‘godlike’ in the process of contemplating and gaining knowledge of the divine Forms.⁶⁰ In accordance with Plato’s general theory of imitation — where one becomes similar (by means of assimilation) to the objects of one’s imitation (393b) — Plato suggests that the philosophical imitation of the

⁵⁴ Socrates introduces the Analogy by asking, ‘which one of the divinities in heaven (*tōn en ouranō theōn*) can you allege as the author and cause of this, whose light makes our vision see most beautifully the things to be seen?’ (*R.* 508a). This has led Nightingale to rename this analogy as ‘the Analogy of the Sun-God’. Nightingale, *Philosophy and Religion*, p. 89.

⁵⁵ Sassi, ‘Where Epistemology and Religion Meet’.

⁵⁶ Nightingale, *Philosophy and Religion*, p. 34.

⁵⁷ Plato, *Phaed.* 250b.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 254b–c.

⁵⁹ Homer, *Odyssey* 3.371–3; Homer, *Iliad* 1.193–200.

⁶⁰ Ferrari, ‘Plato and Poetry’, p. 121; Michael L. Morgan, ‘Plato and Greek Religion’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 227–47.

divine Forms will result in the philosophers themselves ‘becoming like gods’. Specifically, Socrates explains that

he who truly holds his mind on true being has no leisure to look down to the matters of men . . . but fixing his sight and beholding (*thōmenous*) things of eternal and unchanging order . . . he will imitate (*mimeisthai*) them and become like them as much as possible . . . And so the philosopher who associates with what is ordered and divide will become himself divine and ordered (*kosmios te kai theios*) as much as possible for man (500b–d).

Thus, as Long argues, the narrative of the *Republic* shows how ‘philosophy, not mythical or conventional theology, will now become the dialogue’s route to divinity’.⁶¹ In this process, and by virtue of their divine knowledge, the philosophers themselves become divine, at least as much as humanly possible.

As this short summary suggests, Plato’s description of the Forms (especially the Form of the Good) and of the philosophical encounter with them borrows the language and terminology familiar to us from the traditional model of divine epiphany. The Forms themselves appear as the highest divinities, and their description as eternal, perfect, immutable and the source and cause of other beings borrows from the earlier pre-Socratic philosophical-theological investigation of nature and the *kosmos*. Accordingly, the philosophical encounter with the Forms bears a clear resemblance to traditional accounts of epiphanic experience: the Forms appear to the philosopher as radiant and glowing, and the philosopher is struck by terror and awe upon encountering them. Finally, while the individual who encountered the divine is often viewed by the community as being favourable with the gods, the philosophical encounter with the divine leads to an assimilation of the philosophers with the object of their knowledge, and thus results in them becoming as ‘godlike’ as is humanly possible.

This aspect of Plato’s Theory of the Forms and his discussion of philosophical knowledge should be read as complementary to his second theological pattern in *Republic II*. While the second pattern called into question the validity of the traditional model of divine epiphany, it did not exclude the possibility of *any* kind of epiphanic experience. Instead, it prepared the ground for Plato’s alternative model of divine epiphany: the philosophical epiphany. Placing Plato’s Theory of the Forms and of philosophical knowledge within this context reveals his attempt to *appropriate* the concepts and terminology of the traditional model of divine epiphany and apply it to philosophy, thereby establishing the authority of philosophy while undermining other traditional sources of authority, such as the authority of the poets or other wise men (*sophoi*).

In light of this, Plato’s rejection of the traditional model of divine epiphany and his appropriation of this very language in service of his alternative model

⁶¹ Long, ‘Politics and Divinity’, p. 70.

of philosophical epiphany should be read as part of his broader discursive and argumentative strategy. As Allen has argued, one of Plato's primary purposes in producing written texts was to create political change by means of reshaping Athenian political language. 'Plato wrote', she argues, 'not just the *Republic*, but all his dialogues, to displace the poets. And he expected this displacement to have cultural effects and, because cultural effects, political effects.'⁶² Similarly, Tennant has recently demonstrated that Plato's frequent use of proverbs in the *Republic* is part of his attempt to reform moral and political discourse in Athens. As such, it reflected Plato's understanding of the centrality of language and discourse to politics and of the fact that 'wordcraft is statecraft'.⁶³ In light of the ancient Greek religious context and the role played by poets such as Homer and Hesiod in shaping Greek theology and religious experience, it should come as no surprise that religion was one of the primary sites for Plato's linguistic and discursive reform. Perhaps the best example for this was Plato's appropriation of the word 'theory' (*theoria*) from its original religious context and his application of this word to describe the practice of philosophy. As Nightingale shows, *theoria* was traditionally used to describe an individual pilgrimage abroad for the purpose of witnessing a religious event or festival and providing an eye-witness report to the community. Plato is the first to use this religious term in describing the activity of the philosophers and their own philosophical voyage to behold the divine forms. Thus, according to Nightingale, 'the fourth-century philosophers took over the cultural practice of *theoria* and transformed it for their own purpose. In the venerable and authoritative institution of *theoria*, they found a model that helped them define and defend the new discipline of "theoretical" philosophy'.⁶⁴

In light of this article's new interpretation of the second pattern in *Republic* II, it now appears that Plato's alternative model of divine epiphany — the philosophical epiphany — can be viewed as part of this broader discursive and argumentative strategy. Just as he did with the term *theoria*, Plato not only rejects the traditional model of divine epiphany but also appropriates the concepts and terminology of this model and uses it in the service of philosophy. By doing so, Plato establishes the philosophers as the only humans who have access to epiphanic experience and to the divine knowledge that such experience entails, thereby further strengthening the legitimacy of the philosophers in general — and the philosopher-kings of *Kallipolis* in particular — against competing sources of divine knowledge and authority. Given the cultural importance of divine epiphany, this appropriation may be expected to confer on the philosophers the sort of honour and authority that were associated with this experience. As Platt argues, 'for a mortal to experience an

⁶² Allen, *Why Plato Wrote*, pp. 19, 78.

⁶³ Tennant, 'Proverbial Plato', p. 10.

⁶⁴ Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth*, p. 72.

epiphany may be a sign of special status, a privilege granted to mythical heroes and those who are particularly pious, blessed, or desired by the gods'.⁶⁵ Similarly, according to Petridou, 'those who perceive the divine (or at least claim to have done so) are or become celebrated poets, prophets, legislators, theologians, and generally men distinguished for their piety and wisdom . . . Authoritative epiphanies either give or, if already there, enhance a divine gift'.⁶⁶ By limiting the possibility of an encounter with the divine to philosophers, Plato not only undermines the possibility that others — poets, prophets, or laymen — will enjoy the authority that was normally conferred on those who have experienced an epiphany, but also ensures that such authority will be conferred on the philosophers themselves, thus further establishing and supporting their position.

With this, we now recognize the full significance of Plato's second pattern in *Republic II*. As we saw, the primary purpose of the pattern is to call into question the validity of the traditional model of divine epiphany. Since this model assumes that any individual can, in principle, experience a divine epiphany, and in the absence of clear epistemic criteria against which we may validate a given epiphanic experience, this traditional model creates a potential source of authority that may challenge the philosophers' rule. Plato's appropriation of the linguistic and conceptual framework of the traditional model of divine epiphany in his account of philosophical knowledge should be viewed as complementary to his purpose in the second pattern. He does not rule out *any* kind of divine epiphany but instead establishes a clear epistemic standard to epiphanic experience, which allows him to limit the possibility of this experience to the philosophers alone. Thus, Plato is not only undermining the possibility that a divine epiphany may result in an alternative to the authority of the philosopher but also making use of this traditional source of authority to further establish and secure the legitimacy of the philosophers as the only true rulers.

Conclusion

Working within the secular framework of modern political thought, scholars have tended to overlook the religious aspect of Plato and other ancient and early modern philosophers and political thinkers. As Nightingale observes, 'philosophers tend to ignore Plato's references to Greek religious practices

⁶⁵ Platt, 'Epiphany', p. 788.

⁶⁶ Petridou, *Divine Epiphany*, p. 334. On the relationship between divine epiphany and intellectual, religious or political authority, see also Most, 'Philosophy and Religion', pp. 317–18. On the significance of this and other religious arguments for Plato's attempt to establish the authority and legitimacy of philosophers, see Nightingale, *Philosophy and Religion*, p. 50; Schofield, *Plato*, p. 158; Dodds, 'Plato and the Irrational Soul', p. 227.

because these fall outside of the modern philosophical enterprise'.⁶⁷ This article has provided other evidence for the fruitfulness of situating Plato within his religious context and for the potential benefits of such contextualization for our understanding of otherwise obscure passages and claims in his writings. Reading Plato's second pattern in *Republic II* in light of and in dialogue with this religious context suggests that its primary focus is both theological and political. The second pattern appears to represent one of Plato's most radical theological critiques and innovations. It calls into question the traditional model of divine epiphany, a model that played a vital role in Greek theology and everyday religious experience. Doing so, it undermines not only the common idea that any individual can, in principle, encounter the divine but also the various religious, social and political institutions that originated from and were legitimized by past epiphanic experiences. Importantly, Plato's second pattern removes potential threats to the authority of philosophy within and outside the ideal city. At the same time, it prepares the ground for an alternative model of divine epiphany — the philosophical epiphany — which appropriates the language of the traditional model and uses it in the service of philosophy, thereby further establishing and securing the philosophers' position.

This theological-political reading of the second pattern in *Republic II* thus highlights the important and complex relationship between religion and politics in the pre-modern world. Doing so, it corresponds in an interesting way to Schmitt's famous claim in his *Political Theology* that 'all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts'.⁶⁸ While Schmitt viewed this as a distinctively modern phenomenon, the conclusions of this paper suggest that such a complex relationship between religion and politics — and more importantly, the attempt to secularize theological concepts in the service of state-building — is by no means uniquely modern. Like the early-modern political thinkers and state-builders, Plato's political project involved both the introduction of a radically different political community and the construction of an ideological apparatus to justify and legitimize this newly constructed authority against competing sources. Plato's 'ancient quarrel' between philosophy and poetry is, of course, the best-known example of this practice. As this article suggests, Plato's engagement with the religious beliefs and practices of his day should be taken seriously as another.

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⁶⁷ Nightingale, *Philosophy and Religion*, p. 18.

⁶⁸ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. Georg Schwab (Chicago, 2005), p. 36.