

Justice and Immortality:
Platonic Reflections on *Interview With the Vampire*

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“...as long as we have the body accompanying *the* argument in our investigation and our soul is smushed together with this sort of evil, we’ll never, ever sufficiently attain what we desire. And this, we affirm, is the truth.”

--- Socrates, in Plato’s *Phaedo* (66b 5-8)

The relationship between human conceptions of justice and morality, encompassing both their similarities and differences, lies at the foundation of political philosophy and political society. The horizon of death constitutes an ever-present factor in our search for an understanding of both justice and morality. This understanding commonly manifests itself in the development of religious and secular law. Fear of bodily death entices humans to form societies and legal systems to protect our bodily lives and punish any who threaten it. Belief in the immortality of the soul commonly hinges on a belief in absolute or divine justice, prompting human beings to adhere to a moral code, whether religious or philosophical. Morality and justice meet in the belief that our actions in this life will be rewarded or punished accordingly in the afterlife. The horizon of death assures us that even if we escape justice on earth, our eternal life will be characterized by eternal damnation. Divine justice is inescapable and inevitable, or so it seems.

My study examines the necessity of certain justice in preserving morality. I wonder: Is there a morality which exists objectively outside of our societal and individual desires? Or are we, rather, merely trying to avoid punishment. Does virtue exist for virtue’s sake, and if so, why? What does this mean? This study seeks to

examine the relationship between morality, justice, and law. Let me reduce the foregoing to a question: Can any of these concepts exist without the horizon of death and the afterlife? *Interview With the Vampire* suggests that they cannot. Once immortality is possible, the vampires lose their need (and to a large extent their desire) for an abstract, enduring concept of either justice or morality. The measure of justice is determined by whoever is strongest, not whoever is most just. Morality is reduced to personal inclinations, or eradicated completely. Plato presents a different picture of human morality, though death is also a crucial factor in his argument. The tension between body and soul that defines Plato's conception of a human being is only resolved after death. Unlike *Interview*, Plato argues that morality and justice are real forces outside of human control. The source of moral authority and absolute justice is not the divine, however – Plato believed it to be more objective than that. Cosmic justice is presented as the reward of the soul for preserving its moral integrity while trapped in a bodily life. The struggle between the soul and the body is central to Plato's understanding of death. Socrates is fearless when facing execution because of his hope for a better afterlife. The vampires in *Interview* no longer experience this struggle. Its absence leads to despair and nihilism.

The subject matter of my study, or at least portions of it, will certainly seem unorthodox, at first glance. To be sure, *Interview With the Vampire* is not considered a traditional vehicle of political philosophy; it is often not even considered an "intellectual" film by critics. If one looks beneath its surface (and ignores its placement in the "horror" section of Blockbuster), *Interview* reveals itself as a very serious, profound rumination on the importance of death to human ideas of justice and morality. Though she may not have been fully aware of the connection between her work and Plato, Rice, who holds a

B.A. in political science from San Francisco State University, certainly meant for Interview to convey significant political and philosophical statements. She purposefully presents her philosophy in a genre that appeals to the general public. When questioned about her choices, Rice responded, “There is a venerable tradition to making the most serious statement in a form that can be understood by an eight year old. I respect that tradition.”¹ Presenting an argument based purely on hypothetical speculation does not carry the force of seeing that hypothetical situation made visible through characters that we, as viewers, find accessible. Granted, none of us will encounter the exact experience of the vampires, but in addition to killing and immortality, the characters also have the very human experiences of love, hatred, loss, guilt, moral despair, religious doubts, self-loathing, and hope. Discussing what effect immortality would have on justice is somehow different, not to say better, than seeing its effects played out before our eyes.

Now that my reasons for choosing *Interview With the Vampire* have (hopefully) been elucidated, I should explain my choice of Plato as a framework for my thesis. This choice may not have been the obvious one, as the film contains numerous echoes of Nietzsche. I intend to demonstrate that Plato’s work is comprehensive in a way that makes turning to him rewarding. Moreover, its comprehensive character allows us to see what is implicit in a work like *Interview*, but which is not made explicit either due to the limitations of the author or the demands of the medium. Plato was certainly aware of the realm beyond good and evil. But his awareness is not Nietzsche’s, and this too is important. Nietzsche argues against the existence of the immortal soul. His disbelief in God or an afterlife, religious or otherwise, leads to a rejection of the predominate moralities of modern society. Nietzsche advocates the complete fusion of body and soul

– the earthly existence is the only existence. This brief, all too brief, sketch of Nietzsche's assessment of human existence is remarkably similar to Rice's description of the vampires' existence. The vampires forsake death and afterlife in favor of eternal life on earth. Their souls will never be separated from their bodies. Rice may indeed have had Nietzsche in mind when developing several of her characters. If my intention was to present an examination of the vampires' morality, Nietzsche would have been the obvious choice.

I believe, however, that Rice portrays this view of vampire nature as a contrast to her views on human nature. The characters in the film only lose the horizon of an afterlife upon becoming vampires. This loss is distinctly felt by the film's protagonist, and is reflected in various degrees in the other characters, as well. We must turn to Plato in order to understand the effects of beyond good and evil for a creature faced with some concept of cosmic justice. The effects of the horizon of death and the expectation of divine justice are vital to human understanding of justice. Plato explores the consequences of a world without divine justice or divine justness. Socrates' trial and execution also serves to highlight the deficiencies of a societal justice system founded on the fear of death. Plato understands what happens when conventional morality is turned upside down and inside out. He moves beyond good and evil, and finds a concept of good that does not depend on divine or conventional morality. Plato retains a concept of a just afterlife. What may not be possible for beings trapped on earth is possible once we transcend our earthly existence.

In Plato, we find a recurring theme or question: What is the relationship between justice and morality? My goal is not to encompass the entire body of Platonic thought

on this subject; such a task is beyond the scope of this study. Instead, I will focus on the *Euthyphro*, the *Crito*, the *Apology of Socrates*, and the *Phaedo* as a framework for my study in conjunction with the film *Interview With the Vampire*, based on Anne Rice's novel of the same name. *Interview* situates the discussion of death and morality in a case where the usual notions of justice and punishment are not applicable, due to the immortal nature of the vampires. The immortality of their bodies (with their souls trapped inside) forces an examination of the relationship between justice, morality and death. The primary characters of the film are humans who forsook their human lives to become vampires, outside the realm of human mortality and morality. Their immortal nature enables the vampires to avoid facing judgment in the afterlife, effectively rendering the concept of divine justice null. The question remains: Without the threat of death, and without the possibility of justice, does morality have a place in existence? Whether justice is an objective, permanent idea, or whether it is the product of a subjective, ever-changing human consciousness holds tremendous implications for every society. And then, how does the horizon of death, whether permanent or a transition to an afterlife, affect our understanding of justice? This question is central to both *Interview With the Vampire* and the Platonic dialogues that I have selected.

PART ONE: THE PLATONIC DIALOGUES

I have chosen to focus my study on Plato's *Euthyphro*, *Crito*, *Apology of Socrates*, and *Phaedo* in the hopes of penetrating a few dialogues thoroughly, rather than many dialogues superficially. These texts present Plato's ruminations on morality and

justice as they relate to death and the immortal soul. Is our conception of justice only possible in light of the horizon of death? Death is a constant presence in judicial proceedings; in both ancient Athens and contemporary society, lawful punishment most often takes the form of a death penalty or a term of imprisonment (effective as a means of depriving the convicted of a portion of his/her relatively short life-span). If the power to dispense death serves as the foundation of justice, does the fear of death serve as the foundation of morality? In some cases (perhaps most cases) the incentive to lead a moral life stems from a desire to escape punishment, either from our fellow man in this life or from a divine judgment in the afterlife. When one no longer fears death, and consequently no longer fears the afterlife, does morality lose its force in human life? The famous Platonic metaphor for this, appearing in our day in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, is the Ring of Gyges. If I were invisible, my actions closed from the eyes of humans and gods, would I be just?

The source of moral authority will determine the effect that death will have on a person's concept of morality. Divine authority is arguably the most common source of morality, or at least we can say as much for Plato. God, or gods, is commonly portrayed as an absolute sovereign who will judge all of humanity individually beyond death. The certainty of divine justice ensures that any injustice on earth is ultimately punished. Lest we forget, rewards in the afterlife are often the source of good deeds in this life. We don't have to look past 9/11 for both positive and negative examples of this. Justice is absolute and unavoidable under the judgment of the divine. For most, God is also credited with determining the parameters of morality. In a monotheistic, homogeneous, society, morality and justice are derived from the same source, eliminating conflict

between the two concepts. Such a system, while simple, eliminates any possibility of religious freedom or secular political authority. Only people who hold the same religious beliefs could co-exist peacefully. The belief in religious freedom, expressed as tolerance of other monotheistic religions, is akin to living in a polytheistic society. Many, perhaps most, citizens of our own society believe that a secular political authority is necessary, despite their belief in an omnipotent singular deity. Plato's encounter with the polytheistic religion of ancient Athens and the democratic nature of its judicial system parallels our own situation – that of a democratic society encompassing many monotheistic religions. The complexity of this encounter required Plato to account for numerous sources of morality, many of whom advocated opposing principles. His arguments hold great importance to any discussion on the nature of justice and morality.

Examining divine moral authority is the object of Socrates' discussion in the *Euthyphro*. Let us begin there. In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates calls into question piety as a sentiment or duty that stems from a god's favor. Piety is often a result of fear – if one fears the gods, he will heed their commands. Plato suggests, however, that servitude does not necessarily constitute morality. Though it is true that immorality is often found when one has nothing left to fear, bowing to the whims of the divine may not enhance virtue. His discussion takes place outside of the Athenian courthouse and centers around a man, Euthyphro, who is there to bring charges against his father for the murder of a servant. Immediately, the conflict between morality and justice is broached, as Socrates expresses his wonder at Euthyphro's disrespect of his father's position. "You don't fear that by pursuing a lawsuit against your father, you in turn may happen to be doing an impious act?" he asks.² Though Euthyphro's father may indeed have been guilty of murder, and

therefore should justly be punished, Socrates questions the morality of Euthyphro's action. He suggests that a son's moral obligation to protect his family outweighs his obligation to see justice done for the murder of an outsider. Euthyphro claims that the law must take precedence over any familial obligations. It would seem here that Plato is directing us to human sentiments and attachments as among the possible seats of justice. Filial piety is not the same as piety simply. An absolute principle, such as the one to which Euthyphro is appealing, requires an absolute authority to establish and enforce its legitimacy. Where there is no authority beyond question, there can be no unconditional law.

Euthyphro seeks the endorsement of the divine (specifically Zeus) as proof of his justness, and at the same time proof that his sense of justice is rooted in piety toward divine things. Euthyphro produces evidence: "Human beings themselves believe that Zeus is the best and most just of the gods, at the same time that they agree that he bound his own father because he gulped down his sons without justice, and that the later, in turn, castrated his own father because of other such things."³ Euthyphro's action must be pious; it is modeled after the actions of the greatest of gods (Zeus). If the gods are taken to be the source of morality and justice, then Euthyphro's appeal to Zeus's violence against his father would vindicate his actions. Socrates elucidates Euthyphro's sense of morality as, "Then what is dear to the gods is pious, and what is not dear is impious."⁴ For the proponents of an enduring, objective conception of justice under an omnipotent divinity, the source and explanation of human morality is seemingly revealed. Granting, of course, that as human beings, we have the power to, without fail, receive and interpret the mandates of the divine correctly and impartially – a claim made by many religions,

yet their accounts widely differ. As Socrates makes clear, in a society with multiple accounts of the gods (such as Athens), the moral authority of the divine is rendered doubtful at best.

The polytheistic religion of ancient Greece aptly demonstrates the problems with the conception of morality as the gods' favor. The gods were not believed to exist in a state of peace and cooperation; they were attributed with the all too human qualities of jealousy, bias, and rage. Quarrels amongst the gods were frequent and often spilled over into the realm of human beings, altering the course of human life. Socrates maintained that only differences as serious as conflicts over justice and morality could cause either humans or gods to become enemies. He leads Euthyphro to agree that, "Then among the gods too, well-born Euthyphro, some believe some things just, others believe others, according to your argument, and noble and shameful and good and bad. For surely they wouldn't quarrel with each other unless they differed about these things, would they?"⁵ Something that is loved by one god (or endorsed by one account of God) could also be hated by another god, rendering the thing simultaneously pious and impious. Can morality truly be derived from the divine, when no human can absolutely know what the divine considers to be moral? Or even if the divine has a cohesive concept of morality? When divine interpretations conflict, either with one another or with our human concept of morality, which account should take precedence? Should human emotions, such as guilt or loyalty, outweigh uncertain divine mandates?

Socrates also questions the reliability of divine justice. In his effort to determine what exactly constitutes piety, Socrates seeks to differentiate piety from justice. Though Euthyphro wishes to establish the divine as the source of both piety and justice, Socrates

casts doubt upon the gods' authority in both matters. The concept of absolute divine justice has earlier been discredited. None of the gods (or humans) would assert that an unjust action should go unpunished; rather, "don't some of them assert that others do injustice while the others deny it? / They differ about a certain action, some asserting that it was done justly, others unjustly. Isn't this so?"⁶ A problem arises in this separation of morality and justice from the divine: if the divine is no longer considered the absolute and sole source of cosmic authority, can a standard of justice and morality still exist on earth? Socrates introduces the idea that, "where 'pious' is, there too is 'just,'" but "where 'just' is, everywhere is not 'pious'?"⁷ All of morality is just, but all of justice is not moral. If Euthyphro were to suspend punishment of his father, he would commit a societal injustice, but remain just in his devotion to filial piety. Here, two possible sources of justice conflict. There exists a capacity for justice outside of morality, leading to the condition that justice and morality may find themselves at odds. The question then arises, which one takes precedent, living a just life or a moral life?

Socrates suggests that, as humans, we have feelings of justice and injustice that are independent of the gods. This capacity of humans to judge the justness of an action is commonly referred to as the conscience. The nature of a conscience is widely debated. Some suggest that a conscience indicates some form of natural morality inherent in human beings. This seems unlikely to me – else why would children be morally unaccountable? The conscience must develop, and is likely shaped by millennia of social conditioning. Others suggest a more cosmic explanation of the conscience. Namely, that the presence of a conscience is a result of divine communication with humans. An example of this is found with Socrates' *daimon*. He claims that a voice, which he

identifies as divine, counsels him against dangerous actions: “whenever it comes, it always turns me away from whatever I am about to do, but never turns me forward.”⁸ Socrates’ *daimon* allows him to differentiate between just and unjust actions. Yet, in this scenario, the conscience does not constitute a natural human inclination towards justice – a higher authority is ultimately whispering in our metaphysical ear. A completely human conception of justice is not found. But Socrates argues that a completely divine conception of justice is inadequate, as well.

Plato maintained a doctrine of a just afterlife; therefore, morality and justice must exist beyond human society. A portrait of the afterlife is presented which is not dependent on divine justness or divine justice. The fate of humanity in this afterlife is not determined by the divine, but is judged by some as yet unnamed authority by an as yet unspecified standard. Humans are still assured of justice, if not in this life then in the afterlife; yet, without the guidance of the gods, what will define our conception of just and unjust? In order to decipher Plato’s response, it is necessary to examine a case where justice and morality conflict and death no longer seems to have sway over the actions of a man: the trial and execution of Socrates.

The *Apology of Socrates* chronicles Socrates’ trial and sentencing. Socrates is permitted to defend himself against the charge of impiety: specifically, being irreverent to the gods. The charge is ambiguous; there are many gods in ancient Athens, and no one specifies which particular god Socrates has offended. The problem of conflicting interpretations of the divine is again encountered. Plato demonstrates way that an undefined divine moral authority can be manipulated to serve human ends. Socrates proves the flexibility of divine interpretation by proclaiming his life of constant inquiry is

commanded by a god, who supposedly anointed him the wisest of all men. He argues, "When the god stationed me, as I supposed and assumed, ordering me to live philosophizing and examining myself and others, I had then left my station because I feared death or any other matter whatever. Terrible that would be, and truly then someone might justly bring me into a law court, saying that I do not believe that there are gods, since I would be disobeying the divination."⁹ If piety is understood as obeying the edicts of the divine, Socrates merely has to claim divine will as the motivation behind his actions in order to remain pious. So long as his *daimon* speaks to him, Socrates can claim divine endorsement. If morality is to retain its importance to human life, it clearly must have a more concrete origin.

Though morality appears to be a personal enterprise, I do not believe that a concept of personal morality leads to a concept of subjective morality. For Socrates, each person owes a greater obligation to virtue than to his fellow citizens. Compromising one's morality in order to please the citizenry is the root of immorality. There exists a tension between Socrates' allegiance to the laws of Athens (which he declares in the *Crito*) and his dedication to personal virtue. He compromises justice in pursuit of morality. Socrates declares to the jury, "I, men of Athens, salute you and love you, but I will obey the god rather than you; and as long as I breathe and am able to, I will certainly not stop philosophizing."¹⁰ Examining his own existence, and exhorting others to do the same, is the basis of Socrates' morality. His reference to 'the god' is not a pledge to the commonly held ideas of divine will, or to the priests who claim to communicate with the gods, but rather to his *daimon* – his personal concept of justice and morality. His actions demonstrate his skepticism of the gods, yet Socrates appears to trust his *daimon*

completely. Does he suspect that it is not divine, but rather his pure soul that guides him? Socrates places his commitment to morality above his commitment to his bodily existence. He will remain faithful to his morality, even at the expense of being convicted unjustly. Agreeing to cease his life of inquiry would allow Socrates to be acquitted. Socrates' morality would be violated, however, resulting in a greater loss than he is willing to incur.

Socrates insists on his case being judged by the merit of his defense, not by pity for his age or family. He refuses to stoop to begging for acquittal or a light sentence; once the judgment has been made, it must be upheld. Justice is a product of contemplation and reason, not emotion. "Apart from reputation, men, to me it also does not seem to be just to beg the judge, nor be acquitted by begging, but rather to teach and to persuade. For the judge is not seated to give away the just things as a gratification, but to judge them. For he has not sworn to gratify whoever seems favorable to him, but to give judgment according to the laws."¹¹ Curiously, Socrates associates earthly justice with the laws of men, not with the laws of the divine. This is especially strange in the context of ancient Athens, whose laws defined the proper parameters of religion. Though the laws are designed (in part) to please the city's gods, they also serve to empower men. The notion of justice originating from the temperamental, biased gods is no longer plausible. Socrates implies that if a god is, in fact, to judge men in the afterlife, he must judge them according to some other, objective standard, not merely according to their favor. Socrates, evidently, does not fear this concept of justice; he is willing to endorse injustice in this life rather than compromise his search for truth and morality. Preserving the integrity of his soul is more important than protecting the life and liberty of his body.

While the conviction of Socrates accomplishes one of his accusers' goals (it will rid the city of his presence), it fails to punish Socrates for his crimes. Socrates consistently claimed that his wisdom resulted from an acknowledgment of ignorance. The doctrine, "whatever I do not know, I do not even suppose I know," elevated him above men who falsely claimed wisdom.¹² Consequently, Socrates does not fear death. For a person such as Socrates, for whom death holds no terror, the capacity of the legal system to punish him is destroyed. Socrates explains, "For to fear death, men, is in fact nothing other than to seem to be wise, but not to be so. For it is to seem to know what one does not know; no one knows whether death does not even happen to be the greatest of all goods for the human being; but people fear it as though they knew well that it is the greatest of evils."¹³ Ironically, Socrates' accusers may have sentenced him to receive the greatest reward, rather than the greatest punishment.

Without the fear of death or the afterlife, the laws of society would seem to lose some of their capacity to inspire fear, and consequently obedience, from Socrates. He seems to be free from the constraints of morality, able to act without fear of certain justice. He does not do so. Rather, he lives a life devoted to virtue. His belief in an enduring, objective concept of morality prevents him from succumbing to a life of immorality. Socrates believes that his conscience, his personal sense of morality and justice, outweighs the mandates of conventional justice. His belief in the immortality of the soul prevents him from rejecting the concept of justice in the afterlife. Though the gods may be insufficient to ensure that justice is fulfilled, Socrates evidently believes that justice is certain. Men who lead moral lives, whose souls are pure, will be rewarded in

the afterlife. He does not fear death. Death is anticipated as the moment when his devotion to his soul would release him from mortal limitations.

Though he deprives us of an absolute divine, Plato does not leave humanity in a moral vacuum. Socrates maintained that a man's most important task in life is to nurture and purify his soul through attention to virtue. In the *Crito*, Socrates is presented with an opportunity to escape his imprisonment and impending execution. He refuses on the grounds that escaping his sentence, and thus nullifying the judgment of the courts, would be an unjust act. Though it would save his bodily life, committing injustice sullies the soul, leading Socrates to ask, "But is life worth living for us with that thing [the soul] corrupted which the unjust maims and the just profits?"¹⁴ Here, Socrates asserts that retaining a commitment to justice is an essential part of morality; yet in the *Apology* he disregards the will of the people (and what else could democratic justice be?) in order to continue his personal agenda. Socrates now seems to appeal to some other standard of justice. Perhaps his allegiance is to Athens as an ideal, not to the judgments of the current Athenian people.

He believes that Athens has done him an injustice by convicting him, despite his intention to better the people. Though Socrates has been unjustly convicted (from his point of view), he will not corrupt his morality to rectify the outcome. The 'eye for an eye' mentality has no place in Socrates' thinking. He suggests the opposite. "And even he who has been done injustice, then, must not do injustice in return, as the many suppose, since one must in no way do injustice."¹⁵ Socrates advocates the primacy of the afterlife. The health of the soul is infinitely more important than the health of the body. An important connection is also established between morality in this life and justice in

the afterlife. A moral life will result in a more purified soul, which will be rewarded after it is released from the body. Attention to worldly justice is also declared to be an essential part of morality. Upholding earthly justice will benefit the soul when it is judged by an absolute, enduring code of justice in the afterlife.

The tension between the demands of the body and the desires of the soul are never fully resolved in Plato's writings. As human beings, we can only contemplate the possibility of a pure and perfect soul through the experience of a flawed and fragile body. We need a body to contemplate the limitations of a body. The argument can be continued into our concept of justice. Cosmic justice is usually regarded as infallible. Whether one believes in the Christian God on Judgment Day or Plato's realm of the Forms, a common theme is found: justice is perfect, authoritative, and final. Can we only conceive of absolute justice in contrast to conventional justice, which can be fickle and corrupt? Does the idea of final justice allow us to endure the imperfect justice system created by society? I believe so. The idea of an immortal soul is essential to justice in our earthly lives. Not only as consolation to those wronged by 'the system', but also as a deterrent to unjustness that goes unpunished. The tension between body and soul is necessary, but will always leave humanity somewhat unsatisfied with earthly things. The promise of something better is always on the horizon.

The *Crito* identifies earthly justice with the laws of society. Plato does not declare the laws of Athens to be the embodiment of justice, no more than the laws of any other city. The code of justice is determined by the society in which a person chooses to live. Since Socrates chose freely to live under Athenian law, he is bound to uphold the law and adhere to its judgments; else, he commits injustice against the city. "Or does it

seem possible to you for a city to continue to exist, and not to be overturned in which the judgments that are reached have no strength, but are rendered ineffective and are corrupted by private men?" he asks.¹⁶ Though his conviction was unjust, Socrates does not have the right to destroy the laws that nurtured, educated, and sheltered him his whole life. Socrates declares, speaking from the point of view of the laws, "any Athenian who wishes, once he has been admitted to adulthood and has seen the affairs in the city and us laws, that if we do not satisfy him, he is allowed to take his own things and go away wherever he wishes. / But to whoever of you stays here and sees the way that we reach judgments and otherwise manage the city, we say that he has already agreed with us in deed to do whatever we bid. And when he does not obey, we say that he does injustice."¹⁷ For Socrates to escape the judgment rendered against him would be a breach of his contract with the laws, and would therefore be an unjust act.

A strange aspect of justice is introduced in Socrates' rumination on the laws of Athens. Socrates proposes the idea that a person does not have an equal right to justice with some one to whom he has entered into a position of servitude. Not only the relationship between master and slave, but also the relationship of father to son and law to citizen is encompassed in this idea. This idea of unequal justice is encountered in the *Euthyphro*, when Socrates discourages Euthyphro from bringing a charge of murder against his father. Socrates argues, "Now with regard to your father (or master, if you happened to have one), justice was not equal to you, so that you didn't also do in return whatever you suffered. / Or are you so wise that you have been unaware that fatherland is something more honorable than mother and father and all the other forebears? / And that it is not pious to do violence to mother or father, and still less by far to the fatherland than

to them?”¹⁸ Devotion to the agreed upon laws of society provides moral guidance in the absence of absolute divine morality. Though the laws may often endorse or result in injustice, preserving the contract formed with them ensures that you will not commit an unjust breach of contract with the society you joined. Earthly justice is presented as a means of exercising morality, not as an end unto itself. Socrates is willing to suffer injustice in order to protect the sanctity of his morality.

Socrates asserts that the goal of philosophy is to purify one's soul in preparation for death. Though he maintained a doctrine of reincarnation, if a person could purify his soul enough during his earthly life, his soul would not reenter another body after death. The pure soul would be free to spend the afterlife contemplating the pure Forms of knowledge. Plato recounts the hours leading up to Socrates' execution in the *Phaedo*. The dialogue presents Socrates' argument for the immortality of the soul and the value of leading a virtuous life. Socrates advocates a complete rejection of all worldly indulgences and terrors. A virtuous person should care only for that which strengthens and nourishes the soul: justice, knowledge, courage, piety – all the things which comprise morality and thus purify the soul. “If she's [the soul] set free pure, dragging along with her nothing of the body, because she was in no way willing to commune with it in life but fled it and gathered herself into herself / Then being in this condition, doesn't she go off to what's similar to her, to the Unseen – the divine and deathless and thoughtful – and once she arrives There, isn't it her lot to be happy, since she is freed / [and] truly spends the rest of time in the company of gods?”¹⁹ A pure and happy soul (one nourished by morality) is completely devoid of bodily concerns. Devotion to

morality is rewarded in the afterlife. Justice is certain in the end – independent of the divine.

Justice does not result from the judgment of an all-powerful deity. It is dependent on mechanical limitations. Upon its release from the body, a pure soul will soar freely to the realm of the Forms. An impure soul (one which is overly attached to the body) is weighted down, and cannot reach the Unseen place. Socrates explains, “But I imagine that if she’s [the soul] freed from the body defiled and impure, because she was always having intercourse with the body and servicing it and loving it and being bewitched by it / But I take it she’ll be set free pervaded by the body-like, which the company and intercourse with the body have made grow together with her / And, my friend, we should imagine that the body-like is oppressive and heavy and earthy and visible; and a soul in the sort of condition we described is made heavy and dragged back into the visible region through terror of the Unseen and Hades / And they wander about until, through the desire for the body-like that stalks them, they’re again entangled in a body.”²⁰ The impure soul is given another chance to purify itself, and will be condemned to do so until it succeeds. It is interesting that Socrates charges not only bodily pleasure, but also bodily pain with corrupting the soul. The fear of the unknown (death) is equally responsible for causing men to cling to their body as love of earthly pleasures. Any impulse of the body that detracts from morality must be shunned.

Justice in the afterlife is presented here as an enduring, objective force. It is free of all subjectivity, divine or human, and cannot be corrupted. A clear divide exists between justice in this life and justice in the afterlife. Socrates employs a version of the social contract to define justice on earth. Men are compelled to uphold the laws and

judgments of the society in which they choose to live. Any breach of those laws is an act of injustice, no matter if it is in retaliation for a previous injustice. Justice in the afterlife is more absolute. A person who has devoted his life to morality, identified as purifying the soul through a complete rejection of the bodily existence, will be rewarded with a place in a sort of philosophers' paradise amongst the gods. Morality is revealed as a means to an end. Though Socrates has ridded his argument of an absolute divine moral authority, he retains the aspect of virtue judged and rewarded the afterlife. Devotion to a moral life teaches one to love knowledge and prudence and to shun worldly pleasures, resulting in a purer soul. To live a moral life is to spend your life preparing to die a philosopher's death.

If morality is found to be (partially) subjective, justice must necessarily be objective, or else the ability of human beings to determine what constitutes a moral or just life is lost. If a concept of justice is going to claim objectivity, there must be an objective, absolute source from which it takes its authority. This source is most commonly, but not necessarily, the divine. The Platonic teaching situates this life against the horizon, or possibility, of some other, eternal life. Even in the absence of an absolute divine, morality is still seen to carry an implicit form of justice. There is no omnipotent figure judging what is moral and immoral, but the more virtuously a person's life is lived, the purer his soul will be. The problematic relationship between morality and death emerges with the loss of divine punishment in the afterlife, or with the absence of an afterlife. Belief in an afterlife is not an essential component in the relationship between death and justice – belief that the current life is the only life often merely replaces divine justice with societal justice. The courts become God, so to speak. For the horizon of

death to serve as an incentive to morality, it is only necessary that one believes that if an afterlife exists, it is an afterlife where the just shall be rewarded and the unjust punished accordingly.

PART TWO: *INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE*

The threat of death loses its potency in two situations: where an individual is confident of his morality, and welcomes death and the afterlife as a release from earthly life, and where an individual is possessed of an immortality of the body, and will never face an afterlife (just or otherwise). Socrates provides an example of the first scenario; for an example of the second, I must turn to the realm of fiction in *Interview With the Vampire*. Though *Interview* deals with fictitious circumstances, it is useful, nonetheless, as a theoretical study of the role that death plays in morality. The film asks, are humans by nature virtuous creatures, or is our morality based in fear? Plato poses these same questions, but he questions why we should fear death at all, rather than examining the results of removing the horizon of death completely. The questions presented in Plato's ruminations on the nature of justice and morality as they relate to the soul have been, in no way, sufficiently answered. Some might say that until an objective truth (if any exists) can be comprehended, each society and each age must determine how it will conceive of justice – and those things that always seem to pertain to justice: death, soul, and morality.

There are various places to turn for an elucidation of justice and morality. This thesis takes what is arguably a controversial path. The philosophical musings of

contemporary society – in this case our own -- are often manifested in popular culture. The artifacts of a culture reveal what influential artists, and by extension, a public say and mean when speaking about justice. To this end, I have chosen to study the film adaptation of Anne Rice's *Interview With the Vampire* in addition to Plato's dialogues. The film explores the grief and despair of immortal life through the eyes of an immortal being, a vampire. *Interview* is particularly useful as it presents a situation where the usual notions of justice and punishment are not applicable. The fear of death and judgment in the afterlife, as they are commonly conceived, has been removed. Vampires are immortal if they so choose. The choice entails both an immortal life and an amoral life. The film asks the viewer to consider, not only if he/she would like to live forever, but also if he/she would like to live in a place beyond justice. The immortal vampires have no attachment to a society or its laws. Human laws appear fleeting compared to their relatively changeless existence. Immune from the threat of death, do the vampires have any incentive to follow a moral code? Does morality have a place in an existence free of reward and punishment? In the absence of justice, is morality accessible? In other words, is there a moral law that is beyond a conventional law?

To be sure, Anne Rice does not possess the depth and subtlety of Plato. I am not making such a claim in this study. One does not have to be a Platonic scholar, however, to consider the issues at stake in Plato's writings. The questions presented by Plato are so fundamental to our human understanding of justice and morality, that they must be addressed by any serious thinker who endeavors to shed light on the topic. Anne Rice, herself, may not have realized that she was writing in a Platonic vein, but that does not make it less true. Plato addresses this phenomenon in the *Apology of Socrates*. In his

search for a wise man, Socrates converses with the poets of Athens, asking them to relate the wisdom behind their works. Socrates declares, "Almost everyone present, so to speak, would have spoken better than the poets did about the poetry that they themselves had made. So again, also concerning the poets, I soon recognized that they do not make what they make by wisdom, but by some sort of nature and while inspired."²¹ An artist may not fully comprehend the scope of his or her art. Plato allows us to see the philosophical significance of a film that is initially presented as a horror flick – as one poignant reviewer noted, "Metaphors are a stake in the heart at the box office."²² Rice has, nonetheless, presented an intriguing twist on Platonic thought, and presents it in a startling genre. While Plato reveals the depth of *Interview*, the film simultaneously invites a mass audience to consider Platonic ideas. We must ascend beyond the cave of cultural prejudice in order to understand that political/philosophical discourses may be found in strange packages.

When studied in light of the Platonic dialogues, *Interview With the Vampire* presents some startling conclusions about the relationship between justice and morality. The film centers on an Interview with the protagonist, Louis, during which he narrates his life since he became immortal, since, "he was born into darkness" at the hands of the vampire Lestat, who subsequently became his companion.²³ His existence as a vampire is marked by an immediate moral crisis: he must kill humans nightly in order to survive. There are parts of Louis's life that seem to bear on his choice for immortality. In his human life, Louis was a Catholic who had lost all enjoyment of life, along with his wife and child. He could no longer tolerate his human pain. He admits, "Most of all I longed for death. I know that now. I invited it, a release from the pain of living."²⁴ Louis will

come to view his immortality as eternal punishment for his cowardice in the face of death. At the point of death, Lestat offers Louis a life free from human pain, and as a consequence detachment from human emotion and morality, as well. Though he is no longer human, Louis is neither able, nor willing, to relinquish his human conception of morality. He attempts to subsist on the blood of animals, but this is a tortured, desperate existence filled with physical pain. Killing his intended victim's poodles instead, Louis appears pathetic rather than merciful.²⁵ His inability to relinquish his human morality prevents him from embracing the promised pain-free existence. Louis voluntarily entered into his vampire life – Lestat gave him a choice between death and immortal, immoral life. The sacrifice of his morality to preserve his body plunges him into eternal “darkness.”

Pain aside, Louis is immune to illness and death. He never ages, never changes. The only possible death for a vampire is through complete incineration by fire or sunlight – suicide is possible, but only through an extreme act of the will (self-immolation is not for the weak). Louis is beyond death; therefore, he is beyond all human conceptions of justice, or at the very least, this seems to be what Rice is suggesting. Neither divine justice in the afterlife nor societal justice systems are applicable to his immortal nature. Cosmic justice seems to have no bearing. And in light of the cosmic concern, the workings of conventional justice seem petty at best. The temporary legal systems of society are far too weak and removed to have any influence over the vampires' actions. The argument can be made that since they no longer rely on any one society for protection, they no longer need to adhere to the laws of humanity. Rice seems to argue that, absent divine justice, conventional justice has no teeth. As a consequence, the only

possibility of justice available to the vampires is that which they enforce amongst themselves. With the exception of the Parisian vampires, there are no rules, governments, or communities amongst vampires. Justice, then, would necessarily resemble personal vendetta more than law. Their laws have no transcendent source or meaning – might makes right.

The vampires have moved beyond good and evil. There are clear Nietzschean echoes throughout Rice's work. Yet, the nature of her characters indicates that she has not fully succumbed to the pull of the abyss. Nietzsche attempts to move humanity beyond morality. Rice's characters are not human. *Interview* shows what could result from a Nietzschean overthrow of morality – great freedom or great despair. The problems with moving beyond good and evil are personified in Louis's bitter despair and Lestat's mocking amorality. While she explores Nietzsche's ideas, Rice does not recommend immortality/immorality for anyone...thus Plato. Plato is also thinking about life beyond good and evil. His suspicion of both divine and conventional justice suggests an equal, if not greater, suspicion of our usual notions of good and evil. The struggle between body and soul is prominent in both Plato and *Interview*. The vampires may be able to overcome this friction, but both writers indicate that humans are not. Plato moves beyond good and evil, and then goes further – finding justice and morality without the gods or society. Rice may not have moved beyond Nietzsche. But Louis, her creation, comes very close. He never ceases his search for a morality within his immortality, even after his acceptance of God's absence (or apathy).

Louis is immortal. But curiously he is filled with guilt at the actions necessitated by his immortal nature. He kills humans nightly, yet no punishment befalls him. Even

when he kills a child, and Lestat makes her into a vampire daughter (Claudia), God is conspicuously absent. It is at this junction, however, that we begin to see that, for the vampires, the absence of God seems to hold a place for them. This is curious, to be sure. How do we understand God's presence by his absence? Louis desperately wants to believe that he is damned. He wants to feel guilt. His conscience is the last connection he feels to his human self. He must be damned, else all order and meaning is lost from the world. When forced to consider the possibility that there is no judgment of good and evil – there is no justice or reward for morality. He would rather be damned than face an amoral world. Louis insists to Lestat, "We belong in hell." Lestat responds, "What if there is no hell, or they don't want us there? Ever think of that?"²⁶ Years of living amorally with no retribution (divine or otherwise) have deadened Lestat's conscience. He understands that human concepts of good and evil no longer apply to his existence. He challenges the notion of divine omnipotence, suggesting that God's authority is restricted to the afterlife. Even if divine justice is certain in the afterlife, God cannot extend beyond the parameters of death.

The concept of the Christian God is altered slightly in *Interview*. God is either indifferent to the earthly existence, or has no power to intervene on earth. Mortals are subject to God's judgment, those who do not die are not. The tension between body and soul that defines a human being is seemingly resolved in the vampires. Their bodies and souls are welded (wedded?) together permanently. Plato argued that human life, and especially philosophy, is a constant battle between the desires of the body and the desires of the soul. The vampires, with the exception of Louis, seem to have moved beyond this struggle. Does this mean that the vampires have gained an advantage over humanity, or

lost something invaluable? Rice shows us the importance of the human tension between body and soul by presenting creatures in which the tension has been resolved. They can define their own morality (or amorality) completely independent of a higher authority. Lestat understands this; he is free to revel in his evil. Louis cannot accept it; he is trapped by his terror at the thought of losing his guilt, and thus his morality. Would liberation from certain justice be liberating or terrifying? The necessity of a distant judgment for human beings is made clear through its absence in the vampires' existence.

The unparalleled autonomy of the vampires leaves them in a position of unparalleled power on earth. Lestat attempts to make Louis understand that they are truly beyond justice, and do not have an incentive to morality. Good and evil hold no value to a vampire who is outside the reach of justice, divine or societal. Their eternal earthly life ensures that they can remain gods unto themselves forever. Lestat declares, "Evil is a point of view. God kills, indiscriminately, and so shall we. For no creatures under God are as we are, none so like him as ourselves."²⁷ Implied within this statement are doubts, not only of God's authority on earth, but also of God's justness. Lestat does not portray God as the enforcer of justice and source of morality – Lestat's God is not just, much less an absolute measure of justness. It is God's ability to kill indiscriminately without recourse or guilt that makes Him a god. The mark of divinity, for Lestat, is the absence of a higher judicial authority. It is power, not virtue, which defines a god. If God is not just, then another source of objective justice must be found, or else justice is condemned to be the manifestation of a temperamental deity's prejudices and preferences.

Without justice, there appears to be no incentive to morality for the vampires other than virtue for virtue's sake. When speaking of justice for its own sake, however, it

is not immediately clear what that might mean. Could it be that justice is divorced from any utilitarian calculus? Let us leave this aside for the moment, and return to it in the conclusion. The vampires are not able to find a morality in upholding the laws and values of a society, such as Socrates was able to do in Athens. Throughout the course of the film, Louis and Lestat reside in cities as diverse as eighteenth-century New Orleans to modern-day San Francisco. The laws and values of these two societies are so different that they prevent anyone who resides in both from having loyalty to either. The detachment is necessary; else the vampires would be driven mad, unable to cope with the drastic changes that the centuries can bring.

Armand, the eldest and leader of the Parisian vampires, reveals to Louis that very few vampires are able to achieve true immortality. A vampire must find a way to understand each age as it understands itself. He explains, "The world changes. We do not. Therein lies the irony that ultimately kills us."²⁸ This could be an opening into the question of justice as a transcendent idea, not bound by time and place. The desire for immortality is commonly the desire to live forever in the world that we know. Once that world has past away, any loyalty to our new surroundings would be tenuous, at best. Attempting to derive morality from an antiquated society whose customs are now considered immoral, such as Louis' native slave-dependent Louisiana, would be difficult at best. Morality that is based in society is subjective and temporary, and cannot pretend otherwise. As the vampires move from regime to regime, then, there seems to be no conventional apparatus that can speak directly to their consciences. This is made all the more poignant by the way we are made to understand the body of a vampire. Does Anne Rice direct our gaze to the limits of the "body politic?"

Morality becomes a personal decision in the absence of a universal and transcendent justice. Restraining from immoral acts will benefit the vampires in no way – increasing their own happiness is their only concern. Or so it seems to be. At times, the vampires display personal loyalty, love, and a desire to punish those they conceive as wicked. These impulses, however, are derived from personal taste, not from a devotion to morality or justice. But is taste founded on a conscience? The relativism or the nihilism of the vampires can lead to the following: despair, embodied in Louis, or absolute freedom, seen in Lestat, Claudia, and Armand. The latter group, especially Lestat, is at peace with their vampire nature. Lestat embraces the amorality of the world, and defines his own standards of good and evil – what he likes is good, what he dislikes is evil. Lestat does not share Louis's obsession with finding meaning to their existence. When Louis insists, "But you must know something about the meaning of it all, you must know where we come from, why we..." Lestat responds, "Why? Why should I know these things? Do you know them?"²⁹ Two hundred years of life has brought Lestat no metaphysical knowledge and quenched his curiosity about the divine. It is enough that he exists, and is a god unto himself. Vampires simultaneously transcend human nature and regress to an animal-like state. They must kill in order to survive; killing humans is not a moral decision, but rather an instinctual one. But they are not mere animals. Vampires were formerly human; they are intelligent, self-aware, reasoning beings. The fact that their amorality is a conscious, deliberate decision allows the vampires to become god-like.

Louis does not want a world where the evil he is witness to (and part of) goes unpunished. Though he resolves his moral objections to the killing of humans,

eventually “feeding on those who cross his path,” Louis can never fully accept that all morality is pointless.³⁰ His willingness to be interviewed stems from a desire to warn others about the dangers of abandoning their humanity. By humanity, I mean the horizon of death. Humanity is shared, and what could be more common in human life than self-conscious death? Before he reaches this acceptance of his nature, Louis’s search for evidence of an enduring morality leads him to destroy everyone that he loves. Lestat, Claudia, and Armand are all destroyed because Louis cannot accept an existence without morality. He does not want to be absolved of moral responsibility and he eliminates those who acknowledge and glory in their amorality. Lestat expresses Louis’ unnecessary torment in the accusation: “Merciful Death, how you love your precious guilt.”³¹ Louis refusal to abandon his human conceptions of good and evil, right and wrong, prevents him from seeing that he suffers unnecessarily. Though there is no evidence that he is damned, Louis condemns himself to his own personal hell. For Louis, the thought of a world without any sort of order or meaning is more terrifying than the thought of his own damnation. His refusal to cease his search for meaning demands that he continue to exist, no matter how painful it becomes.

Louis’s frustration and rage at Lestat’s ignorance leads him to allow Claudia to attempt, and nearly succeed, in killing Lestat. His preoccupation with his search for morality results in a sacrifice of justice. The (attempted) murder of Lestat can not be just; Louis and Claudia have no authority to judge or condemn him. Lestat gave them both immortal life, and they are both guilty of the same murderous acts as he. Louis merely feels guilt where the others do not. Louis appears to be aware of the injustice of the murder. When Claudia insists, “He (Lestat) deserved to die,” Louis agrees, “Then maybe

so do we. Every night of our lives.”³² Remorse does not excuse unjustness. The divide between vengeance and justice is seen in Claudia’s action. Claudia wanted revenge against Lestat for condemning her to eternity in a child’s body, yet neither she nor Louis are just themselves; therefore, they cannot justly condemn Lestat. The absence of morality is also felt. It does not matter that Louis suffers when he kills and Lestat enjoys it – only morality cares for these distinctions.³³ Though Louis is plagued by a human conscience, the human morality upon which it was developed is no longer relevant. They both chose a predatory life; whether a vampire kills quickly or slowly is of little consequence: the victim is still dead because the vampire chose immortality. The decision to become a creature that feeds on human life is, in essence, the last decision about morality that the vampires can make.

After Lestat’s (supposed) demise, Louis and Claudia flee to Europe in the hopes of uncovering the nature of their preternatural existence. In Paris, they encounter Armand and his troupe of vampire actors who inhabit the *Theatre des Vampires*. Led by Armand, the Parisian vampires perform plays in which they imitate humans imitating vampires. They kill humans on stage, with the audience unaware that their actions are real. After four hundred years, Armand is, to his knowledge, the oldest living vampire in the world.³⁴ Armand has survived the ages through embracing his preternatural nature and molding himself into the perfect vampire: “beautiful, powerful, and without regret.”³⁵ Though he appears as knowledgeable as Louis could have hoped, Armand does not offer any hope for our understanding of divine justice or divine morality. His certainty finally persuades Louis that the vampires are truly their own masters: “I know nothing about God or the Devil. I have never seen a vision or learned a secret that would

damn or save my soul.” Louis’s submission, “So it’s as I always feared. Nothing, leading to nothing,” is not filled with relief, but rather sorrow. If he is not damned, then his suffering has indeed been needless. Not only will his evil go unpunished, but any good that is done will go unrewarded. The absence of divine justice on earth opens the distinct possibility that justice is absent in all realms, including the afterlife. If the amorality of the vampires provokes no repercussion, then God is either unjust or impotent, neither of which holds much hope for a moral universe.

Not only does Armand not confirm Louis’s suspicion (hope?) that he is damned, he also questions whether the killing of humans is an immoral act, given that no discernable objective moral code exists. Armand is beyond the need for morality. He does not revel in his evil like Lestat; rather, he quietly exerts and increases his power until he is a god amongst vampires. The Parisian vampires submit to his demands – he gives them their laws, and enforces his own will. Armand does not despise Louis for his desperate search for morality. He does question why Louis must find himself to be evil in a moral universe, however. Human conceptions of good and evil must be abandoned, but it is human emotion, such as guilt, that allows Louis to retain a semblance of a moral self. Armand suggests that, though Louis has been deprived of absolute morality, either in the form of salvation and damnation, a subjective, personal concept of morality may still offer him peace.

ARMAND: “You die when you kill, you feel you deserve to die and you stint on nothing. But does that make you evil? Or, since you comprehend what you call goodness, does it not make you good?”

LOUIS: “Then there is nothing.”

ARMAND: “Perhaps... (He passes his finger through the candle flame) And perhaps this is the only real evil left.”³⁶

The fact that Louis continues to make distinctions between good and evil marks him as a moral agent. His refusal to accept a life free of moral responsibility would seem to place him in the realm of goodness. He is merely unable to manifest his moral beliefs in his actions. Louis is moral, but not just. Without justice, however, his pursuit of morality leads to nothing but despair, as he is confronted with his own impotence. There is no escaping a universal, comprehensive, transcendent sense of justice, because we are never neutral creatures, even when we dispense with God. The human conscience demands that the just and unjust are rewarded or punished, even when we ourselves must become judge, jury, and executioner.

Armand and his troupe of vampires embody the opposite principle of Louis' impotent morality: they enforce justice without morality. Armand expresses his conviction in the above dialogue that the only true evil left in the world is that which has the capacity to destroy him. To this end, there exists but one crime amongst the Parisian vampires: "It is the crime that means death to any vampire. To kill your own kind!"³⁷ This should not be taken as a moral condemnation of murder – moral judgments belong to the realm of mortals. Armand's law (and it should be understood as Armand's) is meant to preserve himself against both personal attack and the mayhem that would result from attempting to rule a community of constantly feuding vampires. Justice extends only so far as Armand allows. It is not an objective, enduring principle, but rather a means to an end. Here we return to the question of utility. Armand is seemingly not burdened with a conscience. He does not comprehend 'virtue for its own sake.' His lack of morality precludes any true loyalty to justice. Devotion to a moral principle is not a part of Armand's existence; personal utility becomes his standard of justice. As the film

makes explicit, Armand abandons his law when he no longer wishes to rule the *Theatre des Vampires*. Justice is enforced only as long as it suits his preferences.

With the cry of, "Time for justice, little one!" Claudia is ripped from Louis and placed on trial for the (attempted) murder of Lestat.³⁸ Attempted murder of a fellow vampire is considered to be on par with actually killing one. The intent is judged, not the success. Claudia is sentenced, without any account of a trial, to instant death through exposure to sunlight, while Louis, because he was merely a passive participant, is sentenced to "eternity in a box."³⁹ The justice of the Parisian vampires is evident, though their blindness to Claudia and Louis's circumstance and ignorance of the law reveals their immorality/amorality. Armand's absolute power to determine the parameters of justice is also seen. He rescues Louis from his walled-up coffin with no resistance from the others. Armand wished for Louis to leave Claudia and join him. Louis's imprisonment was likely a means to allow Armand to dispose of Claudia without incurring Louis's wrath. Justice without morality is possible, though, as is evident, highly susceptible to corruption.

With the death of Claudia, Louis' scholarly pursuit of morality is abandoned as he turns to vengeance. Claudia's execution by the Parisian vampires was justified according to their law. In a world without absolute or objective authority, however, the power of law is tenuous, at best. Louis kills all of the Parisian vampires, with the exception of Armand, burning the Theatre des Vampires as they sleep. Deprived of divine justice, Louis anoints himself as judge of the wicked. In the absence of God, he will punish what he perceives as evil. His action is not founded in a respect for justice, but rather a desire solely for personal vengeance. Once again, the passions are seen as the root of justice.

This is very much in the spirit of Greek tragedy, which Plato knew. Claudia was unjust and immoral; she broke the only law amongst the vampires and never expressed remorse for her actions. Her death taught Louis that abstract principles such, as justice and morality, are now irrelevant. The visible world is his only concern, and he would sacrifice his morality to preserve her happiness. The loss of Claudia disenchanting Louis; he has little impetus to search for meaning. At the end, he declares, "But all my passion went with her yellow hair. I am a spirit with preternatural flesh. Detached. Unchangeable. Empty."⁴⁰ Louis now understands that he is beyond morality, but he is alone, and too scarred to enjoy it. The film concludes with Lestat, the embodiment of immorality, reappearing and offering the Interviewer, Daniel, the same promise he offered Louis in the beginning – eternal life free from morality. Louis's endeavor has failed; Daniel desperately wants to become a vampire.

Interview presents a scenario where the horizon of death is removed from consideration in the quest for an understanding of justice. Death is possible, but not inevitable. The vampires are placed beyond the reach of death, and consequently do not have to face justice in the afterlife. Societal justice is likewise irrelevant to their existence; the vampires will outlast any judicial system. With little or no possibility of punishment, a reevaluation of morality is mandated. Can morality exist without the certainty of final justice? If so, what sort of morality would it be? *Interview* suggests that no enduring concept of morality can survive without the assurance of reward and punishment. The vampires are placed out of the reach of the divine; they are gods unto themselves. Justice is reduced to personal vengeance, and any attempt at morality leads only to despair. The ultimate victory of Lestat is not a victory over Claudia for

attempting to murder him. It is a victory over Louis for attempting to preserve morality where none is needed.

CONCLUSION

Though *Interview With the Vampire* and the Platonic dialogues that I have presented differ greatly in genre, age, and message, they both offer important insights about the relationship between morality and justice, and the role of death in both concepts. A tension is found, in both cases, between earthly, conventional justice and cosmic or divine justice. This tension mirrors the conflict between body and soul central to Plato's understanding of human beings. *Interview* presents a scenario in which body and soul are bound together forever. The horizon of death and transcendent justice has been removed. The vampires live beyond human ideas of good and evil; they are amoral. Yet, they all experience periods of extreme tragedy and despair. The knowledge that the earthly existence is, in fact, their only possible existence robs the vampires of the hope for perfection in the future. Humans are often capable of accepting earthly injustices because they believe that these injustices will be corrected in the afterlife. Plato's argument in favor of an immortal soul embodies this belief. Upon death, the soul sheds its bodily prison and takes its "pure" form. The ideal of a pure existence is always conceived from an impure one, however. It may be that humanity progresses only by striving towards this unattainable perfection. The conflict between body and soul, earthly and divine, may never be resolved, and perhaps cannot be resolved without losing an essential part of our humanity.

It seems that both works suggest that death is necessary for good and evil. Not merely death, however – a just afterlife is also required. If our actions on earth have no cosmic consequences, then any objective, enduring concept of justice or morality will not survive. This does not necessarily entail the existence of a divine judge or the authority of religion. *Interview* denies that virtue can exist for virtue's sake. Though Louis experiences pangs of guilt and remorse, these feelings are portrayed as mere relics of his humanity. The vampires who have fully embraced their nature are amoral. The absence of God's authority results in the demise of morality and justice. Not so in Plato. Plato questions both the authority and the justness of the gods. The gods are not presented as all-powerful dispensers of morality and justice. An absolute divine is not necessary for Plato's virtue. A virtuous life has its own reward, outside the purview of both divine and conventional justice. Death is necessary to reap this reward. So long as the possibility of perfect justice exists, morality will remain a compelling force in human life.

¹ Rice, Ann. Essay in response to prolific inquiries as to her opinion on the final cut of the film and her response to its critics. Retrieved from <http://www.allstarz.org/tomcruise/vampirerice.htm>

² Plato. *Euthyphro*. Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Four Texts on Socrates. (1998). Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London. 4e (8-10).

³ Plato. *Euthyphro*. Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Four Texts on Socrates. (1998). Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London. 5e (7-8) – 6a (1-3).

⁴ Plato. *Euthyphro*. Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Four Texts on Socrates. (1998). Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London. 6e (11) – 7a (1).

⁵ Plato. *Euthyphro*. Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Four Texts on Socrates. (1998). Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London. 7d (11-15).

⁶ Plato. *Euthyphro*. Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Four Texts on Socrates. (1998). Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London. 8d (10-11) / 8e (7-8).

⁷ Plato. *Euthyphro*. Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Four Texts on Socrates. (1998). Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London. 12d (2-3).

⁸ Plato. *Apology of Socrates*. Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Four Texts on Socrates. (1998). Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London. 31d (4-5).

- ⁹ Plato. *Apology of Socrates*. Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Four Texts on Socrates. (1998). Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London. 28e (4-5) – 29a (1-5).
- ¹⁰ Plato. *Apology of Socrates*. Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Four Texts on Socrates. (1998). Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London. 29d (3-5).
- ¹¹ Plato. *Apology of Socrates*. Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Four Texts on Socrates. (1998). Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London. 35b – 35c (1-5).
- ¹² Plato. *Apology of Socrates*. Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Four Texts on Socrates. (1998). Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London. 21d (8-9).
- ¹³ Plato. *Apology of Socrates*. Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Four Texts on Socrates. (1998). Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London. 29a (6-11).
- ¹⁴ Plato. *Crito*. Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Four Texts on Socrates. (1998). Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London. 47e (1-2).
- ¹⁵ Plato. *Crito*. Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Four Texts on Socrates. (1998). Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London. 49b (10-12).
- ¹⁶ Plato. *Crito*. Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Four Texts on Socrates. (1998). Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London. 50b (3-6).
- ¹⁷ Plato. *Crito*. Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Four Texts on Socrates. (1998). Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London. 51d (3-6) / 51e (2-5).
- ¹⁸ Plato. *Crito*. Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Four Texts on Socrates. (1998). Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London. 50e (8-10) / 51a (3-5) / 51b (10-12).
- ¹⁹ Plato. *Phaedo*. Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Four Texts on Socrates. (1998). Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London. 80e (2-4) / 81a (3-6) / 81a (8-9).
- ²⁰ Plato. *Phaedo*. Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Four Texts on Socrates. (1998). Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London. 81b (1-3) / 81c (4-6) / 81c (9-12) / 81e (1-3).
- ²¹ Plato. *Apology of Socrates*. Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Four Texts on Socrates. (1998). Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London. 22b (2-4) – 22c (1-2).
- ²² Peter Travers. A review of *Interview for Rolling Stone* magazine. Retrieved from <http://www.allstarz.org/tomcruise/vampirereviews.htm>
- ²³ *Interview With the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*. Directed by Neil Jordan. Geffen Pictures (1994). Screenplay by Anne Rice. Scene 2: “Another life for the collector.” Speaker: Louis (played by Brad Pitt).
- ²⁴ *Interview With the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*. Directed by Neil Jordan. Geffen Pictures (1994). Screenplay by Anne Rice. Scene 3: “My invitation to death.” Speaker: Louis (played by Brad Pitt).
- ²⁵ *Interview With the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*. Directed by Neil Jordan. Geffen Pictures (1994). Screenplay by Anne Rice. Scene 6: “Getting used to killing.”
- ²⁶ *Interview With the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*. Directed by Neil Jordan. Geffen Pictures (1994). Screenplay by Anne Rice. Scene 7: “A cursed place burns.” Speakers: (1) Louis (played by Brad Pitt) (2) Lestat (played by Tom Cruise).
- ²⁷ *Interview With the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*. Directed by Neil Jordan. Geffen Pictures (1994). Screenplay by Anne Rice. Scene 9: “Claudia; ...and so shall we.” Speaker: Lestat (played by Tom Cruise).
- ²⁸ *Interview With the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*. Directed by Neil Jordan. Geffen Pictures (1994). Screenplay by Anne Rice. Scene 20: “The stamina for immortality.” Speaker: Armand (played by Antonio Banderas).
- ²⁹ *Interview With the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*. Directed by Neil Jordan. Geffen Pictures (1994). Screenplay by Anne Rice. Scene 7: “A cursed place burns.” Speaker: (1) Louis (played by Brad Pitt) (2) Lestat (played by Tom Cruise).
- ³⁰ *Interview With the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*. Directed by Neil Jordan. Geffen Pictures (1994). Screenplay by Anne Rice. Scene 28: “Do you like dying?” Speaker: Louis (played by Brad Pitt).
- ³¹ *Interview With the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*. Directed by Neil Jordan. Geffen Pictures (1994). Screenplay by Anne Rice. Scene 9: “Claudia; “...and so shall we.”” Speaker: Lestat (played by Tom Cruise).
- ³² *Interview With the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*. Directed by Neil Jordan. Geffen Pictures (1994). Screenplay by Anne Rice. Scene 12: “Good night, sweet prince.” Speaker: (1) Claudia (played by Kirsten Dunst) (2) Louis (played by Brad Pitt).

³³ *Interview With the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*. Directed by Neil Jordan. Geffen Pictures (1994). Screenplay by Anne Rice. Scene 8: "Take her, Louis!" Dialogue between Louis and Lestat discussing the nature of vampires as killers.

³⁴ *Interview With the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*. Directed by Neil Jordan. Geffen Pictures (1994). Screenplay by Anne Rice. Scene 17: "The source of evil."

³⁵ *Interview With the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*. Directed by Neil Jordan. Geffen Pictures (1994). Screenplay by Anne Rice. Scene 25: "A lesson I don't care to learn." Speaker: Armand (played by Antonio Banderas).

³⁶ *Interview With the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*. Directed by Neil Jordan. Geffen Pictures (1994). Screenplay by Anne Rice. Scene 17: "The source of evil." Speaker (1) Armand (played by Antonio Banderas (2) Louis (played by Brad Pitt).

³⁷ *Interview With the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*. Directed by Neil Jordan. Geffen Pictures (1994). Screenplay by Anne Rice. Scene 18: "A crime amongst us vampires." Speaker: Santiago (played by Stephen Rea).

³⁸ *Interview With the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*. Directed by Neil Jordan. Geffen Pictures (1994). Screenplay by Anne Rice. Scene 22: "A mob of the undead." Speaker: Estelle. It should be noted that the Parisian vampires do not differentiate between murder and attempted murder.

³⁹ *Interview With the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*. Directed by Neil Jordan. Geffen Pictures (1994). Screenplay by Anne Rice. Scene 22: "A mob of the undead." Speaker: Santiago (played by Stephen Rea).

⁴⁰ *Interview With the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*. Directed by Neil Jordan. Geffen Pictures (1994). Screenplay by Anne Rice. Scene 28: "Do you like dying?" Speaker: Louis (played by Brad Pitt).

Bibliography

- Cropsey, Joseph. (1995). Plato's World: Man's Place in the Cosmos. Preface, Introduction, Ch. III: *Euthyphro*, Ch. VI: *Apology of Socrates*, Ch. VII: *Crito*, Ch. VIII: *Phaedro*. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London. The insights provided by this book are too numerous to list. In particular, the difficulties presented in the *Apology's* attempt to define goodness were made much clearer from this work. If goodness is merely the favor of the gods, then an absolutely good god is needed in order for morality to retain its authority. By showing that the gods love goodness because it is good, Socrates rescues morality from a very precarious place. Also, the essay on the *Phaedo* was extremely helpful. Rather, it revealed the hidden difficulties. To prove the immortality of the soul through reason alone is an impossible task. Cropsey emphasizes the strengths and weakness (perhaps intentional) of Socrates' argument. Accounting for the weaknesses is one of the goals of this work.
- Jordon, Neil (director). (1994). *Interview With the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*. Film version. Screenplay by Anne Rice. Geffen Pictures. My thesis will focus primarily on the film version of *Interview*. Rice wrote the screenplay years after the completion of the novel, and also after she had written several more chapters of *The Vampire Chronicles*. Her thinking in the screenplay is much more clear and complete, due to the influence of the subsequent novels. The film is true to the book's themes and characters. Therefore, I will rely on the film as my primary source, with some additional references to the book.
- Morel, Lucas. Dr. Morel served as my second reader for my Politics Honors Thesis. He offered many astute insights during the writing process. He was especially helpful in emphasizing the importance of religion in the texts.
- Plato, trans. by David Gallop. (1975). *Phaedo*. Clarendon Plato Series. General Editor: M. J. Woods. Oxford University Press. Oxford. Socrates seeks to prove the immortality of the soul in the moments before his death. He uses the idea of opposites never being able to exist simultaneously, yet always generating one another to show that the soul must have existed before it was born into a body, and will continue to exist after the body's death. Soul brings life, which is the opposite of death; therefore, death cannot destroy the soul. The relationship between the body and the soul will be a large part of the thesis topic that I am proposing. Socrates' argument presents many difficulties, most of which I have not worked out as of yet. *Interview* also contemplates the connection between body, soul, and immortality. Hopefully, a comparison between the relationships discussed in the two works will prove enlightening.
- Plato, trans. by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. (1984). Four Texts on Socrates. Translations of Plato's *Euthyphro*, *Apology of Socrates*, and *Crito*. Cornell

University Press. Ithaca and London. These three texts focus on the authority of the laws and legal system of Athens. The *Euthyphro* challenges the idea of the gods' approval as the basis of morality. Once the belief in an absolutely good divine presence is lost, the legitimacy of the moral and legal systems of society are called into question. The *Apology* gives an account of Socrates' trial and sentencing. Here, the question of the goodness of death is first presented. Socrates will continue his discussion of death in the *Phaedo*. He maintains his claim of ignorance about "the greatest things," and uses this claim to explain his reasons for not objecting to his death penalty. Socrates does not know if death is a good or a bad thing; therefore, he will not assume that it is bad. The *Crito* is a dialogue between Socrates and his friend, Crito, while Socrates is in prison. Crito attempts to convince Socrates to escape into exile, but Socrates refuses. At this point, Socrates seeks to reestablish the authority of the laws, which he had called into question in the *Euthyphro*. He argues that since he lived voluntarily under the Athenian laws, he owes them his allegiance. Despite the fact that he was convicted unjustly, Socrates will not destroy the laws by escaping their judgment.

Rice, Anne. (1976). Interview With the Vampire: Book I of the Vampire Chronicles. Ballantine Books. New York. Rice tells the story of the vampires Louis, Lestat, Claudia, and Armand in the form of an Interview with Louis by a mortal. She examines the effects of immortality on the human soul. The vampires must lead a morally reprehensible life, at least by human standards, in order to survive. They must regularly kill and feed on mortals. Louis must come to terms with his loss of humanity; he must also lose his moral values if he is to continue to exist as a vampire. The revelation by Armand that he knows nothing of God or the devil is a devastating blow to Louis, who had always taken consolation in the fact that he was damned. Louis attempts to come to terms with many of the questions raised by Socrates in his final dialogues. In particular, I wish to examine the impact of immortality on morality.

Rice, Anne. (1994). *On the film, Interview With the Vampire*. <http://www.allstarz.org/tomcruise/vampirerice.htm>. Rice wrote this essay shortly after the release of the film version of *Interview*. It was widely known that despite the fact that Rice wrote the screenplay for the film, she was not consulted during the actual filming. This essay was meant to give her opinions on the final cut of the film, as well as to address critics of her work. I have used it as an example of how literature can be a vehicle for a serious philosophical discussion.

Roberts, Bette B. (1994). Anne Rice. Ch 1: *Rice's Life and Art: Liberation in the Savage Garden* and Ch. 3: *Interview With the Vampire*. Twayne's United States Authors Series. Twayne Publishers: New York. Rice's work on *Interview* took place largely during a very dark period in her life. Her daughter, Michele, had recently died of leukemia, leading Rice and her husband to spiral downward into alcoholism. From this darkness, came the story of Louis fall from grace: his loss

of religion, disillusionment with the world, etc. Rice's pain is evident throughout the book. The figure of Claudia is particularly haunting in light of Rice's life. The wish for an immortal daughter is explored, with tragic consequences.

Smith, Jennifer. (1996). Anne Rice: A Critical Companion. Ch. 1: *The Life of Anne Rice*, Ch. 2: *Supernatural Genres: Horror, Gothic, and Fantasy*, and Ch. 3: *Interview With the Vampire (1976)*. Greenwood Press. Westport, Connecticut. Rice chose to tell the story through the first-person perspective of Louis in order to emphasize his inner struggle and lingering humanity. The character of Lestat, while initially presented as cruel and evil, comes to be the character with which Rice identifies the most. Louis presents the heartache and suffering of the world beautifully; Lestat presents a figure that enjoys the darkness. He is not troubled by the absence of God; unlike Louis, he does not care if he is damned or not. Smith also presents a Freudian reading of the book, which I do not care for. It robs the characters of their dynamic qualities and growth. None of the characters in *Interview* should be categorized so easily.

Travers, Peter. *Interview With the Vampire Reviews*. Written for *Rolling Stone* magazine. Retrieved 2/20/2005 from <http://www.allstarz.org/tomcruise/vampirereviews.htm>. Travers understands, I believe, the moral and philosophical significance of the film. While his writing is intended to appeal to a mass audience (as is the film), his insights are quite poignant. He highlights the tension often found in pop culture artifacts between commercial success and the intellectual ambitions of the author/filmmaker.

Velasquez, Eduardo. Dr. Velasquez served as my Honors Thesis advisor and primary reader. He offered invaluable insights and advice throughout my study. Nearly every part of my thesis has benefited from our conversations.