Chapter Three
Religion and Religiosity in Socrates

Hans-Georg Gadamer

translated by Richard Velkley

If one wishes to enlighten oneself about the theme "Socrates and Religion," one finds oneself confronted with a whole series of problems that must be discussed before approaching the Platonic writings, our most important witness concerning Socrates.

Yet it must be said at once that Socrates will be spoken of here only as Plato presents him. Ours would be a wholly different task if we sought to put to use the description of Socrates which we know from Xenophon, or the image which Aristophanes' comedy sketches, or what the indirect Aristotelian tradition tells us about Socrates and Plato. The Platonic Socrates is in any event the effective-historical (wirkungsgeschichtliche) power which determines all of us, and the question of religion, in other words, of the relation of Socrates to the religious tradition of his city, plays in the Socratic dialogues so central a role that the great works of Plato's maturity, the Phaedo, Symposium, and Phaedrus, can be understood by simple extension as the further articulation of this role.

At the start we must investigate more closely the expressions characterizing our theme. What Greek expressions have the meanings of "religiosity" (Religiosität) and "religion" (Religion)? Neither the one nor the other has a truly appropriate rendering in Greek. We cannot hope to understand with our concept of
religion what the question of religion could mean in Socrates' case. "Religion" is not at all a Greek word, and the essence of Greek religion is for every modern scholar and thinker raised in the Christian West something mysteriously foreign and elusive to later concepts of theology and metaphysics. On the other hand it is easier to find an expression for "religiosity" in Greek. Indeed the difficulty here is instead that there are several expressions which stand close to the words religiosity or piety \(\text{(Frömmigkeit)}\) and which circumscribe their meaning. One can name at least three expressions in Greek, closely related to one another and meaning approximately what we have in mind with religiosity and piety. Thus we have firstly the ἔμμεταν, that which demands awe-filled reverence, and then ἀγαθομεταν, awe-filled reverence itself, and finally indeed ἀίδος, or awe, from whose standpoint one can pursue after Socrates' religiosity. Aidos has as well a gentle overtone of reverence and of venerating what is higher, that need not be related to the divine. That this expression belongs to our inquiry will immediately prove important in the interpretation of the Platonic image of Socrates, especially in the *Euthyphro*. The word aidos points to the religious inasmuch as it always relates to what has a superior rank of being and does not permit the superior attitude of knowing. In any case all of these expressions intend something wholly familiar to us. When however we ask ourselves what religion was for the Greeks, we find ourselves in a wholly different situation. Generally the Greeks preferred to use the neuter gender: τὸ θεῖον, 'the divine'. This expression signifies a fundamental human experience connected in an indefinite manner with the presence of something surpassing through its power the expectations of our daily life. This existential power's indefinite presence achieves fitting expression in the use of the grammatical neuter.

In the neuter, found in Greek as well as in German, one hears something peculiar, as much mysterious as ungraspable. Accordingly "the divine" is not a definite thing of a certain kind, as things and persons are definitely of this or that genus. It is rather more like an atmospheric datum, which one indeed cannot grasp and yet whose existence one cannot dispute. This holds to a certain extent for all use of the neuter in speech and finds a privileged place in the language of lyric poetry, both in German and Greek. As something that pervades and determines

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