

Plato and Aristotle on the Efficacy of Religious Practice

by

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DEDICATION

To Noelle and Tegan.

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Collections of Ancient Texts

DK Hermann A. Diels and Walter Kranz (edd.) 1951–2, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6th revised edn. (orig. 1903), 3 vols., Berlin: Weidmann.

TrGF Snell, Bruno, S. Radt, and R. Kannicht (edd.) 1971, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, Göttingen 1971-2004.

Dictionaries and Encyclopedias

LSJ Henry G. Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry S. Jones (edd.) 1996, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th edn., with a revised suppl., Oxford: Clarendon Press.

ABSTRACT

Plato and Aristotle each present traditional forms of religious practice (e.g., sacrifice, choral performance, prayer, and temple cult) as activities that are worth performing. Because these philosophers advocated such unconventional theological views, their endorsement of conventional religious practice strikes some readers as surprising. This dissertation examines why Plato and Aristotle defended traditional religious practice. Specifically, it investigates their views on its efficacy (i.e., what benefits religious practice produces and how it is thought to produce them).

Chapters 1-2 provide the intellectual background necessary to appreciate Plato and Aristotle's individual contributions. Chapter 1 outlines a view of efficacy that was common in the archaic period (the "Traditional View"). It shows that the literature from that period consistently promoted the idea that, through the performance of traditional religious practice, humans can influence the gods to effect change in all spheres of life: in the cosmos, the city, and the individual psyche. Chapter 2 shows that this view was destabilized in the dawn of the classical period, in the fifth century BCE. The pre-Socratic philosophers and Sophists of this period introduced several theological innovations that forced their proponents to reevaluate the traditional story about what traditional Greek religious practices accomplished and how they accomplished it.

Plato both expands and narrows the understanding of efficacy that is set forth in the archaic age. He argues that, for a token religious practice to be successful, it must be performed according to certain ethical standards. Chapter 3 outlines Plato's ethical criteria and argues that, while the philosopher, like proponents of the Traditional View, denies the efficacy of "illegitimate" performances that contravene these standards, he

believes that religious practice can influence all realms of human life theogenically through the instrumentality of the gods. It also shows that Plato expands the modes of efficacy by introducing the possibility that religious practices produce benefits anthropogenically, without the assistance of the gods. Chapters 4-5 each detail a specific religious practice and articulate how Plato thought they could be executed according to his standards. Chapter 4 investigates Plato's identification of choral performance and sacrifice as forms of play in the *Laws*, arguing that he imagined them to function as games do elsewhere in that work, when pursued in accordance with the laws and reason, and when performed for pleasure's sake. Chapter 5 evaluates the role of petitionary prayer in Plato's dialogues and shows that the philosopher valued the practice for its ability to facilitate intellectual achievement and integrated petitionary prayer into his psychology.

Chapters 6-7 focus on Aristotle's treatment of efficacy. Chapter 6 examines Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Λ and argues that, in contrast to Plato, Aristotle discards the Traditional View entirely by denying the ability of religious practices to move the gods to action or to effect change in the cosmos. It reconciles passages from the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, which seem *prima facie* to endorse conventional attitudes towards the gods, with the philosopher's metaphysical views, which appear to contradict them. Chapter 7 examines the social and psychological benefits of religious practice in Aristotle's *Politics*, where the philosopher claims that the institution of religion forms a necessary part of the city. It demonstrates that, for Aristotle, religious practice provides residents with rest and leisure, obligates them to observe laws, and promotes the development of friendship between residents.

Introduction

This dissertation takes as its principal object a feature of traditional ancient Greek religion that has been consistently understudied by historians of philosophy: religious practice. Scholarship that explores the intersection of ancient philosophy and religion tends to focus on how the early philosophers interpreted and reshaped traditional religious narratives, or myths. Unfortunately, it has neglected the question of how the philosophers viewed traditional religious practices such as prayer, sacrifice, and choral performance. This is a problem. It is also surprising, given how fundamental a part of religious life participation in these activities was in ancient Greek society. Zaidman and Schmitt-Pantel reflect scholarly consensus when they argue that Greek religion was “ritualistic in the sense that it was the opposite of dogmatic: it was not constructed around a unified corpus of doctrines, and it was above all the observation of rituals rather than fidelity to a dogma that ensured the permanence of tradition.”¹ This statement underscores the priority of religious activity in Greek religion. Any attempt, therefore, to understand the ancient Greek philosophers’ views on religion should account for how they conceptualized the physical practices of religion, around which so much of everyday life was structured.

¹ Zaidman and Schmit-Pantel 1992, 27. On the long-standing distinction between belief and practice in studies of Greek religion, see Harrison 2015.

Historians of ancient philosophy appear to have neglected this topic as the result of a misapprehension; they seem to conceive of the division between religious narrative and religious practice as following the same lines as the common dichotomy between belief and practice, between the intellectual and the physical. According to this conception, religious narrative is of philosophical interest because it is an attempt to express one's beliefs about the world and the gods' role in it. But because the performance of religious practice is a physical rather than an intellectual expression, its connection to belief, and therefore to philosophical inquiry, seems more tenuous.

Yet religious narrative and religious practice both have a complicated relationship to belief. The early philosophers examined religious narrative and developed interpretive methods precisely because the literal meaning of these narratives did not appear to constitute a straightforward representation of the author's belief about the gods and the cosmos. The philosopher's task was to extract beliefs from texts whose literal meaning was, according to the reader, either ambiguous or untenable. The relationship between religious practice and religious belief is likewise ambiguous, and therefore the traditional conceptions of this relationship are likewise contested by the early philosophers. Just as philosophers applied their faculties to determine what one ought to believe about traditional religious narratives, so they attempted to define how one should approach traditional religious practice and what it accomplishes. Neither religious narrative nor religious practice provide perspicuous recommendations for philosophical belief, but both can be made to do so through the imposition of various philosophical methods. Neither the recitation of a traditional religious narrative nor participation in a traditional religious practice conveys any belief, strictly speaking, about the world or the function of the gods.

Rather, religious narrative and religious practice are each the object of an exegetical process, and belief is the resulting product.

Of course, the process is different for religious practice than it is for religious narrative. To extract a philosophical message from a poetical text, the philosopher creates an interpretive device through which they can understand better the text as their primary object. This can be accomplished, for example, by proposing a system of symbols or allegories as a lens through which the text may be interpreted according to a particular philosophical view, or by providing a means by which the interpreter can recover a more original and accurate version than the one that is currently available.

Religious practice is not a textual object that can be scrutinized in this way (though some efforts are made to extract the “meaning” of practices from the interrelation of physical symbols). More significant to ancient thinkers was the question of what they should believe *about* religious practice. Specifically, they wanted to solve what I call the “problem of efficacy,” to determine what religious practice does and what effect it has on participants and on the world around them. This is the investigation that the present dissertation undertakes. It examines a burgeoning philosophical discourse around the efficacy of religious practice, which arises with the pre-Socratic philosophers in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, and its treatment in the works of Plato and Aristotle.

Early philosophers before Plato and Aristotle understood the intersection of traditional religious practice and the development of philosophy to be a site of intellectual interest. Indeed, this was of central concern in one of the most decisive moments of early Greek philosophy: the trial of Socrates. In Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates defends himself against the charge (among others) of “not recognizing the gods whom the city

recognizes” (ἀδικεῖ Σωκράτης, οὓς μὲν ἡ πόλις νομίζει θεοὺς οὐ νομίζων).² Elsewhere in the Platonic corpus, Socrates seems comfortable participating in traditional religious cult (e.g., *Euthyd.* 302C), but famously Socrates’ orientation toward traditional forms of piety is uncertain. Socrates frames his speech in a way that emphasizes his religious orthopraxy: his philosophical program is formed in response to Apollo’s decree, and so he articulates his philosophical activity in religious terms as a religious practice. He calls it his “service to the god” (ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ λατρεία, 23C1). In doing so, he imaginatively redefines service to the gods as inclusive of philosophical activity and the pursuit of truth and thus uses the philosopher as a model of religious piety. His conception as expressed in the *Apology* is novel, not traditional.

Socrates’ engagement with this issue is characteristically aporetic. In the *Apology*, he makes an interesting argumentative move: he avoids discussion of his own participation in religious practice and instead focuses on his religious belief. Interpreters have long expressed their curiosity at the central verb in this accusation, translated here as “to recognize” (νομίζειν). Did Socrates stand accused of failing to worship the gods of the state, or of failing to believe in their existence? Although Xenophon attests to his pious observance of traditional religious practice (*Ap.* 11, *Mem.* 1. 1. 2), in Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates steers the conversation toward a discussion of his religious belief. This allows him to combat directly his unfair association with natural philosophers like Anaxagoras. Rather than pursue questions of religious cult, Socrates asks Meletus about deities who had little role in civic cult: “do I not recognize, as other men do, that the Sun

² The charges against Socrates, as they appear in Plato’s *Apology*, are confirmed by the ancient scholar Favorinus’ research at the state archives of Athens (Diog. Laert. 2. 40).

and the Moon are gods?” Here, the only question could be about Socrates’ intellectual recognition of their status as gods as opposed to stone. Socrates leaves unaddressed the question of his participation in religious cult, leaving the jurors to grapple with the philosopher’s appeal to the priestess of Apollo and his loose conception of philosophy as religious worship.

Socrates’ handling of the question of religious practice is curious. He appeals to it on the one hand, yet avoids it on the other. The philosopher’s resolution of the conflict between traditional religious practice and philosophical inquiry (if he had one at all) remains unclear.³ Like so much that we read of Socrates in the early dialogues, the philosopher does not definitively resolve the conflict at hand, but brings it to the surface in a compelling fashion, posing questions for a future inquiry.

As was the case for other topics raised by Socrates, religious practice proved to be an area of generative philosophical inquiry for subsequent thinkers. Like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle appear to have taken for granted the positive role of religious practice. And like Socrates, who recasts traditional piety to include philosophical virtue, it appears that Plato and Aristotle take the position that traditional forms of piety and philosophical activity ought to be compatible. For all of these philosophers, reconceiving the role of piety did not erase the value of traditional methods of service to the gods. Traditional forms of serving the gods continued to be discussed alongside these new forms of service, but they did reconceive some features of their cosmological, social, and psychological functions. Plato and Aristotle discuss traditional forms of religious practice

³ See, for example, the discussion of Jakubiec 2017.

and so an investigation into the role of religious practice in their philosophical thought seems warranted.

In this dissertation, I focus specifically on the question of what philosophical authors thought about what religious practice accomplished, i.e., its efficacy. My focus is on Plato and Aristotle, but my investigation also touches on their pre-Socratic predecessors. In what follows, I find that Plato and Aristotle attributed positive outcomes to religious practice and articulated reasons to substantiate this connection. Both philosophers advocated for participation in traditional religious practice despite the criticisms of their contemporaries, who cast doubt upon its ability to influence the gods. The chapters that follow document Plato and Aristotle's attempt to reconcile their heterodox beliefs with their tendency towards orthopraxy and to justify the latter, which they felt compelled to do in response to these thinkers. I show that Plato and Aristotle endorsed the performance of traditional religious practice but justified it to their followers on quite unorthodox grounds, with arguments that they believed could hold up under philosophical scrutiny.

If they viewed the problem of efficacy as a philosophical problem in its own right, as I have claimed, then one would expect to find in their works evidence of the following: that their theological and metaphysical beliefs provoked an accompanying shift in attitudes towards religious practice (e.g., with what beliefs they ought to be performed and in what contexts), and that their proposals regarding religious practice are congruent with their other philosophical commitments (be they theological, metaphysical, psychological, or political). This dissertation demonstrates that Plato and Aristotle each

fulfill both of these expectations, and that each philosopher articulates a coherent response to the problem of efficacy.

Throughout this work, I ask three related questions concerning each philosopher's views on religious practice: (1) What sphere of life does religious practice affect? More specifically, does religious practice have an impact on individual practitioner's psyche, on society, or on the physical world? (2) Does religious practice produce its benefits through the instrumentality of the gods (theogenically), or as a result of the human practitioners' action (anthropogenically)? Most importantly, I investigate (3) what motivates each philosopher to restrict the efficacy of religious practice along the precise lines that they do. These questions target the main loci of disagreement among the philosophers under investigation, and the answers to them reveal how Plato and Aristotle relate to both the traditional view of their time and to their philosophical contemporaries, including each other.

The dissertation is divided into three parts. PART I consists of two chapters. The first outlines and justifies my methodological use of two distinctions: between psychological, social, and cosmological efficacy on the one hand, and between theogenic and anthropogenic efficacy on the other. It also establishes the most common perspective on the efficacy of religious practice in Plato and Aristotle's time. This view, which I call the Traditional View, allows religious practice to operate in all modalities and in all spheres—the view holds that it can operate theogenically or anthropogenically, and that it does so on a cosmological, social, and psychological scale. This conclusion results from a survey of the surviving texts from Archaic Greece, including Homer, Hesiod, and the lyric poets. The second chapter documents several of the religious innovations of the so-

called pre-Socratic philosophers. Specifically, it surveys their introduction of three discrete ideas and religious criticisms into the theological consciousness of the sixth century BCE: (1) the gods do not conform to mortal standards of behavior, (2) the gods do not intervene in human affairs, and (3) the gods do not exist. I articulate the tensions that each of these ideas created for the Traditional View and establish that these ideas presented a challenge to which subsequent philosophers now needed to respond if they desired to give a persuasive endorsement of religious practice.

PARTS II and III develop the accounts given in the works of Plato and Aristotle, respectively. In them, I explore the types of efficacy that each philosopher attributes to religious practice, and demonstrate how they understood religious practice to work in the larger context of their philosophical thought.

PART II contains three chapters. Chapter 3 demonstrates Plato's commitment to a qualified form of the Traditional View. This thesis conflicts with prominent commentators who regard several passages in Plato's *Republic* as entailing the belief that religious practices are in fact impotent to effect cosmological and theogenic change.⁴ Rather, I marshal passages from the *Republic* and the *Laws* to argue that Plato distinguishes between legitimate and illegitimate practices, the former of which are efficacious in all the ways that proponents of the Traditional View understand religious practice to be, and the latter of which are of no efficacy. The efficacy of legitimate forms of religious practice results from its practitioner's adherence to a set of ethical and intentional standards, and the impotence of illegitimate forms results from their violation of these criteria. The next two chapters elucidate the process by which religious practice

⁴ Most prominently, McPherran 2006, 2000; Vlastos 1991; Morgan 1990; Morrow 1960; More 1921.

operates in Plato's philosophy, particularly in his final work, the *Laws*. Chapter 4 explores the connections between religious practice and the concept of play as it is set forth in that dialogue. I draw on recent work concerning the concept of play in Plato's work in order to explain a curious passage from *Laws* 7, in which the author identifies select religious practices as types of play. I argue that, to qualify as legitimate and therefore efficacious, religious practices must be performed in the spirit of play, i.e., for pleasure's sake and in accordance with reason and the laws. Plato's work articulate a new model of religious practice, which I call the "recreational model." This new model resolves several issues that Plato highlights in his discussion of the so-called "commercial model" of religious practice, which Socrates famously criticizes in the *Euthyphro* (12E-15C) and in the *Republic*. Chapter 5 draws predominately from the *Laws* and the *Phaedrus* to demonstrate that Plato formulates a new model of prayer by which the practitioner receives an epistemic benefit as a result of their participation. This conception of prayer integrates with Plato's theory of the soul, conforms with Plato's "recreational model" of religious practice from Chapter 4, and likewise avoids the pitfalls of the "commercial model."

PART III comprises two chapters. Chapter 6 examines Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and argues that, in contrast to Plato, Aristotle discards the Traditional View entirely. The philosopher precludes the possibility of theogenic efficacy (i.e., the view that religious practice can move the gods to action) and therefore its ability to effect change in the cosmos. The discussion engages a controversy over Aristotle's belief in traditional gods and shows that the philosopher maintains that contemporary accounts of the gods' nature are misguided. I introduce a common view that emphasizes Aristotle's comments on

traditional religion in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics* and therefore decouples the philosopher's theology from his metaphysics, particularly from the famous account in *Metaphysics* Λ. In this chapter, I engage with two of the most forceful proponents of this view, Richard Bodéüs and Sarah Broadie. I reconcile the passages from these three works and show how Aristotle simultaneously advocates a radical theology that rejects the Traditional View and yet endorses common religious practices and ideas in accordance with his general policy of defending universally held views—the so-called *endoxa*.

Chapter 7 examines the social and psychological benefits that religious practice has, according to Aristotle, and elucidates how they are meant to operate in the best regime of Aristotle's *Politics*, where the philosopher claims that the institution of religion forms a “necessary part” of the city (*Pol.* 4. 8, 1322b18-22; 7. 8, 1328b2-13).⁵ This chapter articulates three necessary roles that religious practice has for the state: (1) it provides residents with rest and leisure; (2) it obligates residents to observe laws, particularly those that may, absent their religious association, seem trivial; and (3) it promotes the development of friendship between residents. Rest and leisure promote two goods that are necessary to a well ordered state: the continuation of labor and the acquisition of virtue, respectively. The ability of religious practices to operate as an obligating force allows the legislator to promote obedience to the law and direct the resident's behavior in ways that are beneficial to the state, including towards pro-social activities that lead to increased social solidarity, such as involvement in voluntary religious associations (*thiasoi* and *eranoi*). The chapter concludes by arguing that

⁵ The surrounding passages make it clear that it is religious practices, not religious narrative, that Aristotle understands to be a necessary part of the city.

Aristotle's advocacy of religious practice does not implicate him in deception or compulsion, as some modern commentators allege.⁶

Taken together, these chapters document Plato's and Aristotle's responses to a question that has commanded little attention from their students in the modern world: why should humans, including heterodox thinkers, worship the gods in the customary ways? Their answers are interesting in themselves and deserve to be credited as significant contributions in the history of ancient religion. But in the pursuit of these answers, the inquirer also gains additional insight into more well trodden fields in Platonic and Aristotelian studies such as theology, psychology, and political philosophy.

⁶ See, e.g., Defourny 1932, 351-2; Gauthier 1959, 2. 1. 73.

CHAPTER 1

Assessing the Efficacy of Religious Practice

Before we can enter into a sustained investigation of how Plato, Aristotle, and their predecessors conceived of traditional religious practice, two distinct, but related, questions ought to be answered: (1) how can we assess the efficacy of religious practice, and (2) how did residents of ancient Greece traditionally assess it, before they were exposed to the philosophical innovations of the Greek enlightenment? The first question bears upon modern methods of exegesis of ancient practices and requires a justification of my own method, whereas the second relates to ancient attitudes towards contemporary practices. In answering the first question, I offer a convenient schematic outline that illustrates the multiple ways that one might conceive of the efficacy of a given religious practice. To answer the second question involves the application of this theoretical framework to ancient texts that will elucidate how their authors and the peoples reflected in them understood religious practice and how this understanding fits into the larger web of interpretive possibilities. I use this simple model throughout the dissertation to help the reader understand the views of Plato and Aristotle, as well as those of a select group of Presocratic philosophers who preceded them.

Ancient thinkers did not schematize the efficacy of their religious practices, nor did they, before Plato or Aristotle, view it as the object of anything like a distinct problem for systematic philosophical analysis. To be sure, the efficacy of religious practice was never treated as a science in its own right (in the manner of *Biology* or *Metaphysics*), and so these thinkers never

developed terminology or a system of methodologies for properly investigating the question.¹ To use anthropological terminology, this project constitutes an etic analysis of religious practice in the ancient world. Thus, any theoretical model is bound to produce categories that would be more or less alien to ancient thinkers. In applying my general model of efficacy to the ancient philosophers, I do not attribute this model to them. Rather, I have found that the categories outlined below provide a productive way of approaching ancient ideas regarding religious practice and that they draw philosophical distinctions that are consistent with the available evidence.

In this chapter, I tackle each of the two questions articulated above. In Section I, I establish my own model for understanding various theories of the efficacy of religious practice. I do so by identifying two taxonomies, each of which clarifies a set of the theoretical possibilities available to individuals who consider the subject of efficacy in religious practice. The first taxonomy focuses on the ends of religious action. It demarcates three overlapping spheres of life that a religious practice can influence: the cosmos, the city, and the individual psyche. Practices that influence the cosmos have cosmological efficacy, practices that influence the city (or society more broadly) have social efficacy, and practices that influence the individual psyche have psychological efficacy. The second taxonomy focuses on the means by which religious practice exerts an influence in these various spheres. It distinguishes between religious practice that effects change through the agency of the gods and religious practice that brings about change

¹ Some interpreters, who emphasize the discrepancies between “religion,” as the term is commonly understood in modern thought, and the constellation of practices and concepts surrounding the gods in antiquity dismiss the ability of ancient authors to theorize on religion as a concept (e.g., Bartın and Boyarin 2016; see also the critical response of Roubekas 2017). Regardless of one’s understanding of religion in antiquity, specific practices related to the gods, such as sacrifice or prayer, were conceived of on their own terms and therefore theories concerning their efficacy could have been developed yet do not seem to have been.

through the agency of human beings and their interaction with the practice. I describe the former as operating “theogenically” and the latter as operating “anthropogenically.”

In Section II, I demonstrate that, in the archaic age, the conventional view of religious practices was that they operated theogenically and that their influence reached into all realms of human life. According to this view, religious practice worked through the instrumentality of the gods, who were able to effect change in the physical, social, and psychological worlds of the practitioner. Throughout this dissertation, I call this perspective the “Traditional View” of religious practice.

I

To determine how religious practices are efficacious is an enormous task. Some have even cast doubt on the feasibility of such an undertaking. Johannes Quack, an ethnologist and theorist of religion, contends that “it is wrong and misleading to suggest that there is something like ritual efficacy *sui generis*.... I do not think that there is one answer to the question of ‘how rituals work’.”² As Quack demonstrates throughout his piece, any *general* theory of ritual efficacy that attempts to outline how religious practices affect the practitioner and their world is bound to be overly simplistic and unable to capture fully the various means by which religious practice functions. There is likely no universal answer to the question of what religious practice accomplishes that will accurately embrace them all.

One’s understanding of a given practice’s efficacy is influenced by a number of variables, including, for example, the practitioner’s relationship to the practice and their theological views. As Quack notes, the purported effects of religious practice are many: “Shamanic rituals may

² Quack 2010, 183.

heal, legal rituals may bind, political rituals may resolve difficulties, religious rituals may cleanse or bestow grace, and so on—or they may not.”³ This short list suffices to show that religious actions in general have disparate functions. This feature of religious practice is clearly on display when one considers the roles of different actors who participate in the same religious event or token practice: an animal sacrifice may produce a different effect for the sacrificer than it does for the observer of the sacrifice. The former might obtain satisfaction from fulfilling personal obligations or meeting the demands of piety. But for the latter, who is potentially motivated by a desire to consume a good cut of meat, the effect of the sacrifice may have been primarily gustatory or nutritive. From the perspective of the individual participant, a single religious practice can indeed serve a variety of functions.

It is likewise apt to characterize the task of creating a general and inclusive theory of religious practice as unruly and liable to get the theorist tangled in a mess of diverse opinions. This point, however, is irrelevant to our present exercise. In the chapters ahead, I do not attempt to create a general theory of ritual efficacy or to argue for a comprehensive and objective view of how religious practice affects its practitioners. Rather, I report on the idiosyncratic views of individual thinkers from the ancient Mediterranean world, who attempted to do so in the context of their philosophical writings.

Some theorists have made a discrete point, emphasizing that practitioners need not conceive of their actions as performing any function at all. For example, Pierre Bourdieu argues that religious practices are “ends in themselves, that are justified by their very performance,” and that “they may have, strictly speaking, *neither meaning nor function*, other than the function

³ Quack 2010, 183.

implied in their very existence.”⁴ At the same time, other theorists, such as Fritz Staal, enunciate similar ideas, writing that “ritual is pure activity, *without meaning or goal.*”⁵ Bourdieu’s statement reflects his concerns that the anthropologist refrain from ethnocentrism and essentialism in their analyses of studied populations, and his desire for scholars to abandon the structuralist quest to discover “perfect coherence” in systems of religious practice.⁶ Instead, he embraces the outsider’s “inability to classify everything,” and distinguishes between religious practice and “the interpretation which one can only arrive at by placing oneself outside the practice.”⁷

It is true that religious practitioners often do not have in mind robust interpretations of the events in which they participate or of their roles in those events, nor are they able to justify their actions or even interested in doing so. While they may be at a loss to describe the meaning of their practice, many would be able to provide a reply if asked about the function of the practice in their lives. Indeed, Bourdieu provides acts of funeral piety as an example, and he himself points toward the social importance of these acts. Practitioners who may possess no premeditated understanding of the role of religious practices in their lives can nevertheless offer one upon request, even if they are indifferent to higher-order theoretical hypotheses and are more amenable to simpler social explanations. To broaden the range of acceptable answers to

⁴ Bourdieu 1990, 18 (emphasis added).

⁵ Staal 1989, 131. See also Staal 1968 and 1975, wherein the author states his thesis that ritual action is defined by its activity rather than its meaning (cf. Bourdieu 1990, 36-7). He argues against the prevalent view that ritual action conveys a message or a system of symbols. For the theory of Staal’s adversaries, see Robertson Smith 1894, 439-40; Lévi-Strauss 1958-73 and 1962, Edmund Leach 1966 and 1976, and Geertz 1993, the last of whom famously defined religion, including ritual acts, as “(1) *a system of symbols...*” (90; emphasis added). For a concise review of the debate, see Bell 1997, 61-72.

⁶ Bourdieu 1990, 10.

⁷ Bourdieu 1990, 11 and 18.

questions of a practice's function is to recognize the influence of religion on all aspects of a person's life, including their social relations.

This is particularly imperative when discussing Greco-Roman religious practice. For ancient Greece, as for many societies, religion was inextricably bound up in other cultural categories such as law and politics. A common refrain in the scholarly literature is that Greek and Roman religion “was embedded in all aspects of ancient life.”⁸ For such groups, Quack's “Shamanic,” “legal,” and “political” rituals can accurately be categorized as religious in nature, since they all relate to the gods and a supernatural mythology. The legal rites of ancient Greece, therefore, may have some religious valence to them, but their performance may have a “strictly legal” meaning and function for participants—their character is religious, but their function is not necessarily so. The question which the present study seeks to address is how individual philosophical thinkers understood the function of their religious practice and how the religious character of the practice assists in its functional operation, especially when its function may not seem “religious” in nature, as the term is popularly understood.

As we have seen so far, there is a great diversity of ways in which religious practices are said to function or to be efficacious. For this reason, it will be useful to create a general schema which students may use to analyze the statements of different historical figures. For my purposes, the “efficacy” of a religious practice refers to any effect that the practice is thought to produce. Such effects, as has been intimated already in the discussion of Bourdieu, are produced in various realms of life. What follows is a rough attempt to sketch the different possible types of

⁸ See Price 1999, 89 and Malina 1986, 92-101. For a catalogue of other such statements, see Nongbri 2008, who criticizes the use of the metaphor of “embeddedness” on the grounds that it *understates* the cohesion of religion and culture, by implying that religion constitutes a separable aspect of ancient life.

efficacy, which correspond to the different spheres on which a religious practice may exert influence and the different means by which they cause their effect.

First, I divide the efficacy of religious practice into three categories based upon the sphere of life on which they are able to exert influence: (1) cosmological efficacy, (2) social efficacy, and (3) psychological efficacy. A practice is identified as being efficacious in one of these senses depending on whether it is purported to affect, respectively, the cosmos, the city, or the psyche of the relevant participant. For convenience, I will work my way through each of these divisions in reverse order.

Religious practice is often understood to have an effect on the psychological states of individual participants.⁹ For instance, it seems to play a crucial role in the formation of individual and collective identity. Religious practice can benefit individuals who are in the process of mourning, and in this and other circumstances it sometimes produces results similar to those produced through the application of medical and therapeutic treatments.¹⁰ Indeed, many studies geared towards popular audiences have been conducted with the purpose of measuring the impact that religious practices have on the psychology of the practitioner.¹¹ The psychological effects of religious practice are also investigated within a prominent subfield of ritual studies: ritual and emotion. In Dorothea Lüddeckens' discussion of the state of the field, she provides a typology of the interaction between ritual and emotion. She notes that the

⁹ Sigmund Freud's provocative identification of religious rituals with neurotic obsession (*Zwangsneurose*) is an early contribution to the field, though his interest is primarily in the psychological cause of religious practices rather than the psychological effect they have on practitioners (Freud 1907).

¹⁰ Boudewijnse 2008, 129-30.

¹¹ Such studies have received ample attention in the popular presses, presumably due to a widespread interest in mental health and spirituality or due to their appeal to religious practitioners as a confirmation or explanation of their actions. For a recent sampling, see Luhrmann 2012, Wright 2017, and Kuile 2020.

emotions present in an individual impel them toward religious practice and provide the practitioner with a means of embodying, communicating, and coping with their emotions, but that religious practice can also stoke emotions which the practitioner may find desirable.¹² For the purposes of the present work, if a religious practice is encouraged because of its supposed ameliorative effect on the mental states of the practitioner or observer, such an argument will be referred to as one that appeals to the practice's psychological efficacy. A simple example of psychological efficacy, in the context of a non-religious practice, is given in Ludwig Wittgenstein's discussion of what he takes to be a natural instinct of humans to perform ritual. In his *Remarks on Frazer's "Golden Bough,"* Wittgenstein writes:

Kissing the picture of one's beloved. That is obviously not based on the belief that it will have some specific effect on the object which the picture represents. It aims at satisfaction and achieves it.¹³

Wittgenstein here attempts to demonstrate primarily that humans do not perform ritual action in an exclusively rational, methodical, or utilitarian manner. But the example he uses provides an illustration of how socially formalized human practices such as kissing a picture of one's beloved have a significant psychological effect that could be expressed as having rational, methodical, or utilitarian purpose.¹⁴ The subject does not pretend to influence their beloved by the act of kissing a picture, but they do achieve their psychological aim.

Because most religious practices in antiquity were common to members of a single community, they can also be analyzed in terms of their influence on community dynamics, or their "social efficacy." This method of analysis, promoted by Émile Durkheim in his seminal work *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, is often described as the functionalist, or

¹² Lüddeckens 2008, 549-70.

¹³ Wittgenstein 1993, 123.

¹⁴ For a brief discussion of this point, see Graeber 2019, 7-9.

socio-functionalist, approach to ritual studies. It was subsequently introduced to the field of anthropology by Alfred R. Radcliffe Brown, who explicitly differentiated between social effects of religious practice and the idea that they are “efficacious in the sense of averting evils and bringing blessings.”¹⁵ According to the socio-functionalist framework, religion is primarily a social phenomenon and so it should be analyzed in terms of the influence that it has on the social body. For Durkheim specifically, to participate in a religious practice is one way of “expressing social unity in material form.”¹⁶ Participation in these activities, therefore, is generally analyzed by this camp of interpreters for its ability to promote a feeling of social cohesion or collective consciousness.

While Durkheim’s distinctive approach to socio-functionalism is a powerful and influential one, I use this method in a broader fashion to explore the general impact of religious practice on society. There are various ways that religious practice can function to benefit society: as a mechanism for distributing resources to community members, to promote solidarity among practitioners, to raise funds for community use, to obligate citizens to fulfill civic duties. The phrase “social efficacy” will be used to describe the power of religious practices to effect a change in a collective body, including these.

Finally, “cosmological efficacy” refers to the ability of a religious practice to effect a change on that part of the physical world that is external to the practice itself. Often, an offering

¹⁵ Radcliffe-Brown 1969, 158. Anthropologists who addressed religious practices according to this paradigm include Gluckman (1958, 1962, 1963, 1965), Kuper (1944, 1972), Nadel (1954), Rappaport (1968), Turner (1957, 1964, 1968a, 1968b). In this statement, Radcliffe-Brown appears to be putting into opposition social forms of efficacy and theogenic forms, which (as we will see) are not incompatible according to my schema. Although “evils and blessings” can come in cosmological, social, or psychological forms, this phrase seem to call attention to the divine agency by which they are often thought to manifest themselves.

¹⁶ Durkheim 1912, 329: “En exprimant l’unité sociale sous une forme matérielle”; see also 307-335.

is made to the gods in order to induce them to intervene in the practitioner's environment either for the practitioner's personal advantage, or to the disadvantage of their adversaries. The devotee might dedicate an anatomical votive in order to be healed of a sickness, injury, or other bodily malfunction.¹⁷ A farmer may pray to harvest a productive crop.¹⁸ Or a traveler might make a blood sacrifice (perhaps even of their own kin) in order to secure a favorable wind for sailing.¹⁹ Likewise, an individual might participate in religious activities to avert any number of natural disasters. Indeed, the petitioner may request divine intervention in their life without outlining for the gods any specific request. This kind of request is exemplified in a general sacrificial prayer formula, where the petitioner pleads "for the health and safety" (ἐφ' ὑγείᾳ καὶ σωτηρίᾳ) of their peers, whether it be the Boule, the assembly, citizens, friends, family, or one's fellow sailors.

As the reader may already have noticed, the three categories that I have outlined overlap. The cosmos includes the human beings who interact with it, and societies are made up of individual human beings. Therefore, an individual who believes that a given religious practice has psychological efficacy will also believe, in some sense, that the same practice influences society and the cosmos, given that an individual and their psyche is a constituent part of the city and both the individual and society are constituent parts of the cosmos. The interrelation of the three categories can be illustrated as shown in FIGURE I. 1:

¹⁷ See Lamont 2015; Laios et. al. 2015; Van Straten 1981.

¹⁸ Hesiod, for example, suggests that the farmer pray to Zeus and Demeter so that they will render the grain heavy and ripe (*WD* 465-75).

¹⁹ For Iphigenia's sacrifice, see Eur. *IA* and *IT*; Aesch. *Ag.* 183-263; and Ov. *Met.* 12-3.

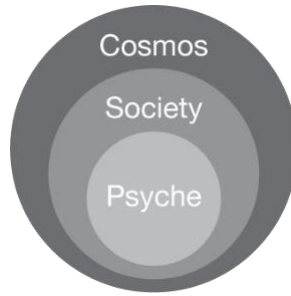


Figure I. 1: Spheres of Efficacy

The cosmological sphere encompasses the society and the psyche, and societal sphere encompasses the psyche. For this reason, belief in a practice’s psychological efficacy entails a belief that the practice influences society and the cosmos, but commentators tend to focus on different types of efficacy in isolation from the others. Therefore, in a given text, the salience of one efficacy type is typically foregrounded to the exclusion of others. For this reason, I have found it unproblematic (and convenient), for example, to use the phrase “cosmological efficacy” to describe a practice’s effect on discrete realm of life, i.e., to describe the ability of a practice to influence the cosmos, excluding the polis and the individual psyche. The quintessential example of praying for rain is considered an appeal to cosmological efficacy, since it constitutes a petition for meteorological changes, which lay outside the societal and psychological realms. Likewise, I reserve the phrase “social efficacy” to describe the ability of a practice to influence the relations between individuals and not to describe the effects of a practice on a single practitioner’s psychological state.²⁰

²⁰ There are, of course, instances where a higher-order effect has a knock-on effects on lower-order spheres. Consider the following example: Hesiod’s piety results in a cosmological effect (a favorable crop), which in turn produces a social effect (he is able to provide grain to his neighbors during a difficult winter) and psychological one (he perseveres in his work, believing that it will be rewarded). In cases such as this, the effect of the religious practice is still describable *per se* in the terms I lay out (it is cosmological). The knock-on effects may be closely

In assessing religious practices, it is not uncommon for scholars to take into account cosmological efficacy exclusively, as if this were the only avenue for religious action to have an effect. Stephan Hotz, in his article entitled “Ritualkritik,” discusses claims of ritual efficacy in one of the opening sections of his paper. He begins by providing a gloss on the term efficacy (*Wirksamkeit*):

Menschen aus den unterschiedlichsten Kulturen und Epochen teilten die Vorstellung, daß rituelle Handlungen ein wirksames Instrumentarium darstellen, um den Lauf der Dinge zu beeinflussen. *Oder man könnte allgemeiner formulieren: Sie glaubten an die Wirksamkeit von Ritualen. So opferte man in den antiken Kulturen Griechenlands oder des Zweistromlandes den Göttern, um von diesen Gesundheit, eine reiche Ernte oder Informationen über die Zukunft zu erhalten.*²¹

This passage reflects Hotz’ discussion as a whole. For him and other scholars, what it means for a people to believe in the efficacy of religious practice is primarily to believe that the practice is a means of effecting change in the physical world. As I describe below, a cosmological understanding of the efficacy of religious practices was common in the earliest periods of Greek history. But as we will see, this is not the only way that the Greeks understood their religious practice to function, either during this period or after. Moreover, it did not take long for Greek thinkers to begin questioning the cosmological efficacy of religious practice. Therefore, debates over why Greeks participated in religious practice that restricts their notion of efficacy to its cosmological valence are inadequate for appreciating the multivalent understanding of religious efficacy that archaic age Greeks had. It is also inadequate for explaining subsequent theories that either modified or rejected claims of cosmological efficacy.

tied to the initial effect, but do not directly result from the religious action, and are often complicated by other factors.

²¹ Hotz 2005, 222. Emphasis is my own.

To view the question of efficacy only through a cosmological frame blinds the interpreter to social and psychological analyses. It also encourages interpreters to view criticisms of religious performance through a narrow lens: arguing against efficacy on the grounds that religious practice does not effect cosmological change. Students of the ancient Mediterranean often make a similar error. They are sometimes too quick to characterize an ancient author's criticism of the cosmological efficacy of religious practice as an outright rejection of religious practice—when an individual thinker appears to reject cosmological efficacy as a principle, it is assumed that the author denies the value of religious practice in full. It is also sometimes assumed, as illustrated by Hotz above, that the efficacy of religious practice only operates through the intermediacy of the gods (“theogenically,” as described below). Because the cosmological effects of religious practice are typically brought about through divine agency, when an ancient author is noted for their non-belief in interventionist gods, they are assumed to be hostile to religious practice and to deny its power to produce an effect generally.

Such conclusions are logical, provided that we grant one key assumption about the nature of religious life and personal piety—that religious practice is only cosmologically (and theogenically) efficacious. Yet there are other possible motivations for performing traditional rites, which rely on the view that religious practices function non-cosmologically. In the introduction to their edited volume, *Secular Ritual*, Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff distinguish between “doctrinal efficacy,” which roughly aligns with what I call cosmological efficacy, and “operational efficacy.” They explain that the former “is within the religious system and is part of its internal logic.”²² Practitioners recognize the relevant metaphysical claims and

²² Moore and Myerhoff 1977, 12. For a more recent application of this model, see Sørensen 2008, 528-9.

the efficacy of the practice is understood on those terms. “Operational efficacy,” on the other hand, refers to the ability of a practice to produce an effect of a social or psychological nature. These effects are measurable and therefore, according to Moore and Myerhoff, their efficacy is an “empirical question” of analysis.²³ But whereas Moore and Myerhoff’s work makes an epistemological division between the two categories—asking which types of efficacy can be studied and how—I instead distinguish these forms of efficacy based strictly upon the sphere of the practice’s influence, leaving open whether a given effect results from the internal logic of a religious system. For social and psychological effects (i.e., the results of “operational efficacy”) can as easily be attributed to the gods as can cosmological effects, such as Hesiod’s large yield of barley or wheat. I also allow that socially or psychologically efficacious practices be described as religious rather than including them all under a discrete category (e.g., secular). Nevertheless, Moore and Myerhoff’s basic distinction of cosmological efficacy from social and psychological efficacy is a productive one.²⁴

I now turn to a second taxonomy that can be used to distinguish theories of efficacy. Throughout this dissertation, I use two terms to pick out the means by which religious practice produces its effects. If an effect is caused by gods, it is “theogenic,” since the efficacy is born of the gods. If an effect is caused by human beings, including the practitioner’s involvement with and reaction to the religious event, it is “anthropogenic.” Whereas the previous taxonomy identifies the sphere of life that the religious practice influences, this one targets the source of the

²³ Moore and Myerhoff 1977, 12-3. The authors do note the difficulty of obtaining and analyzing the data that informs these questions (13-5).

²⁴ Moore and Myerhoff’s keen epistemological observation that questions of psychology and social dynamics can be asked by outsiders looking in explains why these questions are often treated by professionals in the social sciences such as ethnologists, anthropologists, and psychologists.

change. As has been noted previously, it is difficult to conceive of a rite that could function cosmologically in the immediate sense without also being theogenic. The immediate control that human beings have over their natural environment is limited, and so religious practice is powerless to manipulate it successfully without the intermediacy of a higher power such as the gods. Because religious practice is most commonly analyzed in terms of its cosmological effect, it is also most commonly understood and analyzed theogenically.²⁵ Scholars of classical antiquity often present these types of requests as a demonstration of the so-called *do ut des* model of ritual given-and-take. This juristic conception of religious practice operates on the model of strict reciprocity: “I give so that you will give.”²⁶

Yet, there is theoretical space to conceptualize a religious practice’s efficacy as being initiated by, for example, the practitioners themselves. In particular, it is easy to see how the activity of religion could work upon society, as well as upon the individual and collective psyche, without the aid of divine interference. The menu of options available to those who seek to investigate the question of efficacy, then, is as follows: religious practice could putatively function cosmologically, socially, or psychologically on the theogenic model of religious practice, or it could function socially or psychologically on the anthropogenic model of religious practice, as illustrated in FIGURE I. 2 below:

²⁵ Although cosmological efficacy is typically understood to function through the instrumentality of the gods, in theory one could argue that by performing an act, the practitioner is able to alter the physical world without divine aid. I do not believe, however, that this is an argument that can be found in the ancient world.

²⁶ Lännström 2011 highlights modern overreliance on the “*do ut des*” model in understanding the way in which religious practices were thought to work (see also Pleket 1981, 155; Seaford 1998; Gocer 2000, 122; Ullucci 2012, 24-7 and 2018). She shows that individuals can participate in religious practices (such as those I have described) in order to influence the gods, without committing the practitioner to a narrow and strict conception of reciprocity.

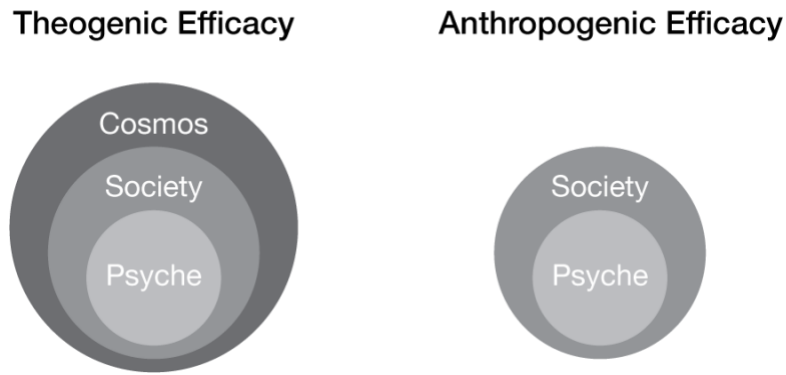


Figure I. 2: Theogenic v. Anthropogenic Efficacy

Just as modern scholars sometimes focus on cosmological efficacy to the exclusion of social and psychological efficacy, they can sometimes attend to the theogenic mode of efficacy over the anthropogenic mode. This means that they can believe (rightly or wrongly) that an ancient author rejects a particular form of cosmological efficacy and prematurely conclude that they renounced the practice.²⁷ For example, Gregory Vlastos argues that Socrates formulated a radical new conception of piety, which was opposed to traditional notions. Vlastos claims that the traditional view of piety “had been thick with magic,” by which he means “the belief, and all of the practices predicated on it, that *by means of ritualistic acts man can induce supernatural powers to give effect to his own wishes.*”²⁸ In Vlastos’ view, Socrates rejects the practices of prayer and sacrifice on the grounds that they constitute “holy barter” and a “swindle for the gods.”²⁹ Vlastos does not consider other reasons that Socrates may have for practicing prayer and sacrifice beyond fulfilling an egoistic desire to secure one’s own wishes. Therefore, he attributes to Socrates a radical view of piety that does not include participation in religious practice.

²⁷ In the context of animal sacrifice, Ullucci 2012 makes a similar point at 3-14, esp. 9-10 (see also Ullucci 2011, 58-61).

²⁸ Vlastos 1991, 176, emphasis in original.

²⁹ Vlastos 1991, 174. McPherran 2000 accepts a modified form of Vlastos’ thesis, whereby Socrates does not completely renounce prayer and sacrifice. Against Vlastos and McPherran’s views, see Lännstrom 2011.

According to this interpretation, Socrates' long-standing, documented participation in the traditional forms of religious worship is an *aporia* that remains to be adequately explained.

This fixation on theogenic efficacy is in some sense understandable. Until the Classical period, authors consistently reflected the view that religious practice functioned theogenically, i.e., practices were intended to induce the gods to action on behalf of the practitioner. Before this point in Greek history, I find no passage in which an anthropogenic model of religious practice is suggested, much less endorsed. Moreover, the literature of this period provides evidence for a view of efficacy that is inclusive of all three spheres of efficacy. The gods respond to religious practice by affecting all realms of life, but they primarily function cosmologically. I defend these claims in Section II, where I survey literature from the archaic period and demonstrate, in broad strokes, the intellectual culture surrounding religious practice at that time. In Chapter 2, I show how pre-Socratic and Sophistic thinkers began to reevaluate the importance of religious practices beginning in the enlightenment in the sixth century, giving rise to a new topic of philosophical deliberation.

II

In every genre that survives from the archaic period (800-480 BCE), Greek thinkers employ the theogenic model of religious practice: the gods are represented as intervening in human affairs to the advantage (or disadvantage) of those who engage in any number of set practices. And religious practices often functioned in each of the three spheres of life that I have outlined above, in the cosmos, in the city, and in the individual psyche .

It is also the case that in the oldest works of Greek literature, religious practice is almost always felicitous, or having its intended effect. As Martin West has argued, the canonical myths

of Greek antiquity were redolent with the fulfilled wishes of the religiously observant.

Contrasting the disappointed religious expectations of real life Greeks, which were presumably many, with the narratives of myths, he explains:

In myth, on the other hand—and we must be clear that those Homeric prayers are not part of the myth of the Trojan War, but inorganic elements in a poetic narrative constructed over the myth—in myth, prayers and curses, like oracles and prophecies, are invariably fulfilled, because they are parts of a working mechanism, and they have to work.³⁰

Felicitous religious practice was such a regular feature of poetic and literary accounts that in the Classical period, the Athenian of Plato's *Laws* draws upon the myth of Theseus and Hippolytus to demonstrate that even misguided prayers can be fulfilled.³¹ This myth, and others that provide examples of practices eliciting divine response, certainly show that these texts broadcast the theogenic model of religious practices to their audiences. But they fail to demonstrate that these audiences understood *their* practice in the same manner, or that they understood themselves as participating in the same world of human-divine interaction as literary figures do. It is impossible to prove that popular audiences adopted the religious precepts presented in textual accounts, but it is significant that the texts in question represent the religious practice of mortals, as opposed to those of gods or heroes, and that they were represented as theogenically and cosmologically efficacious. In order to show that these authors model religious practice as functioning in the lives of regular citizens, I restrict myself in what follows to an investigation of texts that reflect the experience of mortals, despite the fictional settings.

³⁰ West 1999, 33. West's argument about the necessity of ritual success is primarily narratological. For example, in order for Daphne's prayer for deliverance from Apollo to qualify as a "functional element in the myth," it must be fulfilled.

³¹ *Leg.* 687E. Cf. 931B-D, where the Athenian appeals "thousands of other examples," including the myth of Oedipus, who successfully called down curses upon his sons.

In Homeric epic, characters very frequently engage in religious practice. At the opening of the *Iliad*, for example, Chryses prays to Apollo and makes the following request: “Let the Danaans pay for my tears with *your* arrows.”³² Chryses, then, petitions the god to alter the course of human events on his behalf by using divine arrows. Apollo responds to Chryses and the prayer is therefore cosmologically and theogenically efficacious. The Greeks’ reaction to Apollo’s arrows also reflects their belief in the cosmological and theogenic efficacy of prophecy, vows, and sacrifices. Achilles persuades the Greeks to solicit a seer who can inform them of the cause of Apollo’s anger. Achilles provides several possible causes, among which the priest could make a final and definitive determination: Apollo may blame them because of a vow (εὐχολή) or a hecatomb (ἑκατόμβη). Presumably, the view taken here is that the pestilence may have been caused by either the aberrant performance or the non-performance of a vow or a hecatomb. Either way, Achilles believed that the seer would be able to inform them whether they could convince Apollo to avert the calamity by means of pious religious action. His appeal to consult a seer and his speculation regarding the seer’s future findings regarding the cause of and solution to the pestilence among his people, are both premised on the idea that the gods interfere in the lives of humans as a result of their performance or non-performance of particular rites. In this speech, Achilles assumes that Agamemnon and the Greek army share his belief in the principle of theogenic and cosmological efficacy.

Therefore, the most popular and formative narrative in the ancient world begins with a description of competing parties vying to influence the god Apollo, and their chief method of exerting influence upon him was by offering prayer and sacrifice. Later in *Iliad* 1, Agamemnon

³² τίσειαν Δαναοὶ ἐμὰ δάκρυα σοῖσι βέλεσσιν (1. 42, cf. 1. 380-4). All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

orders Odysseus and his crew to purify themselves (ἀπολυμαίνεσθαι) and sacrifice a hecatomb to Apollo (313-7, 442-5), and they seek to appease Apollo with hymns (472-4). After receiving his daughter, Chryses prays that Apollo curb the destruction of the Greeks (453-6). The interpersonal tensions between Chryses and Agamemnon are resolved by the exchange of a human ransom, but the Homeric narrative indicates that divine retribution is stoked and revoked by means of religious performance. The offerings succeed in influencing Apollo, who sends a favorable wind as a token of his approval (479).³³

In another famous episode, the mortal Phoenix reminds Achilles of the ability of religious practices to persuade the gods. In book 9, Achilles' tutor implores him to master his proud spirit and to have pity. Phoenix then provides instruction for Achilles to follow and model his behavior upon. He says that the gods are flexible (στρεπτοί), and so when someone has done something wrong, humans can turn away their wrath by means of sacrifices, prayers, libations, and burnt offerings.³⁴ This method of inducing the gods to act by means of religious practice is established early in Book I of the *Iliad*, but remains constant throughout the poem. Indeed, this is a consistent feature of both of the Homeric poems. In his work, William Allan highlights the shared theological norms of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. While some dispute his claim that the *Iliad* “embodies a system of social norms and punishments that is no different from that of the *Odyssey*” it is indisputable that both works the gods are moved to action by the religious practice of mortal characters.³⁵ The *Iliad* opens with a series of stories about the theogenic and

³³ Propitiatory rites, such as the clasping of the knees and the beard below the chin, are also performed by the gods, in order to influence each other, such as when Athena petitions Zeus to honor Achilles (1. 503-16).

³⁴ *Il.* 9.496-51

³⁵ Allan 2006, 2.

cosmological efficacy of religious practice, and these stories establish a theological culture that persists throughout both of the epic poems.

Although the theological world of the Homeric epics is one that includes all forms of theogenic efficacy, including cosmological, it is also a world populated by gods and it features a great deal more human-divine interaction that may strike the poet's audience as unbelievable on a literal level. Therefore, an important question remains: Is the world that Homer creates (and subsequent hexameter poets follow) a world that is shared by his audience? Or is it a world that they temporarily adopt with suspended belief? The literary theorist Wayne Booth distinguished between features of the narrative world that are "fixed," meaning that they are common to the audience's experience, and those that the reader stipulates for the duration of the narrative, despite their fantastical character. The latter he calls "nonce beliefs."³⁶ While many aspects of the Homeric narrative, including the cosmological effects of religious practice, function as nonce beliefs to the modern reader, it is more difficult, if not impossible in many cases, to determine which operated as nonce beliefs in antiquity, and which the ancient audience understood as "fixed norms."

Yet the theological culture of much of archaic Greek literature also reflects the features that are found in the Homeric epics. Allan argues that "the pattern of justice and cosmic order embodied in the *Iliad* is also found throughout early Greek hexameter poetry," such as Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns.³⁷ The norms shared among these texts include the view that humans can solicit the intervention of the gods through participation in religious practices. Hesiod's didactic agricultural poem *Works and Days* is the most useful of these for establishing theogenic

³⁶ On the distinction between "fixed norms" and "nonce beliefs," see Booth 1988, 142-6.

³⁷ Allan 2006, 15, 27-31.

and cosmological religious practice as a fixed norm in archaic Greek society. In that work, the poet provides practical advice for mortal farmers to succeed and Hesiod makes several comments regarding the virtue of religious practice, including its ability to garner the favor of the gods and their cosmological efficacy.

In recounting the Ages of Man, Hesiod says that the silver race was “unwilling to care for the gods or to sacrifice upon the holy altars of the immortals.”³⁸ For this reason, Zeus buried the silver race under the earth (138-42), showing that sacrifices and the non-performance of sacrifices both influence the gods, inducing them to act in the human realm. In advising his foolish brother Perses, Hesiod states that “property is not to be stolen, god-given is better” (320), suggesting that Hesiod subscribes to the idea that the gods play a role in the distribution of wealth (χρήματα) to mortals. Hesiod lists some of the actions that would disqualify one from being able to receive such assistance from the gods (321-34) and then offers advice as to how Perses might secure the desired possessions in the preferred manner, as gifts from the gods: “But you, keep your senseless heart entirely from these things. Rather, according to your ability, make sacrifices to the immortal gods in a holy and pure manner, and burn thigh-pieces on the altar.”³⁹ Hesiod also advises his audience to pray to Zeus and Demeter that “the holy grain of Demeter be heavy and perfect,” i.e., ripe, abundant, and undamaged.⁴⁰

If this emphasis on theogenic and cosmological efficacy in the archaic period were limited to the hexameter poems of Homer and Hesiod, one might avoid the sort of general conclusion that I would like to draw. Perhaps, if such were the case, interactions between

³⁸ οὐδ’ ἀθανάτους θεραπεύειν | ἤθελον οὐδ’ ἔρδειν μακάρων ἱεροῖς ἐπὶ βωμοῖς (135-6).

³⁹ ἀλλὰ σὺ τῶν μὲν πάμπαν ἔεργ’ ἀεσίφρονα θυμόν. | καὶ δὴ δύναμιν δ’ ἔρδειν ἱέρ’ ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσιν | ἀγνῶς καὶ καθαρῶς, ἐπὶ δ’ ἀγλαὰ μηρία καίειν. (335-7)

⁴⁰ εὐχεσθαι δὲ Διὶ χθονίῳ Δημήτερι θ’ ἀγνῆ | ἐκτελέα βρίθειν Δημήτερος ἱερὸν ἀκτὴν (465-6).

humans and gods would take a particular form within the confines of a single genre. In this case, the predominantly cosmological function of religious practices in in Homer and Hesiod might constitute a generic convention rather than a reflection of popular attitudes concerning theodicy. But in fact we find theogenic efficacy to be the sole method of understanding the power of religious practice in other authors and genres, and we find cosmological efficacy to predominate in such accounts as well.

In the lyric poets, for instance, when religious practices—such as prayers, sacrifices and votive offerings—are depicted, these practices are understood to produce an effect upon the cosmos, and the effect is thought to originate with the gods. In some poems, the participant asks the gods for a particular intervention in human affairs, without any declarative statement or narrative clue as to whether the petition was fulfilled.⁴¹ In many cases, these passages nevertheless reflect the notion that the petition that is performed with the expectation of theogenic and cosmological efficacy can be felicitous. Theognis, for example, gives the following command: “Pray to the gods for power. Neither good nor bad happens to humans without the gods.”⁴² In other poems, the author demonstrates the causation between request and intervention explicitly.⁴³ In still others, a lack of participation in religious practices leads to divine punishment.⁴⁴ All of these passages depict Greeks who hold notions of the cosmological efficacy of religious practices and who recognize divine intervention in human affairs as a product of religious practice. When these authors mention sacrifice and offerings or directly

⁴¹ Sappho fr. 5; Alcaeus fr. 129; Anacreon fr. 348, epigram viii; Alcman fr. 4A (P.Oxy. 3213 (+ 2443)); Simonides epigrams LXII and LXXXIV; Bacchylides 8; Archilochus fr. 8, 26, 108, 327; Hipponax fr. 5-10, 32, 38. Theognis *Eleg.* I.1-4, 11-4, 271-8, 341-50, 757-64, 773-88.

⁴² Theognis I.171-2.

⁴³ Sappho fr. 112; Alcaeus fr. 304 (probably of Sapphic authorship); Bacchylides 3.35-62, 11.85-112, 17.50-129, and epigram I.

⁴⁴ E.g. Steisichorus fr. 46.

address gods in prayer, they do so in order to provoke the gods to action in human affairs. And often, the gods' actions produce cosmological effects.

Religious practice is also reported by the prose authors of this period. For example, the consultation of oracles is a common practice mentioned in the Greek historians. In particular, Herodotus shows the Athenians to be anxious to solicit the responses of the gods at the panhellenic oracles such as those at Delphi and Dodona.⁴⁵ He describes the cosmologically efficacious prayer of Croesus, who, as he burned on the pyre of Cyrus, called upon Apollo for deliverance. Suddenly, “from a clear and windless sky,” a rainstorm broke forth that quenched the flames.⁴⁶ Furthermore, from the fifth century and into the fourth, local historians of Attica (the Atthidographers) produced multi-volume histories (*Atthides*) that gave great attention to events of the mythical past.⁴⁷ Since only fragments of these works remain, it is impossible to know the precise nature of these works, yet their emphasis on mythical history suggests that the content was of a theogenic and cosmological nature. The depiction of cosmologically felicitous religious practice in non-literary texts is significant because these narratives provide putatively historical accounts rather than literary inventions.

I could never prove that *all* people who lived in the Greek world before the classical age *only* conceived of religious practice as operating theogenically. However, I do contend that theogenic efficacy is a consistent feature of ancient accounts, and that texts of the archaic age do not represent it as operating anthropogenically. In the preceding discussion of archaic literature, I

⁴⁵ Epigraphical evidence bear witness to this widespread practice. Bonnechere 2018 analyzes the largest collection of these records (4,350 published *lamellae* from Dodona), sorting them chronologically and thematically. Significantly, Bonnechere finds that, while the literary sources emphasize oracular consultations concerning war, the lamellae rarely reflect such concerns.

⁴⁶ Hdt. 1.87

⁴⁷ See Dillery 2015 and 2005.

have focused on accounts of religious practice that have cosmological efficacy, since these accounts are most obviously theogenic. But religious practice was also viewed as influencing the gods to produce a social and psychological effect. Several passages in the lyric poets seem to highlight the psychological benefits that can be obtained through religious activities, specifically prayer. Since these passages seem *prima facie* to introduce different methods of understanding the function of religious practices, they are worth individual analysis. Two examples will suffice: the first is a fragment of the lyric poet Sappho from the early sixth century, and the second is from the corpus of Bacchylides, written approximately seventy-five years later.

In fragment 1, Sappho offers a prayer to the goddess Aphrodite. Scholars have highlighted the potent emotional force of Sappho's poetry in reference to her amatory relationships (e.g., her passion for the female beloved of fr. 31 and her supposed jealousy at viewing her with a man).⁴⁸ But in this fragment, Sappho also demonstrates her emotional dependence on the gods, in this case on Aphrodite: the goddess helps Sappho regulate the emotions that are stirred up by her romantic intrigues. The poem opens with a prayer that recognizes Aphrodite's ability to transform the poet's emotional state for the worse: "mistress, do not overpower my heart with distress and grief."⁴⁹ At the close of the poem, Sappho returns to the original narrative frame and asks the goddess to improve her emotional wellbeing: "Come to me now again and deliver me from oppressive anxieties; fulfill all that my heart longs to fulfill, and you yourself be my fellow-fighter."⁵⁰ Here, Sappho seems to understand her prayer as a crucial act in achieving emotional or psychological benefit from the goddess.

⁴⁸ Heller 1856, 432; Page 1955, 19-33; Marcovich 1972, 19-32; Campbell 1982, 271; Furley 2000, 8-15.

⁴⁹ μή μ' ἄσαισι μηδ' ὀνίαισι δάμνα | πότνια θῦμον· (3-4)

⁵⁰ ἔλθε μοι καὶ νῦν, χαλέπαν δὲ λῦσον | ἐκ μερίμναν, ὅσσα δέ μοι τέλεσσαι | θῦμος ἱμέρρει, τέλεσον, σὺ δ' αὐτα | σύμμαχος ἔσσο (25-8).

Further analysis suggests that Sappho may understand these psychological benefits to result as a secondary, “knock-on” effect of having obtained her primary request. Her request that Aphrodite become an ally or a “fellow-fighter” (σύμμαχος) demonstrates that Sappho desires the goddess to take an active role in the struggle in which Sappho is engaged. It further suggests that she wants Aphrodite to partner with her in obtaining the material changes she desires and not simply to produce a psychological effect in her mind or heart. While Sappho lists liberation from oppressive desires as one of her chosen outcomes, it appears not to be her primary desire, or something that she wants for its own sake. Rather, this liberation would follow as a result of Aphrodite’s intervention in her personal affairs. Sappho recounts her previous experience with the goddess, an experience that Sappho seeks to replicate through her entreaty. Aphrodite descends to Sappho’s realm and addresses Sappho directly:

αἶψα δ’ ἐξίκοντο· σὺ δ’, ὦ μάκαιρα,
μειδιαίσαισ’ ἀθανάτῳ προσώπῳ
ἦρε’ ὅττι δηῦτε πέπονθα κῶττι
δηῦτε κάλημμι,

κῶττι μοι μάλιστα θέλω γενέσθαι
μαινόλαι θύμῳ· τίνα δηῦτε πείθῳ
ἴψα σάγην† ἐς σὰν φιλότατα; τίς σ’, ὦ
Ψάφ’, ἀδικήει;

καὶ γὰρ αἰ φεύγει, ταχέως διώξει,
αἰ δὲ δῶρα μὴ δέκετ’, ἀλλὰ δώσει,
αἰ δὲ μὴ φίλει, ταχέως φιλήσει
κῶτκ ἐθέλοισα.

And soon they arrived; and you, blessed, with a smile on your immortal face asked what it was I suffered now, and why I was calling again, and what in my frenzied heart I wanted to happen for myself most of all. “Whom should I persuade this time to go back into your love? Who wrongs you, Sappho? For if she flees, soon she will pursue; if she does not accept gifts, she will offer them; and if she does not love, soon she will love, even against her will.” (13-24)

Aphrodite's epiphany, and her subsequent interaction with the poet, itself bears witness to the theogenic efficacy of Sappho's prayer. Without the prayer, Sappho would be unable to interact with the divine figure that she describes as participating with her in a verbal exchange. And with the repetition of the particle δηῶτε, Aphrodite emphasizes the repeated nature of Sappho's pleas and her own interventions. Furthermore, these lines reveal the nature of Aphrodite's previous responses to the poet's petitions, and therefore the sorts of interventions that Sappho would like to solicit in the present. When Sappho quotes her directly, Aphrodite asks for the identity of the person whom she ought to persuade (18-9) and assures Sappho that she will see to it that her beloved will be persuaded and that Sappho's fortunes will be reversed (21-4). Sappho's anxieties, then, will be lifted by virtue of Aphrodite's involvement in Sappho's affairs, and not by virtue of her direct involvement in Sappho's psychology. Rather, Sappho seems to recognize the emotive and psychological impact that Aphrodite's intervention would happily have upon her beloved. But because the mechanism by which Aphrodite persuades the beloved is unstated, the full extent of Aphrodite's intervention, including whether its impact was primarily or secondarily psychological, is unclear.

Bacchylides' first epinician presents a similar case. In it, the poet considers the following question: what is the greatest glory (μέγιστον κῦδος) for mortals? He asserts that the greatest glory is excellence, and considers the influence of wealth and piety on one's likelihood of obtaining it.

160 Φαμί καὶ φάσω μέγιστον
κῦδος ἔχειν ἀρετάν· πλοῦ-
τος δὲ καὶ δειλοῖσιν ἀνθρώπων ὀμιλεῖ,
ἐθέλει δ' αὖξιν φρένας ἀν-
δρός· ὁ δ' εὖ ἔρδων θεοῦς
ἐλπίδι κυδρότερα σαί-
165 νει κέαρ. Εἰ δ' ὑγείας

θνατὸς ἐὼν ἔλαχεν ζώ-
 ειν τ' ἀπ' οἰκείων ἔχει,
 πρώτοις ἐρίζει· παντί τοι
 τέρψις ἀνθρώπων βίῳ
 170 ἔπεται νόσφιν γε νόσων
 πενίας τ' ἀμαχάνου.
 ἴσον ὃ τ' ἀφνεὸς ἰμεί-
 ρει μεγάλων ὃ τε μείων
 παυροτέρων· τὸ δὲ πάντων
 175 εὐμαρεῖν οὐδὲν γλυκὸν
 θνατοῖσιν, ἀλλ' αἰεὶ τὰ φεύ-
 γοντα δίζηνται κιχεῖν.
 ὄντινα κουφόταται θυ-
 μὸν δονέουσι μέριμναι,
 180 ὄσσον ἂν ζῶη ἴχρονον, τόνδ' ἔλαχαν ἄ τι-
 μάν. ἀρετὰ δ' ἐπίμοχθος
 μέν, τελευταθεῖσα δ' ὀρθῶς
 ἀνδρὶ καὶ εὗτε θάνη λεί-
 πει πολυζήλωτον εὐκλείας ἄγαλμα.

I say and will say that the greatest glory consists in excellence. Wealth consorts with even wretched people, and is wont to augment the arrogance of a man. But the one who treats the gods well gladdens their heart with a more glorious hope. And if, although they be mortal, they obtain health and are able to live off of their own property, they rival foremost men. Joy follows the life of people who are free from sickness and helpless poverty. To equal degrees, the wealthy person desires great things and the lesser person lesser things. Indeed, to have all things in abundance is no sweet thing for mortals, but always they seek to obtain that which escapes them. Whoever's heart is agitated by terribly vain cares, they obtain honor as long as they live. Excellence demands toil, but, when rightly brought to fruition, leaves for a man an enviable gift of glory, even when he dies. (1.159-84 Irigoin)

Here, Bacchylides contrasts two methods of obtaining excellence: through accruing wealth and through piety. The opposition, found in lines 160-5, cannot be determined by appeal to grammar, but is made evident by the meaning of the passage. Because wealth accrues to mortals indiscriminately, the possession of wealth does not provide its possessor with any promise of personal excellence. On the other hand, the person who “treats the gods well” (εὖ ἔρδων θεοῦς)

gladdens their heart “with a more glorious hope” (ἐλπίδι κυδρύτερα).⁵¹ The primary method of interacting with the gods in Bacchylides’ Greece, and so of treating them well or badly, was as a benefactor, through participation in a set of religious practices that the gods had prescribed, including sacrifices and dedications. Indeed, even in other contexts, as we saw above in Hesiod’s *Works and Days* (135-6), the semantic range of the verb ἔρδειν includes both “to act” and “to sacrifice.”⁵²

Bacchylides endorses treating the gods well as the better means of obtaining glory. The contrast between the two methods of obtaining excellence is not between one that is sure (piety) and another that is uncertain (riches). For proper treatment of the gods does not guarantee a person excellence or its concomitant features, such as joy or glory. Rather, piety provides humans with a justified hope (ἐλπίς) of them. While participation in religious practices cannot ensure one’s excellence, it can, in Bacchylides’ view, help one satisfy some of the preconditions for obtaining it. Immediately following these lines, Bacchylides suggests that personal piety may lead to endowments of health and moderate material prosperity.

After endorsing piety, the poet proceeds to contrast the mortal character of the participant (θνατὸς ἐὼν) with their divine allotment (ἔλαχεν) of health and prosperity. The contrast suggests that proper actions towards the gods may enable one to avoid the pitfalls intrinsic to mortality.⁵³ The feeling of joy (τέρψις) accompanies mortals with these endowments, and their possession

⁵¹ The two methods are juxtaposed again at the end of the poem, where the poet reveals the allotment that attends the reception of wealth (178-81) and immediately contrasts this with the immortal nature of excellence’s reward (181-4).

⁵² See also Hes. *Th.* 417; Hom. *Il.* 2. 306; Aesch. *Sept.* 231; Hdt. 1. 131, 4. 60; and Pind. *Ol.* 8. 78. For the Greek text of Hes. *Op.* 135-6, see n. 36.

⁵³ The verb λαγγάνειν is often used to describe the apportioning of abilities of Zeus, and so is associated with ideas of fate and divine assignment (see Borecký 1965, 12-5, 45-57). For this reason, some translators incorporate the religious associations into the translations, rendering the verb as “to be blessed with” (Campbell 1992, 123; Jebb 1905, 249).

puts one onto the competitive level of foremost men (πρώτοις). Nevertheless, they must work to attain excellence, for it is toilsome, as the closing lines indicate. Wealth, on the other hand, is opposed to piety. Through the latter, one may obtain (ἔλαχεν, 166) health and a moderate level of prosperity. Through the former, one obtains (ἔλαχε, 180) a temporally limited honor. For Bacchylides, then, we see that certain psychological benefits accrue to the Greek who treats the gods well, including joy and the hope of future glory. But here, as may be the case in Sappho fr. 1, the primary benefit is material and the psychological advantages are ancillary: joy results from physical endowments which are provided to the pious, and the more glorious hope is secured on the basis of the same. It is the avoidance of sickness and helpless poverty that enables the pious to participate in the honorific struggle for excellence. And it is piety, in the midst of this struggle, that gives the athlete the divine help that is necessary to attain victory at athletic competition.

In each of the examples provided so far, religious practice functions theogenically. Further, in the majority of cases, these practices appear to function cosmologically. In their poems, Sappho and Bacchylides place an emphasis on the psychological benefits of religious practice, but these benefits are subordinate and consequent to a prior, material benefit, whose immediate cause is uncertain but whose ultimate cause is the gods. But there are also cases when practitioners seek non-cosmological benefits in themselves. For example, in the longest fragment of Solon's corpus (fr. 13), the statesman-poet offers a prayer to the Muses. After addressing them in the opening lines, Solon makes a series of requests: "Grant that I have prosperity from the blessed gods and always a good reputation from all people; that in this event I be sweet in the eyes of my friends and bitter in the eyes of my enemies, that I appear respectable to the former and dreadful to the latter" (3-6). The solicitation of prosperity (ὄλβον) and the good reputation that it would allow Solon to cultivate, assumes both the gods' ability to bestow wealth upon

humans and the efficacy of prayer in securing the object of such a petition. For Solon, god is explicitly the source of profit for mortals (74), and prayer plays a role in inducing the gods to grant it. This prosperity enables Solon to achieve the reputation that he desires, to act in such a way that would make his friends perceive him as sweet, and his enemies perceive him as bitter. Solon can build the desired perceptions by helping and harming each group, respectively. And it is the gods who can grant Solon the power and resources to take such actions. The object of Solon's request here reflects his view that religious practice induces the gods to intervene in human affairs, and that divine intervention can have further psychological effects.

This is not unique to Solon. We saw, for example, that Aphrodite had a long history of intervening in Sappho's erotic relationships, persuading Sappho's beloved to pursue her, to offer gifts to her, and to love her. To be persuaded involves a mental and emotional change. The gods are known, from early in the *Iliad*, to effect such changes: When the Greek army had endured nine days of Apollo's destruction, Achilles summoned the people to an assembly. But the idea was not his own, for Hera had put it into his heart.⁵⁴ Here, then, are two additional examples of instances in archaic poetry where religious practices work theogenically, and where the authors recognize that this process can produce psychological effects. Likewise, nothing precludes the gods from effecting change that influences Greek social structures. In fact, as Solon himself makes clear, the gods were often thought to oversee the welfare of the state.⁵⁵ Furthermore, as Theognis illustrates, Greek thinkers sought divine protection for their state. He commands Apollo: "You, Phoebus, graciously protect this city of ours!"⁵⁶

⁵⁴ τῷ γὰρ ἐπὶ φρεσὶ θῆκε θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη (I.55).

⁵⁵ See also Theognis I.757-64, 773-88.

⁵⁶ ἀλλὰ σύ, Φοῖβε, | ἴλαος ἡμετέρην τήνδε φύλασσε πόλιν (781-2).

In the archaic period, changes wrought by the gods as a result of the religious practice of humans could have cosmological, psychological and social effects.

The categories that we have defined help us track general trends in the interpretation of the efficacy of religious practice over time and between authors. In the archaic period, we have seen that efficacy was exclusively understood to operate theogenically. Moreover, religious practice functioned to effect change in the cosmological, social, and psychological realms, even if appeals to cosmological effects are most prevalent in the ancient literature. Of the matrix of interpretive options available, Greeks of this period understood religious practices to function in the following ways:

	Theogenic	Anthropogenic
Cosmos	✓	X
Society	✓	X
Psyche	✓	X

Table I. 1: The Traditional View of Efficacy

The universality of the theogenic model in the literature of the archaic period suggests that the tendency to view religious practice as influencing human affairs through the instrumentality of the gods was widespread during this period. Some modern interpreters may wish to proceed with the assumption that the literature I have surveyed does not necessarily reflect the attitudes and practices of ordinary Greek persons and that I have merely documented a literary trope, even if it extends across genres. Friedrich Pfister takes this approach, and argues

that a significant chasm divided the religion of “high literature and art” from that entertained by ordinary members of society. In *Die Religion der Griechen und Römer*. He argues as follows:

Aber wie die homerische Sprache ungeheuer auf die Sprache der Folgezeit gewirkt hat, und zwar in allererster Linie auf die hohe Literatur, auf Poesie und Prosa, ebenso sehr wirkte auch die homerische Religion auf die Weiterentwicklung in der Folgezeit, und auch hier besonders auf die Religion, wie sie uns in der hohen Literatur entgegentritt, in der Lyrik und in der Tragödie, und wie sie dann auch von der Philosophie bekämpft wurde. Aber mehr und mehr beeinflusste sie auch die offizielle Religion der Polis und schließlich auch, eben weil es ein Schulbuch war, den Glauben des Volkes selbst. So ist es denn also dem Epos zu verdanken, daß von nun an ein Zwiespalt in der griechische Religion—mehr als in anderen Religionen—klafft: die Religion der hohen Literatur und Kunst und die Religion des volkstümlichen Glaubens, die primitives Gut aus ältesten Zeiten erhalten hat.⁵⁷

The view expressed here requires that people in the ancient world who consumed “high literature” accepted various theological features of the work by adopting so-called “nonce beliefs,” rather than viewing them as “fixed norms.”⁵⁸ It is worth noting that, even if the conceptions of efficacy reflected in high literature differ from those understood by the Athenian masses, the Greek philosophers, as Pfister notes, were responding to the very literature that I have surveyed, and it is the philosophers who are my focus in this dissertation. But there is, nevertheless, good reason to suppose that “high literature” influenced Greek people across socio-economic classes, even if it did not influence all of them.

Presentations of theogenic religious practice were ubiquitous in the Greek world. For example, a Greek who attended the Delian festival in the 470s would have heard the public performance of Bacchylides’ *Ode* 17.⁵⁹ This performance included a narrative in which Zeus, at

⁵⁷ Pfister 1930, 219-20.

⁵⁸ In the context of Greco-Roman religion, a similar interpretive phenomenon was described by Paul Veyne as *la balkanisation de chaque cerveau* (1983, 103), translated by Denis Feeney as “brain-balkanization” (1998, 14).

⁵⁹ For the approximate date of performance, see Irwin 2011, 53-4; Kowalzig 2007, 88; Fearn 2007, 252; and Schmidt 1990, 29-31.

Minos' request, "flashed his lightning" and miraculously enabled Theseus to visit the underwater "hall of the gods" to retrieve Minos' golden ring (67-129).⁶⁰ The typical effect of dominant ideologies, religious or otherwise, is to make them seem natural and inevitable to their audience. It is likely that many ancient Greeks accepted such narrative elements as reflecting nonce beliefs or at least as reflecting a historical reality opposed to their own. Yet theogenic and cosmological efficacy was not understood as a concept alien to contemporary life, as ancient votives and oracular tablets attest. While some may have contested the prevalent view of the efficacy of religious practice, the long subsequent history of theogenic and cosmological efficacy suggests that there was a strong tendency to view religious practice as functioning in this manner. Indeed, it is difficult to see how the sentiments expressed in the literature mentioned above would not have shaped and reinforced the sentiments of the people who consumed it.

Moreover, it is increasingly clear that most Greeks interacted with so-called "high literature." Recent studies have demonstrated that—in addition to festivals and games—a large swathe of the Greek populace was able to attend events such as symposia, which have often been viewed in the scholarship as an exclusively elite practice.⁶¹ In this way, Greeks from most communities were able to hear and observe the poetic performances that took place at such venues. At times, such exposure resulted from an Athenian male's political office, which depended more on willingness to serve and luck of the draw than it did on economic status. For the magistrates dined together at the Tholos—one of many dining rooms located at the northwest

⁶⁰ On the theme of fate in Ode 17, see Scodel 1984, who notes that throughout "fate, justice, and the gods are united in determining the future" (139).

⁶¹ For example Schmitt-Pantel (1990, 20; 1992, 121), Corner (2012), and Topper (2009) all argue against the traditional view of the symposium, and by extension the poetic performances which occur therein, as an institution reserved for the elite.

of the Agora or outside the South Stoa—in the symposiastic manner.⁶² Alternatively, opportunities for exposure to high literature would have been available at the meetings of informal religious associations (θίασοι) and other communal events such as weddings, festivals, and sacrifices.⁶³ And of course, the narratives of high literature permeated the surroundings of all Greeks, being represented widely, for example, in fine arts such as pottery.

A number of drinking songs (σκόλια), originating between approximately 514-480 BCE, are preserved in Athenaeus (XV 693f-695f),⁶⁴ several of which request specific actions from the gods. Gregory S. Jones has convincingly argued that these songs “display all the hallmarks of a popular oral tradition and genuine examples of non-elite or middling cultural artifacts.”⁶⁵ Therefore, the σκόλια provide some direct evidence, *inter alia*, that some “middling” Greeks petitioned the gods to intervene in their lives. In one σκόλιον, for example, the performer sings to Pallas Athena and asks for a theogenic intervention: “You and your father, guide this city and its citizens, that it be without grief and civil discord and untimely death.”⁶⁶

Thucydides vividly captures the religious expectations of the Athenians in his narrative of the plague that broke out in 430 BCE. When the plague came upon their city, and the human toll inflicted by the sickness increased, the people sought help from human arts such as medicine and religion. But when their religious practices failed to improve their situation, they saw no need to continue to perform them: “As much as they made supplication at sanctuaries, or consulted oracles and the like, all was in vain, and having completed their rites, they desisted from them,

⁶² Fisher 2000, 361-3.

⁶³ Jones 1999, 96-7 and 254-66; Fisher 2000, 360-7; Wilkins 2000, 64, 205-11.

⁶⁴ *PMG* 884, 885 (= Ath. 694c).

⁶⁵ Jones 2014, 234.

⁶⁶ *PMG* 884 (= Ath. 694c). For other sources, see Mikalson 2016, esp. 86-90 and 1998,

overcome by the calamity.”⁶⁷ From Thucydides’ telling, it appears that the Athenians normally conceived of their religious practice as useful insofar as it helped alleviate their immediate and physical traumas. Their religious practice, along with most Greeks of the archaic age, whose religious conceptions are recorded in the literature of the period, constituted a request for the gods’ intervention to improve the Athenians’ material circumstances. In this particular case, when the request was left unfulfilled, the practice ceased to occupy a meaningful place in the life of the erstwhile practitioners. Nevertheless, the Athenian instinct to turn to the gods through religious practice reveals that the dominant ideology of ritual efficacy (that it is theogenic and influences all realms of life) had been internalized by the people whom Thucydides describes.

It is, however, important to recognize that Greeks of the archaic age were not, for the most part, guilty of naïve optimism with regard to the efficacy of their religious practices. The *Elegy to the Muses*, cited above, outlines one explanation that Greeks of this time period had for unsuccessful, or non-efficacious practices. Solon notes that Zeus punishes injustice at irregular intervals from the moment that the injustice is committed; sometimes retribution follows upon injustice swiftly, sometimes punishment is delayed. For this reason, mortals are ultimately unable to predict their fortune, regardless of their participation in religious practices such as sacrifice and prayer. If the timetable of the gods’ retribution is unknown to the participant, they cannot know with any certainty whether their ritual action will be successful, since injustice on the part of the participant can neutralize the efficacy of the practice. The concept of “deferred punishment” is one explanation for the gap between desired and actual results, and tempers the expectation of the practitioner.

⁶⁷ ὅσα τε πρὸς ἱεροῖς ἰκέτευσαν ἢ μαντείοις καὶ τοῖς τοιούτοις ἐχρήσαντο, πάντα ἀνωφελῆ ἦν, τελευτῶντές τε αὐτῶν ἀπέστησαν ὑπὸ τοῦ κακοῦ νικώμενοι (II.47).

On some occasions, however, divine punishment does not redound upon the individual who committed the injustice at all. Solon argues that in these cases, punishment “assuredly comes at another time; the innocent pay the penalty, either their children or a later progeny.” In such a scenario, those who pray, as Solon did, for prosperity and a good standing in society, cannot be assured that the efficacy of their prayers will not be cancelled out by an impending penalty that was incurred by the actions of an ancestor. For, as Solon notes, religious practices cannot overcome the vile fate of an individual that was contracted by past wrongdoing: “by all means, neither augury nor sacrifices will pull down that which is destined.”⁶⁸ This principle is manifest, on an epic scale, in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, when the chorus sings of the inevitable doom of the house of Atreus:

Διὸς πλαγὰν ἔχουσιν εἰπεῖν,
πάρεστιν τοῦτό γ’ ἐξιχνεῦσαι·
ἔπραξεν ὡς ἔκρανεν· οὐκ ἔφα τις
θεοὺς βροτῶν ἀξιοῦσθαι μέλειν
ὅσοις ἀθίκτων χάρις
πατοῖθ’· ὁ δ’ οὐκ εὐσεβῆς·
πέφανται δ’ ἐγγόνιοις
ἴατολμήτων ἄρη†
πνεόντων μείζον ἢ δικαίως,
φλεόντων δωμάτων ὑπέρφρεν
ὑπὲρ τὸ βέλτιστον· (367-78)

They can speak about Zeus’ blow. It can be traced it back to its source. He did as he decreed. Someone said that gods do not concern themselves with mortals, by whom the grace of things holy is trampled underfoot. But he is impious. The curse of the insufferable is made manifest to future generations, when they puff themselves up more than is just, when a house abounds in excess, beyond what is best.

⁶⁸ τὰ δὲ μόρσιμα πάντως | οὔτε τις οἰωνὸς ρύσεται οὔθ’ ἱερά· (55-6). López 2017 understands the poem to be itself constitute a pious act (“acto piadoso”), for it recognizes the blindness of mortals and the necessity of “reconociendo la competencia de los dioses en aquello que se pide” (99 n.45, cf. pp. 98-9).

The concept of generational punishment—“ancestral fault” or “inherited guilt”—is yet another concept that could be cited in the archaic age to relieve the philosophical strain produced by the observable fact that not all religious practices were fulfilled in the anticipated fashion.⁶⁹ Martin West notes regarding curses what must surely be true of those who participated in a myriad of religious practices and offered a myriad of religious offerings: “People who uttered curses or wrote *defixiones* must often have been disappointed.”⁷⁰ Ancestral fault is a principle that could explain the theological basis for such disappointment. In his book *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Dodds understands ancestral fault to be a traditional concept—indeed “the characteristic archaic doctrine”—to be found already in Hesiod.⁷¹ Others have argued that the concept originates in Homer,⁷² although Homer seems to have avoided ancestral fault, either to encourage sympathy for the Trojans or as a part of a more general tendency to suppress more supernatural elements of religious tales,⁷³ and still more that the pedigree of ancestral fault begins only with Solon himself.⁷⁴ But regardless of the origin of this theological development, ancestral fault provides

⁶⁹ For the role of ancestral fault in Aeschylus, see Dodds 1960. On ancestral fault generally, see Glotz 1904; Dodds 1951, 28-63; Parker 1983, 198-206; Sewell-Rutter 2007, 15-48; Gagné 2013.

⁷⁰ West 1999, 32-3.

⁷¹ Dodds 1951, 31-4. Cf. Vlastos 1946, 76-8. Vlastos writes that “nothing is so characteristic of the magical view of justice as the postulate that punishment descends biologically upon the sinner’s posterity” (76), and Dodds argues that to the Greeks of the Archaic period, inherited guilt “appeared as a law of nature, which must be accepted” (34). Timothy Gantz argues that Hesiod “represents a modest beginning” to the notion of ancestral fault, and credits Solon with significant novelty (1982, 4-6). Nägelsbach 1857 also traces the idea back to Hesiod (34-8).

⁷² See Rohde 1925, 450 n.65; Lloyd-Jones 1983, 7, 37, 44, 170.

⁷³ On this tendency in Homer, see Griffin 1977.

⁷⁴ Kakridis 1929, 141-68. I agree with Renaud Gagné when he writes: “While divine wrath against kin groups and delayed punishment is found in Homer and Hesiod already, and the ‘ancestral curse’ of the Atreids is probably present as early as Alcaeus, nowhere does the idea of ancestral fault appear as a regular principle of divine action in time before Solon” (2009a, 23; cf. Gagné 2010, 17).

one explanation as to why pious individuals (or, in Solon's words, "the innocent") do not appear to receive the gods' benevolence despite their faithful participation in religious practices. This, in addition to similar principles, preserves the belief that religious practices can move the gods to action from patent indefensibility.⁷⁵

In this section, we have seen, then, that in the archaic age, religious practices operated on a strictly theogenic model. There is no evidence of an author who understood either their own participation in religious practices or the participation of their contemporaries to function anthropogenically. In the evidence that we have investigated, only the gods granted the benefits that were thought to accrue from the performance of religious rites. Moreover, these benefits were understood to have affected human life in all its dimensions: the gods could alter the physical conditions of the petitioner's natural environment, help or harm social communities, or manipulate the psychology of mortals. The religiously observant would have recognized the failure of religious practices as an obvious fact of religious life, and they had intellectual resources through which they could make sense of such cases.

Having established the predominant ideology of religious practice (what will henceforth be referred to as the "Traditional View"), let us now turn to the thinkers whose work first called these prevailing religious conceptions into question.

⁷⁵ Other fail-safe principles include associative, or "collective," guilt and the belief, as Dodds notes, that the wrongdoer "will pay his debt personally in another life" (1951, 33). On the former, see Parker 1983, 276-80. These explanatory principles, however, each assume the unanimity of the gods. The conflicting natures and wills of the gods are perhaps a simpler and therefore more intellectually satisfying explanation of unsuccessful religious practice.

CHAPTER 2

Contesting the Traditional View: The Revolutionary Ideas of the Pre-Socratics

In Chapter 1, I described what I call the “Traditional View” of religious practice, which appears to have been held by authors in the archaic period or at least reflected in their works. Those who subscribed to this view understood religious practice to effect changes in all spheres of life: in the cosmos, in the city, and in the individual psyche. Furthermore, they held that religious practice produced its effects theogenically, i.e. by moving the gods to take action on the practitioner’s behalf. As far as we can tell from the literature of this period, the Traditional View predominated in the archaic period of Greek history. Although the remainder of this dissertation documents a progressive shift away from this view among philosophers, it should be noted that the Traditional View is commonly attested well into the Christian era and is still common today. Indeed, there is no indication that the alternative views put forward by the philosophers had widespread success in stamping out what they took to represent an outmoded position on the traditional practices of Greek religion. Nevertheless, in sixth century BCE, a small group of intellectuals began to rethink their religious traditions. Their ideas spread quickly throughout the region.

In Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, the protagonist Strepsiades learns of a new school in Athens called the φροντιστήριον, or Thinkery, where paying students are welcomed into a new world of intellectual inquiry and are introduced to new methods and fields of knowledge. The leader of the school is the barefoot philosopher Socrates, but his activities represent those of the so-called

pre-Socratic and Sophistic movements, whom Aristophanes is content to satirize at the philosopher's expense. In the play, we see that students are inducted into The Thinkery as one might be inducted into a religious cult: there is an initiation ceremony (258) and Strepsiades, qua initiate, is introduced to the various rites of the institution, including a dress code for entrance to the interior of the school (498). When Strepsiades finally enters the school, the chorus sings that although this initiate is older in years, "he tinges his nature with revolutionary ideas and cultivates wisdom" (νεωτέροις τὴν φύσιν αὐτοῦ πράγμασιν χρωτίζεται καὶ σοφίαν ἐπασκεῖ, 514-6). In the *Clouds*, it is clear that Aristophanes believes the revolutionary potential of the philosophers at The Thinkery to be theological, and that he believes that their ideas pose a grave threat to traditional Greek religious conventions.

In the present chapter, I investigate the various theological innovations that were made among the pre-Socratics and Sophists of the sixth and fifth centuries. Although these thinkers did not explicitly address the problem of efficacy as a philosophical challenge in its own right, their theological insights had significant implications for the Traditional View of religious practice. These philosophers criticized traditional theology and introduced new ideas that occupied a subsequent generation of philosophers. Their theological views were at the very least inhospitable to the Traditional View held by their contemporaries, and at times were plainly inconsistent with it. In particular, three strands of thought arose in this period that appear to have complicated the Traditional View of religious practice. The first was an observation that was made newly controversial and extended beyond its typical bounds; the others appear to have been genuinely novel conceptions introduced into the intellectual landscape: (1) the belief that the gods do not conform to mortal standards of behavior, (2) the belief in non-interventionist gods, and (3) the denial of the gods' physical existence. Each of these ideas is found among the

writings of the pre-Socratic and Sophistic authors, and each bears on the Traditional View of religious practice. At times, the authors themselves articulate the implications of their ideas for participation in religious practice, and at times the implications are left unstated (at least, they are not preserved in the extant literature). In the present chapter, I examine the introduction of each of these ideas in succession and the troublesome impact that they had on the Traditional View of religious practice. Section I treats (1) and Section II treats (2) and (3). Section III explores a further threat to the Traditional View, a variant of (2). Namely, it examines the tendency to restrict the scope of divine intervention by denying the gods a role in specific domains of human life.

I

At some level, that the gods do not conform to mortal standards of behavior is clearly on display in the earliest Greek literature. But the idea that this is an objectionable feature of Greek religion seems to take root in the sixth century with the itinerant poet Xenophanes. In perhaps his most famous pair of fragments, Xenophanes criticizes the anthropomorphism (the view that the gods possess human character and likeness) of traditional Greek religion, which was proliferated by the poets of his day and was prevalent in the popular imagination:

ἀλλ' εἰ χειῖρας ἔχον βόες <ἵπποι τ' > ἠὲ λέοντες
ἢ γράψαι χεῖρεςσι καὶ ἔργα τελεῖν ἄπερ ἄνδρες
ἵπποι μὲν θ' ἵπποισι βόες δέ τε βουσὶν ὁμοίας
καὶ <κε> θεῶν ιδέας ἔγραφον καὶ σώματ' ἐποίουν
τοιαῦθ' οἷόν περ καὶ αὐτοὶ δέμας εἶχον <ἕκαστοι>

Now if cattle, <horses> or lions had hands and were able to draw with their hands and perform works like men, horses like horses and cattle like cattle would draw the forms of gods, and make their bodies just like the body <each of them> had. (B15)

πάντα θεοῖσ' ἀνέθηκαν Ὅμηρός θ' Ἡσίοδός τε,
ὅσσα παρ' ἀνθρώποισιν ὀνειδέα καὶ ψόγος ἐστίν,

κλέπτειν μοιχεύειν τε καὶ ἀλλήλους ἀπατεύειν.

Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods all things that are blameworthy and disgraceful for men: stealing, committing adultery, and deceiving each other. (B11)¹

In B15, Xenophanes highlights what he takes to be a universal feature of the representations of gods in the archaic period: human agents craft the gods roughly in their own physical image. Both fragments draw attention to the fact that humans are, of necessity, inventors of the image and character of the divine. Having no direct epistemic access to the gods, they are forced to create an image of them. Confronted with this task, humans have imposed upon the gods physical and behavioral characteristics that parallel their own. In B15, we find that in Xenophanes' imagination, other animals would do likewise, if only they had the requisite artistic abilities to do so. His conviction is apparently born of some supposed ethnographic observation, for "Africans <say their gods are> snub-nosed and black, Thracians blue-eyed and red-haired."² Due to their internal diversity of appearance, even a single species projects their physical characteristics onto the gods in ways that are mutually incompatible. The principle of inventing like-looking and like-minded gods may have some virtues, but Xenophanes seems to contest this depiction of the gods on methodological grounds: the gods cannot be characterized with any precision by holding up a mirror to one's self. If the goal is to produce a universal, and hence "accurate," characterization of divinity, this method is, in the philosopher's view, bound to yield incoherent results.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all texts and translations of pre-Socratic authors are taken from Graham 2010.

² Αἰθιοπές τε <θεοὺς σφετέρους> σιμοὺς μέλανάς τε | Θρῆνικές τε γλαυκοὺς καὶ πυρροὺς <φασὶ πέλεσθαι>. (F21)

If humans are inventors of the gods' image and character, then they must create an image of them that includes physical and behavioral features. B11 makes a point similar to B15, but focuses on the gods' behavioral, rather than physical, attributes. Xenophanes describes the traditional method of representing the gods by targeting their most celebrated representatives of the archaic period: poets, such as Homer and Hesiod, who give the gods human behaviors. Xenophanes focuses his criticisms on behaviors that mortals widely consider to be inappropriate in civilized society. Because the problem broached in B11 is that the gods are depicted as acting as humans *actually* act, a ready solution would be that the gods would be better represented as acting the way humans *ought* to act. Yet Xenophanes does not pursue this line of argument.

In other fragments, we learn that the philosopher does not object to Homer and Hesiod's representation of the gods because he thinks that the gods are morally upstanding in human terms. Rather, his view is that the behavior of the gods simply resists human evaluation. Indeed, Xenophanes' own theology is quite apophatic: god is defined largely by what he understands it not to be. For example, in B23, Xenophanes sings that god is "not at all like mortals in body nor in thought" (οὔτι δέμας θνητοῖσιν ὁμοίος οὐδὲ νόημα), and in B25-6, he announces that god neither toils nor moves. Xenophanes' behavioral criticism of traditional representations of the divine in B11, combined with his insistence that the god(s) defy human likeness, introduces a rather expansive epistemic chasm between the mortal and the divine. Not only do the gods neither look nor act like human beings, they are not like human beings at all. Xenophanes' insight opens up the possibility that mortals have no ability to understand the nature of the gods, since they have no reference point against which to make a productive comparison.

Scholarship that treats these fragments tends to focus on Xenophanes' attack on traditional myth and the poets' naïve representation of the gods.³ This makes sense, given that the philosopher makes these connections explicit. But Xenophanes' criticism of poetic characterizations of the gods had implications for common interpretations of religious practice. How the gods were depicted in the archaic period is bound to influence how religious practices were understood to function in society at that time. Therefore, to reimagine the former invites a reimagining of the latter. If the behavior and intellectual activity of the god(s) do not resemble that of humans, as illustrated in B11, then how reliable is the internal logic of sacrifice and prayer? In archaic literature, the gods often respond to the religious practices of mortals out of anthropomorphic motives: feelings of obligation, or the desire for honor, respect, and vengeance. If someone living in Xenophanes' time was persuaded by the argument that it is naïve to imagine that the god(s) feel and act upon humanlike passions and motivations (or even participate in motion or labor), then they would have been justified in wondering about the mechanism by which religious practice was supposed to elicit the gods' response, and therefore whether participation in religious practice is able to do so. Arguably, the implications of Xenophanes' fragments regarding the efficacy of religious practice would have been more disruptive to the everyday life of Athenians than the doubt that the philosopher casts upon the factual accuracy of contemporary poetic accounts.

Xenophanes' rough contemporary, Heraclitus of Ephesus, adumbrated a similar view according to which the nature of god profoundly departs from conventional Greek understanding. Although the similarity between the theologies of Xenophanes and Heraclitus has

³ E.g., Eisenstadt 1974; Leshner 1978; Stambovsky 1996, 34-6; Morgan 2004, 47-61; Granger 2007.

been overstated at times, it is true that both authors hold that human and divine thoughts differ in fundamental ways.⁴ Heraclitus writes that the moral judgments of human beings do not parallel those of the gods. In B102, Heraclitus remarks that “to the god all things are fair and good and just, but humans suppose that some things are unjust, and others are just.”⁵ In such a world, the ability of mortals to determine the judgments of the gods in relation to their own affairs, specifically the justice of their petitions, is compromised. For human agents can scarcely, if ever, possess the knowledge of when their petitions accord with the will of the gods. Under Xenophanes and Heraclitus’ view, any petition made to remedy perceived injustice is misguided, since the petitioner acts based on an understanding of injustice that is not shared with the god whom they petition. The true scope of Heraclitus’ statement, however, will influence its impact on how contemporaries may have interpreted contemporary religious practice. If the philosopher refers to the realm of human action, religious practice is ill-suited towards rectifying the effects of unjust human encounters. If its scope is cosmological, religious practice that responds to natural phenomena is likewise ill advised. In whichever realm B102 applies, if the gods believe all states of affairs to be fair, good, and just, they will have no motivation for changing them as a result of mortal practices.

Heraclitus has a positive view of the function of religious practice, but his view predictably does not involve changing the will of the gods or altering their course of action. In fact, Heraclitus devoted a great deal of thought to religious practices and felt a need to provide an

⁴ For the tendency of modern scholars to view Heraclitus and Xenophanes as theologically equivalent, see Marcovich 1978, 284; Conche 1986, 173; Gerson 1990, 249 n.60.

⁵ τῷ μὲν θεῷ καλὰ πάντα καὶ ἀγαθὰ καὶ δίκαια, ἄνθρωποι δὲ ἃ μὲν ἄδικα ὑπειλήφασιν ἃ δὲ δίκαια (translation my own). The philosopher also seems to emphasize the universality of the god’s concern for humankind, which may contradict the notions of some that religious practice provides the practitioner with a private and privileged access to the gods (F115, see Adoméas 1999, 102-7)

explanation of their traditional forms. He does not criticize traditional practices, but takes issue with vulgar interpretations of them that do not highlight the truth of Heraclitus' philosophical system. As Mantas Adomėnas has argued, Heraclitus attempts to uncover the underlying significance of traditional religious practices by showing how they integrate with what he takes to be the true nature of things. Adomėnas concludes that "Heraclitus tries to give an interpretation of traditional religious practices in terms of his own philosophy, identifying in those practices a structure of the 'unity of opposites' that plays a prominent role in his account of reality."⁶ Although Heraclitus felt compelled to treat religious practices in a methodical manner, the surviving texts leave unanswered questions concerning god's relation to these practices. For example, how do the gods distinguish just from unjust petitions? In what circumstances would god respond to human action? Is the efficacy of religious practice theogenic or anthropogenic?⁷

Heraclitus' positive view of the functions of religious practices is that they are explanatory. Just as the world presents, in the words of Mark Johnstone, an "orderly and intelligible (i.e., comprehensible, understandable) presentation of its nature to us throughout our lives," so too the form of various religious practices demonstrates the true nature of the cosmos.⁸ Heraclitus believes that traditional religious practices serve a pedagogical function by revealing a Heraclitean account of the world. In this sense, the philosopher understands religious practice to, in a sense, do philosophical work: Heraclitus provides a philosophical explanation of the cosmos, to the truth of which traditional religious practices attest. In his famous river fragments,

⁶ Adomėnas 1999, 109.

⁷ The origin of the various religious practices is not specified, but Iamblichus reports that Heraclitus thought "obscene rites" to be efficacious by virtue of the divine visions they produce (B68), and Heraclitus' discussion of prayer seems to presuppose the accessibility of the gods through such means (B5, cf. Babut 1975 and Adomėnas 1999, 101-7).

⁸ Johnstone 2014, 21.

Heraclitus shows how a river, an everyday structure with which all are familiar, reflects the deep philosophical realities of Heraclitus' world. Similarly, the philosopher shows that structure of religious practices reflects fundamental truths of reality, which Heraclitus teaches. Like a river, religious practices provide well known object lessons for demonstrating his philosophical dogma. But given their association with tradition, by proving some deep harmony between his philosophical thought and various religious practices, Heraclitus lends a sense of authority to his views. Crucially, the account of religious practice in the fragments of Heraclitus conceives of it as serving a pedagogical function, leading towards an understanding of true philosophy. In the fragments, we find no defense of the Traditional View of religious practice's efficacy that was at home in the archaic age.

Both Xenophanes and Heraclitus argue for a god whose nature radically departs from traditional accounts. The former proposes that humans and gods have different appearances, as well as fundamentally different thoughts. The latter argues that the gods do not recognize the moral categories of good and bad, which motivate human action and desires. For the gods, all things are unified, falling under a single moral category. Both philosophers show that the gods are in some sense alien to human experience, an idea that casts doubt upon the gods' interest in the desires of mortals and their ability to respond to their requests, which so often came in the form of sacrifices or prayers. It also calls into question whether the gods are influenced by honorific practices such as the erection of monuments and the singing of hymns.

It is entirely possible to accept the theogenic model of religious practice, either as a philosophical doctrine or as an unexamined custom, while simultaneously accepting the philosophical doctrines of Xenophanes and Heraclitus. Indeed, there is no clear indication that they did not do so themselves. But their opposition to popular conceptions of human-divine

likeness raises further questions regarding the character, or even possibility, of human-divine interaction.

II

Other intellectuals of the time made a distinct theological innovation that had even stronger implications for the Traditional View of religious practice. These philosophers raised the possibility that the gods do not influence human affairs. These figures were of two types: some thinkers, beginning with Protagoras in the fifth century, raised the possibility that the gods simply do not exist. Among this group there was a great deal of variability: some were agnostic, some argued that the gods do not exist, but all raised the possibility of a world with no gods. The other group argued that the gods exist, yet do not intervene in human affairs. While the differences among these various figures are theologically significant, they all have one thing in common: their theological views contradict the Traditional View by casting doubt on the possibility of theogenic efficacy. If the gods do not exist, or do not intervene in human affairs, then the gods cannot be moved by human action, including by religious activity. What follows is a description of the various positions that fall under this rubric. I begin with some of those who raise the possibility of a world without gods (Protagoras, Prodicus, and the author of the so-called Sisyphus fragment), and then move to a discussion of Democritus, a philosopher who argues that the gods do not intervene in human affairs.

In B4, Protagoras famously asserts that he does not know (εἰδέναι) anything concerning the gods' existence or appearance.⁹ This constitutes the first explicit avowal of agnosticism

⁹ περὶ μὲν θεῶν οὐκ ἔχω εἰδέναι, οὔθ' ὡς εἰσὶν οὔθ' ὅποιοί τινες ιδέαν (= Eus. *Praep. evang.* 14. 3. 7; DL 9. 51).

known from Greek antiquity. But knowledge is an epistemologically high bar to clear. Knowledge is typically distinguished from belief in virtue of its ability to fulfill two conditions: the so-called Truth Condition (i.e., it is a *true* belief) and the Justification Condition (i.e., the belief is justifiably believed to be true). The truth condition identifies knowledge as a belief that is in fact true. On Monday morning, Socrates cannot *know* that the weather on Tuesday will be sunny or cloudy, although he can believe that it will be one or the other. On Tuesday, his belief may be proven to have been true. In this case, Socrates' belief on Monday is shown retroactively to have fulfilled the Truth Condition. Plato famously identifies the justification condition in his distinction between "knowledge" and "true belief" when he says that knowledge is justified true belief (*Meno* 97D6-98A9). For Socrates' meteorological declaration to constitute knowledge on Monday, he must have been able to justify it with sufficient reason. In the case of the gods, there is distinctively no way of proving or falsifying claims about their existence and so no way of satisfying the Truth Condition. In the extant remains of his work, Protagoras does not reveal whether the gods are objects of his belief.¹⁰ But even if he believes in the gods' existence, such a belief is bound to remain insufficiently justified to be regarded as knowledge in the strict sense.¹¹

We can, then, allow for Protagoras to have had views about the gods which do not constitute knowledge (e.g., that they interfere in the physical world as a result of a person's performance of pious acts). But regardless of his views, Protagoras' words seem to have been interpreted as evidence of the philosopher's suspension of belief. Diogenes of Oenoanda

¹⁰ On Protagoras' acknowledgment of epistemological barriers to knowledge in this passage as well as the dubious fragment from Didymus the Blind, see Mansfeld 1981.

¹¹ Although in the fifth century, the verb εἰδέναι operates as a dead metaphor, Protagoras' use of the perfect form of ὁρᾶν ("to see") highlights Protagoras' lack of justified belief in the gods' existence. For Protagoras has obtained no experiential, and thus secure, insight concerning their being.

provides the most extreme interpretation of Protagoras, in what C. W. Chilton characterizes as a “gross breach of the simplest rules of logic”: “Protagoras of Abdera in effect held the same opinion as Diagoras [of Melos], but used different words so as to avoid its excessive boldness. He said that he did not know whether gods exist, which is the same thing as saying that he knew they did not” (col. 2, 1-12).¹² Protagoras has not been understood as one who possessed a committed belief in the gods. But in any case, Protagoras’s work underscores the possibility of a world without gods. In entertaining such a world, he focuses attention upon the possibility that the actions that humans direct towards them are theogenically vain: it may be that they do not (and cannot) move the gods to action, for the gods may not exist.¹³

Although the fragments of Protagoras have profound implications for our subject, they do not themselves treat the subject of religious practice. But given his uncertainty regarding the existence of the gods, one might expect either that his conception of the efficacy of religious practices would reflect this same uncertainty or that he would claim that their efficacy does not derive from the activity of the gods, i.e. that it is not theogenic. Either option would constitute a dramatic shift away from the Traditional View of the archaic period. In Plato’s *Protagoras*, we find an explicit statement concerning the eponymous character’s views regarding religious practice. Plato presents views that he attributes to Protagoras, which the latter may or may not have articulated publicly. Whether the words of Protagoras in Plato’s dialogue represent Protagoras’ historical view is a live question of significant value.¹⁴ But regardless of one’s

¹² Chilton 1962, 106, from whom the translation of Diogenes is taken.

¹³ This effect would be exaggerated in such authors as Prodicus, who seem to reject the existence of the gods outright, as will be discussed.

¹⁴ On the debate over the historicity of the Great Speech and Plato’s fidelity to the historical Protagoras, see Yona 2015, 262-3 nn. 11-14 (cf. Nathan 2017, 381 n. 9). My own view is that the Great Speech constitutes an artful formulation of an address that is doctrinally and rhetorically Protagorean (Yona’s “group 2”).

answer to this specific issue, it is notable that in the *Protagoras* Plato attributes to Protagoras a kind of conception of religious practice that one might expect. There, we find that Protagoras presents an agnostic's take on the question of religious practice, or one that might result from the theological position of agnosticism.

After relaying to Socrates the myth from the Great Speech (320C – 322D), Protagoras sets forth a general principle that he takes to be agreeable to most Athenians: all people have a share in political excellence. He argues that people do not have this excellence “by nature” or “spontaneously” (ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτομάτου). Rather, political excellence is capable of being taught (διδασκτόν) and can be achieved “with practice” (ἐξ ἐπιμελείας, 323C). For this reason, those who are found deficient in political excellence become the object of the Athenians' collective ire. In this regard, excellence is much like other positive human qualities, since lacking a quality, the possession of which is in one's control, reflects a moral deficiency on the part of the one who lacks it. Protagoras lists examples of such vices, including injustice (ἀδικία), impiety (ἀσέβεια), and “in short, everything opposed to political excellence” (συλλήβδην πᾶν τὸ ἐναντίον τῆς πολιτικῆς ἀρετῆς, 323E-324A). Plato, then, characterizes Protagoras as being opposed to impiety, calling it a vice whose presence can be attributed to a lack of care and attention. Moreover, since the third element of Protagoras' list seems to describe a broader category that includes the first two, the philosopher appears to regard piety as a subset of political excellence, and he grounds his distaste for impiety in the fact that it works against political excellence.

What exactly this means depends on one's conception of political excellence in Plato's *Protagoras*, and in that dialogue Protagoras infamously alternates between competing views of excellence. Arthur Adkins, for example, argues that Protagoras uses “excellence” (ἀρετή) to pick out two distinct types of excellence: the traditional “competitive” virtue and the more

contemporary “cooperative” virtue that was ascendant with the advent of democracy.¹⁵ It appears that the latter definition, which calls to mind a general duty to law and custom, is operative in our passage in 323E-324A, since Protagoras notes that political excellence is held by all and connects this insight to the flourishing of Athenian democracy. Yet, according to Adkins, Protagoras deliberately equivocates, leading his audience to believe that they also possess the specific political skill and acumen that the more restrictive and traditional definition denotes.¹⁶ Protagoras’ choice to subordinate piety to political excellence, however defined, tells us what we need to know. Plato’s Protagoras conceives of devotion to the gods as a political virtue and one’s lack of devotion as a fundamentally political vice. Impiety may well undercut one’s success in political life, e.g., by restricting one’s sphere of influence in the city or by making one less persuasive to the crowd. It may also constitute a more general breach of personal duty to the laws. In either circumstance, Protagoras’ sense of obligation towards piety is related to its political effects and is not dependent on its ability to influence the gods.

As we saw in Chapter 1, authors who accept the theogenic model of religious practice sometimes understand rites as contributing to the wellbeing of the polis. So the fact that Protagoras discourages humans from impiety on political grounds says nothing about his commitment to either the theogenic or the anthropogenic model of religious practice, which is generally taken to be a part of piety.¹⁷ But given his explicit avowal of agnosticism, we must

¹⁵ Adkins 1973, 3-12. Other scholars characterize Protagoras’ equivocal use of ἀρετή differently, but nevertheless issue the general complaint that his use of the term varies (Jowett et al. 1956, liv; Zappen 2004, 95-116).

¹⁶ Adkins 1973, 10.

¹⁷ Piety represents one’s “loyalty” and “careful dealing” towards one’s parents, polis, and the gods, who are honored through religious practice (Auffarth 2006, s.v. *Eusebeia*). Martin and Boyarin argue that εὐσεβεία comes to signify specifically an “appropriate and measured strictness in observance” towards the gods, a middle point between impiety and superstition (2016, 131).

understand that Protagoras' endorsement of the political efficacy of piety means that, at a minimum, religious practices should be able to function on either model. If the gods do exist, then religious practice can influence the polis through the instrumentality of the gods. But if the gods do not exist, then the benefits that proceed from religious practice must be anthropogenic, for the gods can play no part in the administration of goods initiated by human piety. If Protagoras wants to encourage the performance of religious practices, as Plato portrays him, then he must be comfortable with the possibility that their efficacy derives not from the gods, but from the human practitioners and their interaction with these rites. Protagoras' agnosticism has an influence, then, on how Plato represents his view of piety. Piety is not a virtue because of anything that it does theogenically, but rather because of what it does in the context of human political institutions, an anthropogenic effect.

Protagoras' contemporary, Prodicus of Ceos, offered a more concrete reason to doubt the traditional model of religious practice. In fact, he seems to have been an atheist (in the modern sense of the term): he believed that the gods do not exist.¹⁸ In his work *On Piety*, Philodemus defends the Hellenistic philosopher Epicurus from accusations of atheism. In doing so, he reports that Epicurus in fact ridiculed "those who abolished the divine from the things that are."¹⁹ Philodemus provides a list of such philosophers, including Prodicus and others such as Diagoras and Critias.

¹⁸ Throughout, I use the adjective "atheist" and its cognates in the modern sense, to describe one who does not believe in gods. On the rather more loose definition of atheism in antiquity see Obbink 1989, 189-90. When referring to ancient uses of the word, my meaning will be specified. On the atheism of Prodicus, see Henrichs 1984, 139-45; 1976 and 1975. For the literature on atheism in antiquity, see Obbink 1989, n. 5; Whitmarsh 2016; Winiarczyk 2016, 65 n. 25 and 1989.

¹⁹ καὶ πᾶσαν μ[ανίαν Ἐ]πίκουρος ἐμ[έμψα]το τοῖς τὸ θεῖον ἐκ τῶν ὄντων [ἀναι]ροῦσιν (Phld. *On Piety* I.519-23).

Prodicus propounds a theory concerning the origin of the gods, in which primitive people came to regard as gods “things that nourish and are useful” (τὰ τρέφοντα καὶ ὠφελοῦντα) and people who made nourishing and useful discoveries.²⁰ This doctrine commits Prodicus to the view that those who were called gods in his time are not actually supernatural beings with attendant supernatural powers. Rather, they are physical entities (animate or inanimate), which people came to regard as gods because of their great usefulness to human beings. For these reasons, Epicurus considered him as an atheist, according to Philodemus.²¹

It should be noted that the available evidence for Prodicus’ atheism is not incontrovertible.²² He may, for example, have believed in gods, but not in the gods for whom his story provides a developmental account (those which are recognized by human beings).²³ But because religious practice was directed to a traditional pantheon of gods in ancient Greek society, a refutation of their existence constitutes a refutation of the theogenic efficacy of traditional religious practice. No specific acknowledgment of his theory’s implication for religious practice is required in order to see the effects it would have on popular conceptions concerning religious practice. The late Roman philosopher Themistius makes this connection explicitly. He argues that, for Prodicus, the “goods of farming” were connected with “all sacred rites of humans and mysteries and festivals and initiations.” As Robert Mayhew notes, this is probably an expansion of Prodicus’ teaching made by Themistius rather than a straightforward transmission of Prodicus’ own teaching: “it is much more likely that he [Themistius] has simply deduced (not incorrectly, I should think) that because the goods of farming gave rise, according

²⁰ Phld. *On Piety* II (*PHerc.* 1428, cols. ii 28-iii13). Cf. Lebedev 2018.

²¹ For a commentary on Prodicus’ fragments concerning religion, see Mayhew 2011, 175-80 and Lebedev 2018, 731-74.

²² See, e.g., Sedley 2013, 230-1; Kahn 1997, 261.

²³ See Mayhew 2011, 183-4.

to Prodicus, to belief in the gods, they must also be responsible for the religious rites and festivals that grow out of such belief.”²⁴ But this is a connection that could be made by contemporaries of Prodicus, as it probably was by Themistius.

There is no evidence that Prodicus refused to participate in traditional religious cult. Although he stated that the gods (and perhaps the rituals connected to them) were human inventions, there is no evidence that he criticized religious practice or belief. As Winiarczyk notes, “there is nothing to suggest that Prodicus rejected religious practice, just because he had an explanation for it.”²⁵ Prodicus’ explanation does, however, rule out some reasons that the philosopher may have had for his participation: he could not have believed that his involvement in these rites could have had a theogenic effect, as they were traditionally understood to do. He could, of course, have had other reasons to participate: religious practice could be anthropogenically beneficial on psychological or social grounds, even if they grew out of a worship of natural substances. But if Prodicus participated in religious practices, his evolutionary explanation of the gods and their associated rites requires him to formulate new justifications that depart from the traditional understanding of efficacy. While he may not have rejected these socially constitutive practices, he would have needed to reinterpret radically the mechanism by which they work. By providing an account of the human origins of religion and the gods, Prodicus commits himself to a different model of religious practice from the Traditional View. In particular, Prodicus must accept an anthropogenic model of religious practice rather than a theogenic one. If humans are the cause of the gods, they are likely also to be the cause of the associated religious practices and their benefits. Any other author who might propose atheism

²⁴ Mayhew 2011, 191.

²⁵ Winiarczyk 2016, 66 n. 27.

would likewise need to deny the theogenic model of religious practice and therefore find themselves, as Prodicus did, in a theoretically hostile position relative to the Traditional View.

This is precisely what we see in the Sisyphus fragment (DK 88 B25 = *TrGF* fr. 19, Eur. fr. 19 N²), which contains lines of a satyr play that was probably written by Euripides for performance in 415 BCE.²⁶ The authorship and date of the fragment are both disputed, but it appears that the passage forms part of a speech given by the mythological character Sisyphus. In the fragment, Sisyphus attempts to explain why a crime will not be avenged by the gods.²⁷ Along the way, he provides an origin story for fear of the gods. He lays out three stages of human history, each defined by its contribution to ensuring the good behavior of human beings. In the first stage (lines 1-4), human life was ruled by force, and there were no consequences for good or bad behavior. Thus, there was no incentive for human beings to act well. In the next stage (lines 5-11), humans created laws to curb *hubris* by establishing a standard of justice. Although the laws were successful in preventing humans from acting violently in public, they did not prevent individuals from doing so in secret, where, ostensibly, they felt that they were protected from the legal enforcement. To resolve this problem, “fear of the gods” was invented, ushering in the third stage of human history. Sisyphus explains:

πυκνός τις καὶ σοφὸς γνώμην ἀνήρ
<θεῶν> δέος θνητοῖσιν ἐξευρεῖν, ὅπως

²⁶ Scodel 1980, 122-9, Ostwald 1986, 283.

²⁷ See Yunis 1988. Debates over authorship vacillate between Critias the Sophist and Euripides. For Euripidean authorship, see *Aët. Plac.* 1.6.7, 7.2; Dihle 1977; Yunis 1988. For Critias, see *Sext. Adv. Math.* 9.54; Popper 1966, 140-5; Sutton 1981; Winiarczyk 1987; Parker 1996. Among the reasons for supporting the view that Critias is the author of the fragment is his identification in Epicurus’ aforementioned list of atheists (Burkert 1985, 467n22; Davies 1989; Bremmer 2007, 16-7). Sedley argues that the controversy results from the text’s anonymous circulation within an “atheist underground,” wherein Athenians were able to proliferate their views without the threat of social sanctions or state violence (2013, 335-7).

εἴη τι δεῖμα τοῖς κακοῖσι, κὰν λάθρα
πράσσωσιν ἢ λέγωσιν ἢ φρονῶσί <τι>.²⁸

Some man, clever and wise in thought,
invented fear of the gods for mortals in order that
there would be some fear for the wicked, if they should do
or say or think anything in secret. (12-5)

Now that the fear of the gods has been introduced and popularized, humans have good reason to refrain from violence and other anti-social actions, even if such acts are not observed by those invested with the powers of pronouncing judgment and executing punishment. Although the Greek verb ἐξευρεῖν in line 13 can mean “discovered” when taken in isolation, the context of the passage shows that the clever and wise man of line 12 is wise because of his ability to solve problems creatively, and so the translation “invented” is to be preferred here. This makes it clear that the conception of the gods was a creative act and not a logical or scientific revelation. This account of the invention of religion claims that it was motivated by a desire to solve the social problem of ensuring law and order, not by a philosophical interest in the operation of the cosmos. Later in the passage, Sisyphus explicitly states that the content of the wise man’s story was a fiction, not a recently discovered truth: “saying these words, he introduced the most pleasant lesson, covering the truth with a false account (ψευδεῖ λόγῳ).”²⁹ Here it becomes plain that Sisyphus invents the gods themselves, in addition to the idea that mortals should fear them.

We see, then, that like Prodicus, Sisyphus describes a world in which the gods do not physically exist. According to this view, religious practice cannot function on a theogenic model and the traditional account is jeopardized. Although Sisyphus appears to use his origin story to demonstrate that secret wrongdoings are not, in fact, punished by the gods, the fragment

²⁸ Greek text is taken from *TrGF* (Snell 1971).

²⁹ τούσδε τοὺς λόγους λέγων | διδαγμάτων ἠδιστον εἰσηγήσατο | ψευδεῖ καλύψας τὴν ἀλήθειαν λόγῳ. (24-6)

emphasizes the positive effects of the wise man's fabrication: it prevents misconduct and is described as "most pleasant" (ἡδίστον). This suggests that there is a high possibility that the wise man, whoever he might represent to the playwright's audience, sees a positive role for religious practice in society. Specifically, it points to religion's social function as a restraint on the deleterious behavior of the city's residents.

Democritus provides a hybrid account that is of interest. He agrees with the latter group (i.e., that the gods exist), but believed that the gods do not participate in the operation of the cosmos. Like the Sisyphus fragment and Prodicus, Democritus describes the origins of belief in the gods, which comes to be as a result of human wonderment regarding unexpected events (A77) and human perception of the stream of images (εἰδωλα) which proceed from the gods (B166).³⁰ Yet the philosopher provides no indication that human belief originates in a fabrication or invention. Whereas Sisyphus' inventor of religious belief was clever (πυκνός) much like Sisyphus himself, Democritus, who seem to be of a scientific orientation, credits ancient "intellectuals" (λόγιοι) with the origin of religious belief (B30). His account is one of philosophical discovery rather than of invention. Although the doxographers at times elide distinctions between the theological views of Democritus and Epicurus, making it difficult to be precise about Democritus' beliefs,³¹ we can be confident that Democritus himself was not an atheist. (He is not, for example, included in the early inventories of atheists.)³² But at the risk of

³⁰ See Vassallo 2018, Piergiacomi 2017.

³¹ Cic. *ND* I.29, Sext. *Adv. Math.* 9.19. See Vlastos 1945-6.

³² For a comprehensive inventory of ancient accusations of atheism, see Winiarczyk 1984. Democritus is not described as denying the gods' existence until Apuleius, who attributes this accusation to a "nearly universal error of the ignorant" (*Apol.* 27). See also the implication of atheism by Eusebius in the *Praeparatio Evangelica* (14.3), which is not listed in Winiarczyk 1984. For modern perspectives on Democritus' belief in the gods, see Piergiacomi 2017, 12-7; Taylor 1999, 211-6; Eisenberger 1970; and McGibbon 1965.

conflating their views ourselves, it should be noted that Democritus believed in non-interventionist gods. His atomistic view of the world, combined with his ethical repudiation of fear, lends itself to a view of gods that are not actively involved in the daily life of mortals and with whom humans are better served not concerning themselves.³³ As James Warren writes,

Here already there is a link between the two [Democritean ethics and physics] which survives into Epicureanism. That is not, of course, to say that the arguments against fearing death or fearing the gods *require* an atomistic cosmology. However, these arguments can be seen to stem from and contribute to a general picture of the world and man's place in it which is maintained by Democritus and Epicurus, however much they differ on other issues.³⁴

While the distinction between believing in the non-existence of the gods and in non-interventionist gods is a theologically important one, if Democritus (like Epicurus after him) posited non-interventionist gods, the result for religious practices must be the same as for those who deny the existence of gods. Because the gods do not involve themselves in human affairs, they do not respond to the actions of human beings on any level: cosmological, social, or psychological. Therefore, the gods do not respond to religious practice of any kind. This philosophical move may successfully remove the fear of the gods from the hearts of Democritus' followers. It also renders religious practices theogenically impotent.

We have now discussed the accounts of Prodicus, the character Sisyphus, and Democritus on the origin of religious belief. Together, these three accounts constitute a fairly cohesive tradition, "an innovation," Charles Kahn argues, "that we cannot securely date but that is likely to have begun no later than the time of Anaxagoras." This tradition is "the rise of speculation concerning the origins of religious belief."³⁵ For our purposes, these accounts are distinct in an

³³ Hence Whitmarsh 2015 dismisses the role of the gods in Democritus' thought, rightly noting that they are "entirely incidental" to his cosmology (68).

³⁴ Warren 2002, 39.

³⁵ Kahn 1997, 225.

important way: some, such as the accounts of Prodicus and Sisyphus, defend a cosmos without gods. Others defend a cosmos that is populated by a god or gods and that is influenced by divine agency. Kahn speculates that we may also be able to add to these theories others, which probably circulated around the same time but of which we have no record.³⁶

We have seen that in the sixth and fifth centuries, three strands of thought appeared that cast doubt upon the Traditional View of religious practice, which was dependent on the theogenic model. Those who accepted ideas—such as those espoused by Xenophanes and Heraclitus—that the gods do not conform to mortal standards of behavior, understandably could have questioned their ability to communicate effectively with the gods through their religious rites. Moreover, the various arguments in favor of non-interventionist gods or atheism flatly contradicted the theogenic model required by adherents of the Traditional View. Even agnostics like Protagoras needed to accept the possibility that religious practices either have no function or operate according to a different, anthropogenic, model.

III

Less disruptive than these three intellectual strands, but nevertheless destabilizing to traditional notions about the efficacy of religious practice, was yet another intellectual movement of the period: some intellectuals recognized both the gods and their ability to act in the realm of humans (and so their overall theology remained hospitable to the theogenic model), yet chose to impose limitations on the scope of divine intervention.

³⁶ Kahn recognizes the conjectural nature of his theory, and suggests that the earliest, pre-Democritean theories about the origin of religious belief were “not necessarily part of the written account” (1997, 259). For a more theologically traditional account of the origin of religious belief, which includes the gods, see Aesch. *PV* 484-97 and Pl. *Prt.* 320c8-324d1.

This phenomenon has roots in early Greek literature and began as an attempt to explain infelicitous religious action (i.e., acts that were unable to influence the gods as the practitioner intended). Homer emphasizes that, in order to ensure the efficacy of a religious practice, the request must align with the wishes and ability of the god addressed, since each has their own particular profile of allegiances and motivations. Similarly, if a mortal commits an injustice, particularly against the gods, their petitions are often unfulfilled. For example, in *Iliad* 6, Helenus, the “best of the diviners” (οἰωνοπόλων ὄχ’ ἄριστος), petitions his brother Hector to make a request of their mother, Hecuba. He wants Hector to ask Hecuba to follow a set of instructions in an attempt to persuade Athena to spare the city of Troy and its inhabitants. The instructions are as follows: bring a group of older women to the temple of Athena, dress the goddess with her finest robe, and promise to sacrifice twelve one-year-old heifers. Hecuba follows these instructions as they were given by her son, but although Hector asked her to pray that Athena “hold back” (ἀπέχειν, 277) Diomedes from Troy, she instead requests that Athena break the spear of Athena’s favored warrior and that he “fall on his face” (πρηγέα πεσέειν, 307) in front of the gates of Troy. Predictably, the narrator informs us: “so she spoke in prayer, but Pallas Athena refused.”³⁷ Athena was unmoved, given her close bond with Diomedes as well as the Trojan’s breaking of the truce and her offense at the judgement of Paris. Likewise, when Achilles prays that Patroclus have Zeus’ aid in driving the battle away from the ships and return home safely, Zeus grants Achilles’ wish only partially: he grants the former, but not the latter (16. 249-50). For Zeus had already determined that Patroclus would fall to Hector for killing Sarpedon. In neither case is any reference made to the inadequacy of the execution of these rites or their formal propriety. The fact that Zeus grants some of Achilles’ prayer suggests that these

³⁷ ὧς ἔφατ’ εὐχομένη, ἀνένευε δὲ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη (311)

factors did not influence the gods' response to it. To be efficacious, the petition must be amenable to the disposition and interests of the god addressed.

Homer and Hesiod also show that the gods do not respond to religious practices when the practitioner is ritually impure. For example, Hesiod warns against pouring libations of wine with unwashed hands, “for they do not listen, but they reject the prayers.”³⁸ Indeed, in the Homeric episode described above, Hector tells his mother that he dare not pour libation to Zeus, “nor is it even possible to pray to Cronos of the dark clouds, when defiled with blood and gore.”³⁹ As mentioned in Chapter 1, Solon's treatment of ancestral fault in the *Elegy to the Muses* emphasizes the significance of the historical record of moral infractions, which only the gods possess, for the felicity of religious practice. The fact that the gods use this record to inflict punishments on the offender's offspring provides an explanation for why a sacrifice has gone unrequited, or why tragedies befall innocent persons. It also extends the limitation that Hesiod puts upon divine intervention.⁴⁰ It does so by showing that the gods do not benefit mortals in response to their religious activity if *their ancestors* have committed an injustice.

In some cases, Greek authors invoked the principle of ancestral guilt to explain instances of divine deception while preserving the efficacy of religious practice. In Herodotus' *Histories*, when Croesus sends messengers to Delphi to chide Apollo for his deceit, the priestess acknowledges the charge while simultaneously insisting that the god had, *sensu stricto*, fulfilled his promises. Croesus was not entitled to criticize the oracle for its prophecy (i.e., that if he

³⁸ οὐ γὰρ τοί γε κλύουσιν, ἀποπτύουσι δέ τ' ἀράς (*WD* 726). The strength of the gods' reaction—indicated by the verb ἀποπτύουσι—suggests that the gods may not just refrain from honoring the libations, but become actively hostile in response to them.

³⁹ οὐδέ πη ἔστι κελαινεφεῖ Κρονίωνι | αἵματι καὶ λύθρῳ πεπαλαγμένον εὐχετάασθαι. (*Iliad* 6.267-8)

⁴⁰ For the connection between Hesiod and Solon on this point, see Gantz 1982.

attacked the Persians, he would bring down a mighty empire). Instead, Croesus' misinterpretation was his own fault, since he had failed to make further inquiries that may have elucidated the meaning of the oracle and prevented the disastrous invasion. The oracle also noted that Apollo had responded to Croesus' prayer on the pyre, saving him from assassination at the hands of Cyrus. But even so, the priestess recognizes that Croesus had been mistreated. She justifies the god's behavior by invoking the principle of ancestral guilt and claiming that the hands of the gods were tied: Croesus' punishments may have seemed an unjust mistreatment, but they, in fact, expiated a crime of his ancestor, which had been committed five generations prior.⁴¹

Although authors began to place limits on divine intervention quite early, as documented in Chapter 1, this practice takes on a new tenor as the three strands of thought we have examined begin to emerge. These newer intellectual innovations are both at odds with the Traditional View and are, as far as their relevance to religious practice is concerned, of a piece with the other sixth- and fifth century theological movements that inquired into the conditions necessary to ensure felicitous religious practice. At the same time that pre-Socratic and Sophistic authors began to introduce their troublesome ideas to the public regarding the nature and existence of the gods, other thinkers took another tack, effectively continuing an existing theological tradition rather than creating a new one. Instead of speculating on the nature of the gods, they began to introduce further limitations on the efficacy of religious practices as the poets did in previous years. In so doing, these thinkers were able to denounce uses of religious practice that they considered to be intellectually unpalatable while upholding the principles of the Traditional View in other spheres of life.

⁴¹ The priestess offers her full response to the messengers in Hdt. 1.91.

We can see this tendency most clearly in ancient medicine, where there was an effort to insulate the realm of human health from the possibility of divine interference. As this field of study began to grow into a rigorous and predictable science, efforts to influence the functioning of the human body by using methods not sanctioned by practitioners of the medical craft were seen as ineffective. Hence, a movement to erect a barrier between the professions of diviners and doctors arose.

The late fifth-century Hippocratic work *On the Sacred Disease* exemplifies this phenomenon. The use of religious practice was sometimes thought to influence the health of the human body in two ways: an errant practice could cause sickness and a felicitous practice could stimulate healing. The author of *On the Sacred Disease* rejects both possibilities. From the outset, the author collapses the distinction between the “sacred disease” and other non-sacred diseases. In so doing, the author is able to show that the so-called “sacred” disease arises and vanishes in a predictable manner, just like other diseases that are properly addressed by practitioners of the medical craft. He writes that the disease “has a nature as other diseases do, from which each arises” (φύσιν μὲν ἔχειν καὶ τὰ ἄλλα νοσήματα, ὅθεν ἕκαστα γίνεται; 2.1, see also 1.11). In the author’s view, to misunderstand the disease’s origin as divine is particularly damaging to those who suffer from it, because it leads its victims to seek redress from religious healers, who propose ineffectual religious remedies. Religious prescriptions in turn crowd out the remedies of physicians and their more reliable art of healing. At 18.2, the author argues that all diseases can be treated and ameliorated given a proper understanding of their nature and force. This knowledge, of course, is the domain of the physician and not the religious healer. Therefore, the Hippocratic author dismisses the influence of the gods in medical affairs to protect patients and, conveniently enough, to secure a professional monopoly on the art of healing.

The author's sustained attack on those who offer religious cures (who are compared to magicians, purifiers, beggars, and charlatans in the opening chapters) should inform our reading of his statements on the efficacy of purification. His most unambiguous comment on the practice falls into two discrete steps:

οὐ μέντοι ἔγωγε ἀξιῶ ὑπὸ θεοῦ ἀνθρώπου σῶμα μαιίνεσθαι, τὸ ἐπικηρότατον ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀγνοτάτου· ἀλλὰ καὶ ἦν τυγχάνη ὑπὸ ἐτέρου μεμιασμένον ἢ τι πεπονθός, ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ καθαίρεσθαι ἂν αὐτὸ καὶ ἀγνίζεσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ μαιίνεσθαι. τὰ γοῦν μέγιστα τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων καὶ ἀνοσιώτατα τὸ θεῖόν ἐστι τὸ καθαῖρον καὶ ἀγνίζον καὶ ῥύμμα γινόμενον ἡμῖν, αὐτοὶ τε ὄρους τοῖσι θεοῖσι τῶν ἱερῶν καὶ τῶν τεμενέων ἀποδείκνυμεν, ὡς ἂν μηδεὶς ὑπερβαίνειν ἦν μὴ ἀγνεύη, ἐσιόντες τε ἡμεῖς περιρραϊνόμεθα οὐχ ὡς μαινόμενοι, ἀλλ' εἴ τι καὶ πρότερον ἔχομεν μύσος, τοῦτο ἀφαγνιούμενοι. καὶ περὶ μὲν τῶν καθαρῶν οὕτω μοι δοκεῖ ἔχειν.

[1] However, I believe that a person's body is not polluted by a god, the most perishable polluted by the most holy. But, even if it happens to have been polluted or at all harmed by something else, it would more likely be purified and cleansed by the god than polluted. [2] In any event, it is the divine that purifies and cleanses and washes us of our greatest and most unholy mistakes, and we ourselves appoint boundaries for the sanctuaries and precincts of the gods, so that no one crosses them unless they are pure. And when we enter, we sprinkle ourselves, not because we are being polluted [sc. by entering the sanctuary], but, if we already have some pollution, to wash it away. And this is what I think about purifications. (*Morb. Sacr.* 4. 50-60)

In [1], the author rejects the possibility of the gods polluting a human body. The subsequent statement that bodily pollution incurred by a non-divine cause would be more likely cleansed by god than bestowed by god responds to a hypothetical.⁴³ He sets up a scenario in which a body is polluted by a non-divine cause (ὑπὸ ἐτέρου), and then responds to the question of whether the god would be more likely to cleanse or pollute it. Given how the author frames the question, the answer is clear. For the Hippocratic author, the divine, which as we see in the passage above is the most holy (ἀγνοτάτου), cannot be the author of bodily corruption. Therefore, of the

⁴³ The potential optative is noted in Van der Eijk 1990, 110 n.48.

alternatives corrupting and healing, the gods are more likely to affect the latter, given the author's understanding of the gods' nature.

On the Sacred Disease does not endorse communication with the gods as a source of bodily relief, but instead it recommends the use of proper medical treatments. But the author's subsequent endorsement of religious purifications in [2] is no contradiction of his medical principles. Crucially, the purification that the author hypothetically endorses in [2] is supposed to cleanse the practitioner of their "greatest and most unholy mistakes" (τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἁμαρτημάτων καὶ ἀνοσιώτατα), not of their diseased or otherwise impaired bodily state. The author's positive endorsement of purification relates to its ability to affect psychological, rather than physical, healing. Phillip van der Eijk finds that the author consistently treats the issue of purifications in this manner. In his theological study of the treatise, he finds that "the divine purification is explicitly defined by the author as applying to *moral transgressions* (τῶν ἁμαρτημάτων), and to the greatest of these. This restriction is significant in that it may indicate that in the author's opinion, an appeal to divine cleansing is only (or primarily) appropriate in cases of moral transgression."⁴⁴ Between [1] and [2], the reader observes a quick and perhaps jarring leap from a discussion of physical healing to a discussion of psychological healing, but the talk of psychological healing is included only to provide evidence of his contention in [1] that the god would, hypothetically speaking, be more likely to heal than to harm. The Hippocratic author uses purifications in [2] to show that in other instances, it is the gods who heal and the humans who harm themselves.

Medicine is the means of healing physical ailments and diseases, all of which have an equal share of the divine; therefore the methods and tools of the medical craft ought to be

⁴⁴ Van der Eijk 1990, 112 (emphasis in original).

preferred over those of any religious practitioner.⁴⁵ The author recognizes god's power to heal mortals on a moral level but excludes the possibility of god's direct involvement in the process of physical healing. Whether this limitation applies more broadly to other physical interventions is impossible to know, since the treatise only addresses the question of healing. But the text reflects a new challenge to the Traditional View of religious practice, whereby individual fields of inquiry are insulated from divine action, therefore limiting the sphere of divine-human intervention. In pursuing this project, the author of *On the Sacred Disease* would ostensibly reject some of the theogenic effects claimed by practitioners of some religious practices including, for example, the presentation of anatomical votive offerings.

Whereas previous authors underscore how the religious practitioner might err and therefore render their religious practice infelicitous, the author of the Hippocratic treatise makes a distinct theological move, whose repercussions for religious practice are similar to those of the atheists and agnostics. Although the Hippocratic author believes in the theogenic efficacy of religious practices in the moral sphere, they appear to limit which actions the gods can or are willing to take in the physical sphere. While we have seen instances where a particular god is disinclined towards a particular practitioner or their request, the principle outlined in *On the Sacred Disease* operates generally, without reference to specific circumstances. The treatise recognizes the gods and their responsiveness to human action and so it does not call into question the legitimacy of theogenic efficacy. But it does place meaningful limits on the cosmological

⁴⁵ As Julie Laskaris notes, the treatise attempts to characterize all diseases as sacred rather than to make the more intuitive claim that the so-called "sacred" disease is not in fact sacred. The reason is rhetorical, since it undercuts the religious healers' claim to divine knowledge, and rather invests it in the medical art (2002, 93-107). This seems to be part of a greater trend by Greek intellectuals to appropriate the concept of piety and recast it as an alternative and more legitimate pursuit of a philosophical or scientific project.

efficacy that a religious practice may have and, therefore, on the ability of human beings to move the gods to intervene in their lives. The treatise's author encourages his audience to redirect their energies from religious petitions to the art of medicine, while remaining silent on the more rudimentary assertion of the theogenic model, that, as a general principle, religious practices can induce the gods to action.

At this point, it should be noted that the authors principally responsible for limiting the scope of the efficacy of religious practices are almost all known to have participated in these traditional practices. Furthermore, there is no record that any author of the archaic period, including those discussed above, actively refrained from participation in religious practice or encouraged non-participation. Xenophanes endorses hymns to the gods, the pouring of libations, and prayer (B1); Heraclitus expresses approval of oracles (B92-3) and Dionysian processions (B15), and generally defends participation in religious practice as a propaedeutic to his own philosophical doctrines. Protagoras understands piety to be productive of political excellence and, in his eponymous dialogue, Plato represents him as saying that the worship of the gods results from our kinship with them (ὁ ἄνθρωπος θείας μετέσχε μοίρας, 322a3). The fragments of Prodicus do not bear on the question of religious practice, but Democritus is reported to have prayed in order to receive apparitions (εὐλόγων τυχεῖν εἰδώλων), which he understood to convey the images of the gods

(B166). Lastly, Sisyphus reveals the fictitious nature of the gods, but he also recognizes their artificial benefit to humans.

As we have seen in this chapter, even if these thinkers continued to participate in religious practices, their theological innovations had serious implications for how Greeks ought to understand them. As a result, they may have felt a need to reimagine why they performed religious practice and what benefits resulted from their performance. To some—such as Prodicus, Democritus, and those represented by the philosophy of Sisyphus—the predominant model for understanding religious practice, the Traditional View, is simply untenable. Sacrifice and prayer, as well as a host of other practices, do not function theogenically, for the efficacy of a given practice cannot be secured through the instrumentality of the gods. While theogenic efficacy is not inconsistent with the teachings of Xenophanes, Heraclitus, and Protagoras, they cast doubt upon it as a satisfactory method of understanding traditional practices. Others, as reflected in the treatise *On the Sacred Disease*, recognized the ability of the gods to respond to religious practice, but limited the avenues by which they could do so. In this case, by removing the physical well-being of mortals from the domain of the gods, our author limits the cosmological efficacy of religious practices. The pre-Socratics and Sophists called into question the means by which religious practice operates, but *On the Sacred Disease* limits their scope of its influence.

Each of these innovations pushes against the Traditional View of religious practice as outlined in Chapter 1. Unfortunately, our understanding of exactly how the philosophers of this period addressed the efficacy of religious practices is incomplete. Due to the limited and fragmentary nature of the evidence, we simply do not know all that we would like to about why these philosophers practiced their religion in the traditional way, despite their heterodox

understanding of the nature of the gods and their involvement in human affairs. The Sisyphus fragment shows that, by 415 BCE, some of the theological views that necessitated a reevaluation of religious practice had become an object of public interest and deliberation. The performance of Aristophanes' *Clouds* in 423 BCE shows that already at this point, the revolutionary theological ideas of the intellectual class at Athens were viewed by some as posing a serious threat to conventional attitudes and norms. Each in their own way, these ideas called into question the traditional conceptions regarding the function and efficacy of religious practices, and they seem to have found a wide audience in the Athenian public.⁴⁶ Whether or not the thinkers discussed in this chapter understood or attempted to resolve the difficulties that their theories produced, they opened up a new field of inquiry for future thinkers to engage. Two such thinkers were Plato and his student Aristotle.

⁴⁶ As indicated by Stephan Hotz, fable narratives are also an important source of ritual criticism: "Im antiken Griechenland sind es unter anderem die Fabeln des Dichters Babrios (2. Jh. n. Chr.), welche die Wirksamkeit von Ritualen kritisch reflektieren. Eine dieser Fabeln fällt in dieser Hinsicht besonders drastisch aus.... Die Botschaft dieser volkstümlichen Geschichte lautet: Wer sich auf die Wirksamkeit von Ritualen verläßt, ist der Dumme" (2005, 222). The efficacy which Hotz considers is strictly cosmological, but his work brought my attention to additional data that is potentially contemporaneous with, but is unlikely to predate, the Sophists.

CHAPTER 3

Plato and the Traditional View

In Chapter 1, I surveyed the intellectual landscape of the archaic period and showed that there was a great deal of agreement, from a wide variety of sources, concerning the ability of religious practice to effect change theogenically in every realm of human life. In Chapter 2, I identified a set of ideas that destabilized this consensus, which arose during the intellectual movement of the Greek enlightenment in the sixth century. These arguments contradict the Traditional View, but are adumbrated in highly lacunose works that present neither a direct nor a fully detailed response to the paradigm articulated in Chapter 1. In Chapters 3-5, I turn my attention to Plato, an author whose works present a more complete response to the problem of efficacy. The current chapter explores how he understood traditional religious practice to function vis-à-vis the Traditional View, and Chapters 4-5 investigate how the philosopher advocated its use in daily life, including how the practices relate to his philosophical ideals.¹

Plato depicts traditional religious practice in his dialogues and not just as an artistic representation of daily life. He affords religious practice a philosophical role and affirms its positive value even for members of his ideal societies. The philosopher admits traditional

¹ Aiming to address Plato's theory of the efficacy of religious practice, this chapter will examine the middle and late works of Plato. Throughout, I use the phrase "religious practice" as shorthand for the even more clumsy phrase "traditional religious practice," unless explicitly stated. I am not interested, for my current purposes, in practices that Plato's Socrates may describe in religious language, but which nevertheless were not practiced as a part of the common religion tradition of Athens or of the Greek world (e.g. dialectic or contemplation).

religious practice into both Kallipolis and Magnesia, the utopian cities that he envisions, respectively, in the *Republic* and the *Laws*. For example, in each dialogue, the primary interlocutor shows his support for traditional religious rites by deferring to Delphi as the chief lawgiver and chief authority for religious law and customs.² In the *Republic*, Socrates allows Apollo at Delphi to enact laws pertaining to “the founding of temples, sacrifices, and other services for gods, daemons, and heroes, the burial of the dead, and whatever services ensure the favor of those beyond.”³ In the *Laws*, the Athenian stranger endorses the same policy.⁴ But Plato’s most explicit endorsement of religious practice comes in *Laws* 4, where he enunciates a personal protocol, which he regards as finest (κάλλιστον) and best (ἄριστον) and most effective (ἀνυσιμώτατον) at securing the good life: “for the good person to sacrifice, contact the gods by means of prayers and offerings and religious observance of every kind.”⁵ It is clear, therefore, that Plato’s ideal cities would retain the kinds of traditional religious practice that are on display in non-utopian, traditional Greek life. This feature of utopian society in Plato, common to both

² See Morrow 1960, 403-4. For more on this passage, and the influence of the oracle at Delphi in establishing matters of religious law, see Parke and Wormell 1956, 405-6; Bowden 2005, 82-6, 109-33. Guthrie argues that the *Laws* imposes regulations on many of the matters that are left for the oracle to determine in the *Republic* (1962 5. 357-8).

³ ἱερῶν τε ἰδρύσεις καὶ θυσίαι καὶ ἄλλαι θεῶν τε καὶ δαιμόνων καὶ ἡρώων θεραπείαι, τελευτησάντων <τε> αὖ θῆκαι καὶ ὅσα τοῖς ἐκεῖ δεῖ ὑπηρετοῦντας ἴλεως αὐτοῦς ἔχειν (*Rep.* 427B6-9).

⁴ See, inter alia, *Laws* 5. 738B-C, 6. 759. Hernández de la Fuente, in his study of the oracle’s role in the *Laws*, demonstrates the ways in which Plato reimagines the political function of the oracle in the context of the establishment of Magnesia. Nevertheless, he notes that “Plato reaffirms and codifies extensively a doctrine that, in regard to sacred laws, was already present in the *Republic* (427b-c): ‘all issues of religion and its interpreters will come from Delphi’” (2011, 16).

⁵ τῷ μὲν ἀγαθῷ θύειν καὶ προσομιλεῖν ἀεὶ τοῖς θεοῖς εὐχαῖς καὶ ἀναθήμασιν καὶ συμπάσῃ θεραπείᾳ θεῶν κάλλιστον καὶ ἄριστον καὶ ἀνυσιμώτατον πρὸς τὸν εὐδαίμονα βίον καὶ δὴ καὶ διαφερόντως πρέπον (4. 716D6-E1).

the *Republic* and the *Laws*, suggests that the philosopher believes religious practices to be an important feature of human life worth retaining.⁶

The precise role that Plato intended these practices to play in Kallipolis and Magnesia is to be determined in subsequent chapters. The question that must be asked presently is how Plato's general views concerning the efficacy of religious practice relate to the Traditional View, which will give some indication as to how Plato responds to the troublesome ideas proposed by the pre-Socratics, the Sophists, and other intellectuals of the time. By answering this question, the reader comes to see where Plato fits into the general schema of theoretical options that was presented in Chapter 1. Therefore, I begin this chapter with a discussion of Plato's relationship to the ideas put forth by the sixth-century thinkers (Section I). My findings go some way towards establishing Plato's general relationship with the Traditional View. I then highlight instances of religious practice in the dialogues to show where Plato's views fall on the two taxonomies that have been used so far in this dissertation, i.e., whether he believes religious practice to be theogenic or anthropogenic, and which combination of psychological, social, and cosmological change he believes religious practices is able to effect (Sections II and III). As a result of this study, I argue that although Plato is not traditional relative to typical members of the Athenian society, he does not make a concerted effort to limit efficacy further, beyond setting ethical requirements for felicitous practice as did the poets before him. Moreover, he endorses theogenic efficacy, but moves beyond it to recognize some anthropogenic benefits of religious practice. He maintains a commitment to the Traditional View, but expands the reaches of efficacy to include

⁶ The relevant passages from the *Republic* demonstrate this most convincingly, since the *Laws* purports to be a "second best," falling short of the fully utopian Kallipolis, but nevertheless representing a leap forward from society as it stood in Plato's day. For this interpretation of the *Laws*, which originates in Aristotle (*Pol.* 2. 6), see Schofield 2010, Rowe 2010, Roochnik 2013, 145.

anthropogenic benefits and continues in the rich intellectual tradition of debating which ethical demands the gods place upon humans, which are prerequisite to ritual success.

I

As we saw in Chapter 1, beginning in the sixth century, Sophists and pre-Socratic philosophers began to object to several traditional conceptions of the gods. In particular, three criticisms of traditional religion encouraged resistance to the traditional model of religious practice: (1) the gods do not conform to mortal standards of behavior, (2) the gods do not intervene in human life, and (3) the gods do not exist. Each of these ideas entails a criticism of the Traditional View, which includes the commitment to theogenic efficacy that reaches into all areas of life, including the cosmos. If Plato subscribed to any of the above theological criticisms, we might expect him to provide an explanation for why he nevertheless depicts religious practice positively, and even condones it. However, Plato adopts none of these criticisms in his own writing. On the contrary, he goes to great lengths to refute each of them in turn.

Of the three ideas introduced above, Plato clearly refutes (2) and (3) in both the *Republic* and the *Laws*. In *Republic 2*, Glaucon takes up Thrasymachus' definition of justice from *Republic 1* ("the advantage of the stronger") and attempts to provide a more palatable articulation of the argument. Glaucon and his brother Adeimantus argue for the virtues of appearing just while committing injustice in secret. Since humans cannot hide from the gods, Adeimantus outlines two ways for humans to secure the reputational rewards of justice while also reaping the rewards of injustice. He says that if the gods do not exist or care about human affairs, in which case humans need not worry about their injustice being discovered. In this case, humans could commit injustice with impunity and nevertheless reap the desired rewards. Or, if

the gods are as depicted in traditional poetic accounts, humans can commit injustice, receive the profits of their crimes, and avoid the negative consequences of their injustice by appeasing the gods through prayer (2. 365E-366A). In short, they can practice injustice “with fraudulent respectability” (μετ’ εὐσχημοσύνης κιβδήλου, 366B5) and will nevertheless do well by both gods and their fellow mortals. The strategy offered here takes advantage of a loophole of sorts that Glaucon finds in traditional poetry, which enables mortals to use their financial resources to escape the penalties of their injustice.

Adeimantus’ first suggestion is not considered at any length, and the second is forgotten once Socrates begins his city-soul analogy at 368D. Of the two interpretive possibilities offered up (i.e., either that the gods do not exist or care about humans, or that they exist according to poet accounts and respond to religious practice), Plato’s Socrates surely prefers the latter, although Plato’s criticisms of the poets are suggestive of his discontent with an overly permissive view of religious practice as a persuasive device. Clearly there are alternatives beyond those articulated by Glaucon and Adeimantus: belief in the gods, or even in interventionist gods, does not require an acceptance of all features of the traditional poetic accounts. While Socrates takes issue with one component of the poetic characterization outlined by Adeimantus (i.e., the gods are capable of being misled or defrauded), he takes for granted that the gods exist and that they intervene in human affairs, referring to them and their activities throughout the dialogue. For example, in his discussion of education later in *Republic 2*, Socrates and Adeimantus arrive at positive conclusions about the nature of the gods, such as *inter alia* that they are good and the sole cause of the good things that happen to human beings (379A-C).

The *Laws* also militates against both atheism and the view that the gods do not care about human affairs. When the Athenian establishes his law concerning impiety in *Laws 10*, he and his

interlocutors criticize each of these views. The Athenian argues that the acceptance of them leads one to commit unholy acts or speak lawless utterances. First, he tackles the belief that the gods do not exist. Throughout his corpus, Plato invokes the names of the canonical gods and takes their existence seriously. Plato recognizes humanity's limited knowledge about the gods and their character, and he tends to default to traditional accounts, for example, of afterlife punishment.⁷ The reader of his dialogues never gets the impression that the existence of the gods is in doubt.⁸ In the *Laws*, Plato reveals his unease with the growing popularity of atheism, and provides extended proof of the gods' existence (893B-899C).⁹ Here, the Athenian argues that souls are prior to body, that they manage and dwell within the heavens, that the best souls move the heavens in a rational manner, and that the benevolent, rational souls that move the heavens are gods.¹⁰ In the mouth of the Athenian, Plato offers an argument substantiating the belief that the gods exist, contradicting (3).

The second cause of impious behavior outlined in *Laws* 10 responds to (2), the belief that the gods exist, but that they do not care for human affairs (μη φροντίζειν δὲ αὐτοὺς τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων, 10. 899D5-6). The Athenian evidently worries that the gods' lack of

⁷ In the *Phaedo*, for example, Socrates adopts many features of traditional accounts of the afterlife (107D2-114C8, and cf. Reed 2021, 56-8, 65).

⁸ In the *Cratylus*, for example, Socrates cites human ignorance of the gods, with particular reference to our ignorance of the gods' "true names" (400E), but the existence of the gods is taken for granted.

⁹ As addressed in chapter one, it is clear that many of the authors who were included in the ancient lists of atheists do not, in fact, deny the existence of the gods. Plato's sustained and detailed rebuttal of atheists in Book 10, however, leads Sedley to argue persuasively that atheism had some intellectual currency in Plato's Athens: "In the mid fourth century, Plato was familiar with both prose and verse texts circulating at Athens which promoted atheism. Shortly after—a few decades at most—Theophrastus, or whoever compiled the first list of atheist authors, could not find out the names of the prose authors in question" (2013, 337; and before him Meijer 1981, 217-8, cf. Whitmarsh 2015, 136-7).

¹⁰ For a detained summary of the Athenian's proof, see Rheins 2010, 117-33 (cf. Mayhew 2008, 106-54).

concern for human affairs might imply that they do not intervene in the world of mortals. The Athenian, therefore, develops an argument that they do in fact care for human affairs. The argument unfolds as follows (899D-905D):

1. The gods are not morally bad (900D-E).
 2. The gods are omniscient (901C-D).
 3. The gods have immortal power (901D).
 4. The gods are neither ignorant nor idle (902A, (1, 2, 3)).
 5. The gods are responsible for us (902B-C).
 6. The gods are not inferior to workers, who care for the details of their creation (902E-903A, (4, 5)).
- ∴ 7. The gods care for the details of their creation.

The argument's conclusion depends on the Athenian's invocation of the craft-analogy in (6), a hallmark of Socratic argumentation.¹¹ Were the argument to demonstrate that the gods care (φροντίζειν) for human beings, *sensu stricto*, without intervening on their behalf, then the Athenian's analogy of the gods to craftsmen, as well as his appeal to the gods' power, would appear to be unnecessary stages in the argument. However, their inclusion suggests that the Athenian's concern with the care of the gods responds to a deeper worry that, if the gods do not care for humans, they would not take action in human affairs.¹² The gods' characterization as ethically exemplary and omniscient and powerful, combined with the assumption that they will act as a good craftsman would, shows that the gods attend to the details of human life. Their goodness precludes them from ignoring the details out of idleness, their knowledge precludes them from doing so out of ignorance, and their power precludes them from doing so out of

¹¹ Graham 1991.

¹² Epictetus used similar phraseology as metonymy, in order to describe gods who do not intervene in human life. He asserts that god "does not neglect human affairs" (οὐκ ἀμελεῖ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων, Arr. *Epict. diss.* III.28).

inability. Idleness and ignorance could give rise to a cognitive inattention, but a lack of power (δύναμις) would prevent the gods from exerting a force of physical character.¹³

While Plato, in the *Republic*, introduces the latter two views from Chapter 2 into his dialogue, Socrates' opposition to them is presumed rather than being developed in detail. But in the *Laws*, Plato takes the opportunity to provide an elaborate criticism of these ideas. The Athenian's defense of the gods' existence and involvement in human affairs is motivated by a desire for political stability, but it is non-political in substance. The arguments evince a cosmological and ethical commitment to the ideas set forth, rather than the necessity of stipulating them for the sake of political convenience.

Plato also takes issue with (1), the idea that the gods do not share the ethical or behavioral standards of mortals. Plato shares Xenophanes' behavioral criticism, enunciated in F17, that the gods of traditional poetry display characteristics that are widely considered to be socially deviant according to the standards of human beings. This criticism of traditional poetry motivates the restrictions that Plato places upon the poets in *Republic 2* and *Laws 7*. In each of these works, the primary interlocutor proposes a series of regulations that would ban poets from depicting the gods as participating in unsavory actions, such as “warring and plotting and fighting” (πολεμοῦσί τε καὶ ἐπιβουλεύουσι καὶ μάχονται, *Rep.* 2. 378B8-C1). As Xenophanes does in F17, Plato criticizes the representation of divine behavior that is unethical by human standards. In the remainder of his corpus, Plato depicts the gods in accordance with regulations that he would

¹³ The noun δύναμις primarily describes force of a bodily nature (LSJ s.v. δύναμις I). Where Plato uses the noun in the derivative sense of “faculty” or “capacity,” as is most common in Aristotle, he analogizes from the primary meaning explicitly. In the *Cratylus*, Socrates discusses the power of words to cause an effect, and uses δύναμις in order to express the power of words. His use of the noun is effective insofar as it highlights the commonality shared between the power of words and “the power of medicines” (ἡ δύναμις τῶν φαρμάκων, *Crat.* 394B1) to cure bodily injuries and trauma.

impose upon Kallipolis and Magnesia. Each god retains their traditional sphere of authority and place in the traditional pantheon, but unethical behavior that is traditionally ascribed to the gods is absent in the dialogues. For example, Gert Van Riel notes that “neither Zeus’ nor Kronos’ violent and cruel accessions to power is ever mentioned, nor is any reference ever made to Zeus’ famously unbridled sexual appetite.”¹⁴ Plato and Xenophanes each take issue with the popular conception of the gods, and Plato’s depictions of the gods reflect this critique.

But Xenophanes has another contention, which is what makes him threatening to the Traditional View. For there might still be reasons to pray and sacrifice to immoral gods, even if their response may be unpredictable or at times contravene mortal concepts of fairness. As noted in Chapter 2, Xenophanes’ criticisms (as well as Heraclitus’) do not end with a denunciation of immoral divine behavior: Xenophanes and Heraclitus find fault with anthropocentric conceptions of the gods generally.¹⁵ Xenophanes provides a description of the gods that is untethered from human conceptions of the good life and proper conduct. But for his part, Plato does not emphasize the dissimilarities between gods and mortals. Rather, he assumes continuity between human and divine norms of behavior, and so he evaluates the gods’ behavior by human standards. He depicts the gods as acting as human wisdom dictates that they ought (i.e., as

¹⁴ Van Riel 2013, 55. These aspects of divine beings are certainly expressed in the voice of characters within the Platonic dialogues, e.g. *Euthphr.* 5D-6C. Van Riel’s contention is that such qualities are not predicated of the gods in Plato’s censored accounts, as expressed in the voice of Socrates and the Athenian stranger (for Zeus, see *Criti.* 121B; *Grg.* 523A-524A; *Laws* 6.757B-C, 8.842E-843A, 9.881D, 11.921C, 12.953E; *Plt.* 271C-274D, *Prt.* 320C-323D). Moreover, in the *Republic*, Zeus and Athena’s complicity in Pandarus’ breaking of the truce between Paris and Menelaus (*Iliad* 3.245-301) renders the myth morally objectionable for the citizens of Kallipolis (379E; Sommerstein and Torrance 2014, 55-9). See also Lefka 2003, 126-7. Lefka characterizes the restrictions that Plato places on representations of the gods as rationally derived (“règles rationnelles que Platon s’impose à lui-même concernant la conception de la divinité,” 125 et passim), though they seem to me to be derived on the basis of ethics. Plato does not respond to Xenophanes’ rational argument against anthropomorphic gods.

¹⁵ See Chapter 2, pp. 50-5.

conforming to the ethical standards of mortals). In lieu of the morally undesirable qualities that are often attributed to them, Plato characterizes the gods as displaying the qualities of the philosopher (such as wisdom and intelligence) and encourages the poets in his ideal cities to do likewise.¹⁶ The criterion by which the philosopher decides what is appropriate or inappropriate behavior for the gods is thoroughly mortal: Zeus, for example, should not commit violence against his father because a human should not engage in such an activity. Plato's project of theological revisionism imposes an anthropocentric model of morality upon the gods.¹⁷

This stands in sharp contrast to thinkers like Xenophanes and Heraclitus, for whom the gods are unlike mortals in both appearance and thought. Heraclitus argues that the gods' ethical evaluations depart from those of mortals. While Plato may be open to criticisms concerning the strict "accuracy" of his physical portrayal of the gods,¹⁸ his anthropomorphic gods give mortals a reliable model of good behavior and provide an educational standard for members of society. Although, for Plato, the nature of the gods differs radically from traditional accounts of their immoral behavior (following Xenophanes), his gods succeed at conforming to human standards of behavior (*contra* Xenophanes and Heraclitus). Plato's assertion, in contradistinction to the traditional poets, is that the gods respect human norms of moral behavior rather than flout them. Plato's theological doctrine, therefore, does not cast doubt upon the ability of the gods to communicate successfully via the performance of religious practices. Rather, their response to religious practice should be more transparent, predictable, and comprehensible to human reason.

¹⁶ Van Riel 2013, 55-6.

¹⁷ Cf. *Euthphr.* 5D8-6A5. The full semantic field of anthropomorphism is sometimes lost on interpreters. Van Riel, for example, reduces Xenophanes' criticism of anthropomorphism to his behavioral criticism of the gods, and in so doing views Plato's moralizing revisionism as a denunciation of anthropomorphism (2013, 25-34).

¹⁸ In *Laws* 11. 930E6-931A4, Plato says that traditional statues are likenesses (εἰκόνας) of the gods, whom we cannot see, suggesting that he holds an anthropomorphic view of such gods.

Plato disagrees with the three theological innovations of the Sophists and pre-Socratic philosophers that I identified as philosophically antipathetic to the Traditional View of religious practice. This, of course, does not preclude Plato from criticizing the Traditional View on his own terms. However, a body of evidence to suggest that Plato endorsed the idea that religious practice is theogenically efficacious in a way that effects change in all spheres of life. Before marshalling this evidence, it will be instructive to show that Plato follows in the footsteps of poetic authors from Chapter 1, such as Solon and Hesiod, who understood the gods to intervene in human affairs according to criteria that ensure that their influence fostered cosmic justice. In this regard, Plato is not a wholly unique thinker. Yet his participation in the project of defining the constraints of the gods' action sets him apart from many of his contemporaries.¹⁹ Plato understood the scope of possible interventions to be narrower than many of his contemporaries likely believed them to be.

So far, I have described what Plato believes the gods to be like: he affirms that the gods exist, intervene in human affairs, and conform to human standards of behavior. In philosophy of religion, positive ascriptions of character to the gods are often referred to as “kataphatic doctrines.”²⁰ Each of these philosophical doctrines makes an affirmative proposition (a *κατάφασις*) about the nature of the gods, a limiting claim about their character. But Plato also imposes restrictions on the nature of the gods in a series of “apophatic doctrines,” which describe

¹⁹ Plato's polemic against those who believe that the gods can be misled or bribed to do unjust action (see discussion below) may itself be taken as evidence that this view was still prevalent in his social world.

²⁰ The distinction between apophatic and kataphatic theology derives originally from the Neoplatonic Christian writer Pseudo-Dionysius, who uses the term *ἀπόφασις* to describe negative theology, or the so-called *via negativa*, as a method of describing god through negation (as opposed to the kataphatic *via affirmativa*).

characteristics that the gods do not have. Of note in this context are Plato's apophatic statements that deny the gods any ability to intervene in human life in particular ways.

Several apophatic doctrines appear in Plato's dialogues. In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates criticizes his interlocutor's belief that holiness is a "science of requesting and giving," which he later describes as a kind of commercial art (τις ἐμπορικὴ [sc. τέχνη]).²¹ In his political works, Plato explores the connection between religious praxis and the receipt of the gods' benevolent action. For example, *Republic 2* articulates two features of divinity that appear to grow out of Plato's criticisms of the commercial model (2.363E-7A):

1. Gods are not misled (παράγεσθαι) by humans or by their practices.
2. Humans cannot force (βιάζεσθαι) the gods.²²

These limitations expose the exploitative nature of local vagabonds (ἀγύρται) and prophets (μάντις, 2. 364B6).²³ Whereas the Hippocratic author limited the gods from intervening in a specific realm of human life (i.e., physical health), Plato, like Solon and others before him, limits the gods' engagement in a particular mode of human living (i.e., unethical behavior). The limitations enumerated above flow from the philosopher's disagreement with the first troublesome idea introduced by the Sophists and Pre-Socratics and they reflect the priorities of gods who can do no injustice. Since it would be unethical for human beings to veer from the path

²¹ Pl. *Euthyphr.* 12E-15C

²² These doctrines are put forth by Adeimantus, but they seem to accord with Socrates' views. Indeed, these doctrines are explicitly endorsed in the *Laws* 5. 741A; 10. 885D-E, 905D).

²³ These itinerant religious experts (sometimes called ὀρφεοτελεσταί) were alternately welcomed and vigorously opposed by the various hellenic city-states. They are likewise the object of contempt for Theophrastus (*Char.* 16) and the author of the Derveni Papyrus (col. 20). The money-grubbing religious imposter, whom Plato describes here, reminds the reader of Alexander and Cocconas, the subjects of Lucian's second century CE satire (*Alex.* 6). In such a case, the apophatic doctrines of Plato could be used as a criterion by which to judge the merits of their message.

of justice as a result of a bribe, the gods likewise cannot be misled. A defining characteristic of Plato's gods is that they are morally good, and thus are not responsible for anything bad that exists in the world.²⁴ Likewise, it would contravene the goodness and purity of the gods to be compelled, since compulsion requires that the actor did not have the course of action in mind already. Indeed, because the gods are good, Plato thinks that the gods should play an educative role in Greek society, providing individuals with a model of justice. In *Laws* 4, for example, the Athenian rewrites the famous Protagorean maxim to reflect this understanding: "Indeed," he says, "for us, god is the measure of all things."²⁵

In Chapter 2, we saw that the Hippocratic author of *On the Sacred Disease* highlights the impotence of the gods in the medical realm while remaining silent on the ability of the gods to intervene in human life as a general principle. Plato, however, does not address the powers or the physical abilities of the gods, but rather follows in the footsteps of the archaic poets like Solon, who argued that the gods respond to human religious performance according to an ethical standard.²⁶ Whether the gods are able to act contrary to justice is not addressed, but it is clear that they choose not to do so. In order for religious practice to be felicitous, therefore, the practitioner must not aim to induce the gods to take unethical action, for such an attempt is destined to fail.

II

Plato's apophatic statements have led scholars such as Mark McPherran to minimize, if not eliminate, the role of divine-human interaction in Plato's thought and thus to argue against the

²⁴ See *Rep.* 379A-380C, *Leg.* 10.900C-D, 12.941B; *Theat.* 176A.

²⁵ ὁ δὲ θεὸς ἡμῖν πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἂν εἴη μάλιστα (*Leg.* 4.716C). Cf. *Prt.* B1 (= *Sext. Emp. Math.* 7.60, *Pl. Tht.* 152A1-4).

²⁶ See, e.g., the discussion from Chapter 1, p. 44-7.

possibility of theogenic religious practice. McPherran rightly highlights two of Plato's apophatic doctrines that are not enumerated above: the rejection of the idea that (i) the gods forgive humans of wrong-doing or (ii) will unjustly harm others as a result of a human being's religious practice. Plato also disapproves of these actions on ethical grounds. In his analysis, McPherran claims that "thus far...we have seen no connection between worship, divine response, and moral development, and it may seem as though Plato has discarded Socrates' partial retention of the traditional idea of reciprocity and exchange of services."²⁷ In that piece, McPherran provides no further connection between worship and divine response. In a subsequent paper, McPherran repeats his assertion that Plato's gods do not respond to the religious practices of human beings. Although he notes that there is nothing in Plato's theology that "directly undermines" the notion that "there is reciprocity of some kind between humans and gods," McPherran suggests that Plato does not believe this to be the case.²⁸

McPherran argues that, for Plato, the gods cannot be "magically" influenced to benefit human beings. At first sight, it appears that the adverb suggests that Plato only rejects one type of religious practice (i.e., the magical ones). But while McPherran's use of the term "magical" is undefined, it becomes clear that his use of the adverb is redundant: as was the case for Gregory Vlastos, magic is defined by its alleged theogenic capacity.²⁹ Thus, McPherran treats all traditional Greek religious practices as magical in nature, since they purport to move the gods to action. He writes that "although Plato, like Socrates, vigorously rejects the idea that gods can be

²⁷ McPherran 2000, 103.

²⁸ McPherran 2006, 249.

²⁹ See Lännström 2011, who argues that McPherran's reading of Socrates and Plato is impaired by its limited understanding of Greek religious practices. Vlastos, whom McPherran follows in much of his argument, defines his use of magic as involving the belief that "by means of ritualistic acts man can induce supernatural powers to give effect to his own wishes" (Vlastos 1991, 176).

magically influenced to benefit us, it is clear that he retains a role for traditional-appearing religious practices.”³⁰ Here, the distinction is drawn not between magical practices and non-magical ones, but rather magical ones and those that still *appear* traditional but are stripped of the expectation that traditionally adheres to them, which is magical in nature. The use of the phrase “traditional-appearing religious practices” to describe the performances accomplished in Plato’s proposed religious program suggests that traditional practices are, as a general rule, magical and non-Platonic. To remove the magic, then, is to remove the traditional expectation or function of the practice and leave only the appearance of tradition.

This clarifies McPherran’s reluctance to address the role of theogenic efficacy in Plato’s account. If all traditional practices are used to benefit the practitioner through manipulation of the gods, then they may appear to be unethical, given that Plato’s apophatic doctrine denies that the gods can be misled by religious practice. On this view, Plato seems obliged to dismiss religious practice out of hand. But the philosopher’s belief in the apophatic doctrines enumerated above do not preclude him from believing that humans can influence the gods. Rather, they state only that humans cannot do so by unethical means, either by misleading the gods or through force and bribery. McPherran cites five passages to substantiate his claim that the gods cannot be magically influenced to benefit us. In each of these passages, Plato places limits on what type of actions will induce a response from the gods and what types of actions the gods are willing to take in response to human activity.³¹ I address each of them in turn.

³⁰ McPherran 2006, 249 (citations excised). Cf. McPherran 2000, 102. Dillon supports the view that Plato envisions no place for religious practice to influence the gods (2016, 9).

³¹ The doctrines put forth in these passages overlap in some instances with those listed above. They are cited in McPherran 2006, 249.

In the first passage (*Rep.* 2. 363E-367A), we read that humans cannot mislead (παραγωγή) the gods by prayers and sacrifice, nor can they in any way use force (βιάσασθαι) against them; Plato criticizes the poets for representing the gods as being cajoled into diverging (παράγεσθαι ἀναπειθόμενοι) from their original course of action. This passage is just one articulation of the two apophatic doctrines enumerated above. The prefixes (παρα-, ἀνα-) attached to the relevant lexemes further highlight that the gods are unable to be *mis*led and cajoled, rather than simply led to act in a proper way. The gods, in other words, can still be prompted or persuaded to act, if they are being lead along a just course of action rather than being diverted from the just course.³² In such a case, the performance of religious practice itself may change what justice demands from the gods. The gods' course of action, then, may change as a result of the practitioner's behavior without involving manipulation.

In the second and third passages that McPherran adduces (*Laws* 10. 885B-E, 888A-D), the Athenian says that the gods are not easily appeased (εὐπαραμύθητοι). In claiming that the gods are not “easily” (εὐ-) appeased, rather than simply capable of appeasement (παραμυθητοί), Plato produces what is known as a scalar implicature: since εὐπαραμύθητοι denotes a relatively high value on a scale of appeasability, from “not at all” to “very” appeasible, the philosopher implicates that no higher value applies.³³ That the gods are able to be appeased under some circumstances is left as a possibility, but they are certainly not appeased easily, through simple means.³⁴

³² This language is found throughout the passages that are discussed here (*Laws* 885B9, 906E1, 907B6).

³³ For classic treatments on the production of scalar implicature, see Grice 1987 (reprinted from 1975), and Hirschberg 1985.

³⁴ See also *Rep.* 399A-B, where Socrates asks which musical genre is most appropriate for one to use in persuading someone, “either *a god in prayer* or a human in teaching or exhortation.”

In the fourth passage (*Laws* 10. 905D-907B), the Athenian presents several disanalogies that fail to capture the character of the gods. The gods are not like human agents (such as seamen, charioteers, commanders, physicians or husbandmen) who are influenced by fragrances, bribes, and fear. The central message seems to be that there are unjust methods of appealing to the gods as there are to humans, and that the gods do not act upon them.

As in earlier passages, in *Laws* 12. 948B-C, the Athenian denies that the gods will involve themselves in morally suspect activities, including fraud.

These passages demonstrate that Plato criticizes religious practice that putatively operates by implicating the gods in unethical behavior. That Plato criticizes this understanding of religious practice is predictable, since it undercuts his view of ethically pure gods. Because what is objectionable about this kind of practice is how it causes the gods to act unjustly, all of the practices that Plato rejects are theogenic. But theogenic religious practice does not implicate the gods in unethical action *tout court*, and therefore not all theogenic practices contravene Plato's apophatic doctrines. Indeed, in the passages cited by McPherran, Plato seems to make room for religious practices that operate theogenically. The apophatic doctrines offer parameters that mark off types of religious practice that, in his view, are unacceptable on ethical grounds. But throughout his corpus, Plato indicates that he views theogenic religious practices as having an appropriate place in human flourishing and in a well functioning society.

There are several instances where Plato articulates his belief that religious practice can operate theogenically. One way that he does so is by showing a commitment to the cosmological efficacy of religious practice. Because such practices can only function on the theogenic model, demonstrating Plato's belief in cosmological efficacy should be sufficient to reveal his acceptance of the theogenic model. (Although human agents, *qua* practitioners of religious rites,

could not conceivably effect change in the cosmos by their own power.) What follows does not constitute an exhaustive list of passages where Plato endorses cosmological or theogenic efficacy. Rather, it aims to show that such concepts have a home in the Plato's theological world.

In *Laws* 7, the Athenian clearly states that habitual participation in traditional religious practice results in the gods' intervention in human affairs.³⁵ This passage will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 4, where I investigate the role of choral performance and sacrifice in the *Laws*, but is it useful here as an example of Plato's endorsement of using religious practice as a means of moving the gods to act for human benefit. He appeals unambiguously to the theogenic capacity of religious practice: the gods are specified as actors in an exchange between gods and humans. When a human being participates in choral performance and sacrifice, the gods respond by acting kindly towards them (ἴλεως αὐτῶ παρασκευάζειν, 803E2-3). Further, cities that collectively perform these activities benefit from divine protection against their enemies and from victory in battle.

Plato's belief in the cosmological efficacy of religious practices is also manifest in his proposals concerning procreation in both the *Laws* and the *Republic*. In the *Republic*, Socrates establishes the age ranges during which men and women are ideally suited for reproduction and then proposes that political sanctions be set against those who engage in procreative sex outside of the legally prescribed range. He also provides the reasons why he believes that the Kallipolis should adopt such a policy [T1]:

³⁵ Close attention to the text reveals that participation in these activities does not force the gods to act, since the possibility of compulsion is precluded by Plato's apophatic doctrines. Rather, participation in festival practices naturally results in the gods' beneficent actions (ὥστε... δυνατόν εἶναι). England notes the significance of the result clause, but argues that the goods result "not by the favour of a placated deity, but as the natural result of a correct education which fully develops the bodily among other powers" (1921, 273).

Οὐκοῦν ἐάντε πρεσβύτερος τούτων ἐάντε νεώτερος τῶν εἰς τὸ κοινὸν γεννήσεων ἄνηται, οὔτε ὄσιον οὔτε δίκαιον φήσομεν τὸ ἀμάρτημα, ὡς παῖδα φιλύοντος τῇ πόλει, ὅς, ἂν λάθῃ, γεννήσεται οὐχ ὑπὸ θυσιῶν οὐδ' ὑπὸ εὐχῶν φύς, ἅς ἐφ' ἑκάστοις τοῖς γάμοις εὗξονται καὶ ἰέρεια καὶ ἱερῆς καὶ σύμπασα ἡ πόλις ἐξ ἀγαθῶν ἀμείνους καὶ ἐξ ὠφελίμων ὠφελιμωτέρους ἀεὶ τοὺς ἐκγόνους γίγνεσθαι, ἀλλ' ὑπὸ σκότου μετὰ δεινῆς ἀκρατείας γεγονώς.

Then, if someone who is older or younger than they are will have sex in order to reproduce for the community, we will call their mistake neither holy nor just, on the grounds that they beget a child for the city, who, if it remains a secret, will be born, having been begotten not under the influence of sacrifices nor by prayers, which both priestesses and priests and the entire city will pray at every wedding, that the offspring will always become from good [sc. parents], better [sc. children], and from useful, more useful, but having been born by darkness, with a wicked weakness of will. (*Republic* 5. 461A3-B1)

Of particular importance in the present context is the reason provided for why extralegal reproduction is a problem for the ideal city. According to Socrates, felicitous wedding prayers result in generational progress, wherein each successive generation outperforms the last, both ethically and in matters of productive capacity. Athenian marriage formulae reflect the collective desire of the city for married couples to produce legitimate offspring (for example, in the fourth century, Menander frequently made use of the formula “for the sowing of legitimate children” (παίδων ἐπ' ἀρότῳ γνησίων) to indicate the purpose of betrothal),³⁶ although the extant sources on epithalamia are fragmentary and do not include specific blessings upon future children. According to Socrates' formulation above, children who are begotten inopportunistically would be born illegitimately, since the childbearing years are restricted by the state. In these cases,

³⁶ See *Dys.* 842, *Perik.* 1013-4, *Sam.* 727, *Misumenus* 444, *P. Oxy.* 429, 1829. On the legitimation of children in Greek law, see Harrison 1968, 61-70; cf. Just 1989, 49-52. The practice of praying for offspring appears to be a standard element of the Greek wedding ceremony at least by the time of Theocritus (*Id.* 13.49-55). For later sources, see also *Men. Rhet.* 401.16-20; 404.25-29; 407.17-24; 411, 11-29. In the *Kallipolis* of the *Republic*, however traditional forms of marriage were to be abolished. The period of procreation, initiated by the ceremony described in T1, endures twenty years in the *Republic*, the coordinate period in the *Laws* endures only ten (6. 784B1-3).

illegitimate children do not receive the benefits of the prayers and sacrifices that are offered on behalf of a couple's future offspring. Under this view, those who are conceived illegitimately are unaffected by such prayers, since they were not conceived according to the prescribed way, and so the parents do not receive in their children the generational progress that those prayers and sacrifices bestow.

In *Laws* 6, we read of another proposal designed to encourage ideal forms of procreation. The Athenian argues that a committee of female guardians (ἐπίσκοποι) should be appointed to supervise young couples, ensuring that the couple “gives attention to procreation” (τῇ παιδοποιίᾳ τὸν νοῦν προσέχειν, 6. 783E4-5). The purview of the guardian's oversight is evident in his description of their daily meetings [T2]:

πρὸς τὸ τῆς Εἰλειθυίας ἱερὸν ἐκάστης ἡμέρας συλλεγόμεναι μέχρι τρίτου μέρους ὥρας, οἳ δὴ συλληθεῖσαι διαγγελλόντων ἀλλήλαις εἴ τις τινα ὄρα πρὸς ἄλλ' ἅττα βλέποντα ἄνδρα ἢ καὶ γυναῖκα τῶν παιδοποιουμένων ἢ πρὸς τὰ τεταγμένα ὑπὸ τῶν ἐν τοῖς γάμοις θυσιῶν τε καὶ ἱερῶν γενομένων.

[These women] should convene every day at the temple of Eileithuia for up to a third of a day,³⁷ and when they have come together, let them discuss with each other whether anyone notices any of the procreants—man or woman—who is attending to any other task than those that have been prescribed by the sacrifices and rites that occurred at their marriage. (6. 784A3-B1)

Significantly, the fulfillment of these mandates were of importance to the guardians, whose central task is to make sure that the couple focus on their reproductive duty. But some key facts are wanting. What, for example, is the nature of the matrimonial sacrifices and rites mentioned, and what prescriptions did they put upon the participants? In what activities would the bride or bridegroom participate in order to comply with these prescriptions? The answers to these

³⁷ England 1921 appears to read ὥρα in the passage as denoting something like the modern hour, writing that “among other things, we may conclude that twenty minutes was the *minimum* time of attendance” (*ad loc.*).

questions are critical desiderata. If sexual activity alone is at issue, then the present passage does not convey the Athenian's belief in cosmological efficacy. But it would be quite peculiar if this were the case, and it would be striking for the guardians to expect the couples to attend to "no other task." If, on the other hand, the content of these religious prescriptions exceeds the duty to participate in procreative sex, including other behaviors (as is both customary in other matrimonial contexts and intimated by the Athenian's use of the plural τὰ τεταγμένα), then the Athenian suggests a connection between the fulfillment of non-sexual religious duties and the guardians' desire for legally wedded couples of the city to procreate. The connection between two physically unrelated events (i.e., a non-sexual religious duty and childbirth) depend upon the gods, to whom marriage parties presumably appeal in the wedding ceremonies. According to this view, felicitous performance of the matrimonial duty eventuates, through divine dispensation, the successful fulfillment of the couple's procreative obligation to the state.

In T1-2, Plato seems to accept a religious ideology that includes a notion of theogenic and cosmological efficacy. In these particular examples, religious practice assists the practitioner in securing offspring. It is also emphasized that through non-participation citizens fail to secure such divine assistance. Plato accepts this religious ideology elsewhere. In a passage that will be discussed further in Chapter 5, the Athenian characterizes the act of unintelligent prayer as dangerous (σφαλερόν), since it is easy to mistake the good for the bad, and consequently pray for an ultimately detrimental end (3. 687D-688D). The paradigmatic example, on this score, is Theseus, whose prayer for the death of his son Hippolytus, uttered on mistaken information, was nevertheless granted by the gods. Here, the Athenian presumes that even unintelligent prayers can be theogenically and cosmologically efficacious, while not committing himself to the particularities of the mythic account.

As previously discussed, for each religious practice that Plato describes in the dialogues, the effects of felicitous practice must accord with the apophatic doctrines outlined in the *Laws* and the *Republic*. In *Laws* 11, we find a particularly illustrative example of how Plato honors the apophatic doctrines while still subscribing to the theogenic model of religious practice. In the opening of the passage, the Athenian cites myths (those of Oedipus and Amyntor) in which parents prayed for or cursed their children, to great effect. While it may turn out that the Athenian does not endorse all the details of these mythic accounts, he flatly acknowledges the efficacy of prayer and builds his subsequent argument on the assumption that prayers do, in fact, effect change in the cosmos through their ability to stimulate the gods to action.

In this passage, the Athenian argues for the proposition that children should honor their parents. He compares the practice of honoring one's parents to the practice of statue worship and he juxtaposes the traditional statues that Greeks worship with their ancestors, whom he calls "ensouled statues" (ἴδρυμα τὰ ἔμψυχα, 11. 931E1-2). He argues that the worship of ensouled statues is more efficacious than the worship of traditional statues that represent the gods. For while one's parents or grandparents are yet living, no other objects of worship can be more authoritative (κύριον, 11. 931A7). The reason that ensouled statues have such a powerful claim on the divine relates to their ability to fulfill the requirements for an efficacious petition. Because ensouled statues pray alongside the younger generations (and non-living statues and shrines do not), when the younger generation treats them well, the prayers of the "ensouled statues" are in turn directed at the well-being of the younger generations. In a sense, the older generation's prayers have a doubling effect on the prayers of the younger generation, thus amplifying the latter's worship. Worship of ensouled statues is "more authoritative" (κυριώτατα, 11. 931E5) than worship of inanimate ones, since it inclines additional parties to appeal to the gods also.

As we saw in our discussion of the apophatic doctrines, Plato believes that there are some practices that do not influence the gods and, therefore, do not place them under any obligation. The Athenian highlights the fact that ensouled statues not only pray for their children and grandchildren, but that they are also able to do so in a just manner. The Athenian says that Oedipus and Amyntor provide evidence that “the gods are heedful of parents over children.”³⁸ The explanation for this phenomenon immediately follows: “For a parent is better able than anyone else to curse their children and [does so] most justly.”³⁹ But the Athenian seems to recognize that parents and grandparents do not always pray justly. He specifies that the curse or prayers of parents on behalf of their offspring are fulfilled according to the principle of justice and that unjust petitions will be of no value, since to confer a blessing unjustly would “be not at all appropriate for gods” (ἥκιστα θεοῖς εἶναι πρέπον, 11. 931D2-3). The gods listen to the prayers of a father and a mother when they have been insulted by their children (ἀτιμαζομένῳ...πατρὶ πρὸς παίδων καὶ μητρὶ). Likewise, the gods will listen to parents’ prayers for their children when they are honored by them (τιμωμένῳ, 11. 931C3-5). For the gods to do otherwise would constitute an injustice, which would contravene the ethical standard to which Plato believes that the gods must conform.

The “ensouled statues,” then, are most authoritative because their petitions are most just due to their familiarity with the conduct of their children and grandchildren. The younger generation’s worship of the ensouled statues is likewise not depicted as manipulative: the act of being honored motivates the ancestors to pray for their children and grandchildren, but it also provides the grounds for their doing so. In Chapter 5, we will find that another reason for the

³⁸ γέγονε σαφές ἐπηκόους εἶναι γονεῦσι πρὸς τέκνα θεοῦς (11.931C1-2).

³⁹ ἀραῖος γὰρ γονεὺς ἐκγόνοις ὡς οὐδεὶς ἕτερος ἄλλοις, δικαιοτάτα (11.931C2-3).

superior justice of the parents' petitions is provided. But what is relevant to the present discussion in *Laws* 11 is that here the Athenian shows the mechanics of efficacy at work in a way that allows the reader to see how religious practices can still function in a positive sense, despite Plato's commitment to certain apophatic principles.

These examples sufficiently illustrate that Plato understands religious practices as functioning on the theogenic model. They also showcase Plato's belief that the gods effect change in all aspects of life, including the cosmos, as a result of appropriate human participation in religious practices. What emerges is a picture of Plato that conforms, in large part, with the Traditional View enunciated in Chapter 1. In the sixth century, Greek intellectuals begin to question theogenic forms of efficacy, which include practices that are supposed to effect cosmological change. Nevertheless, these forms of efficacy are given credence in the Platonic corpus. Plato, like those who subscribe to the Traditional View, takes seriously theogenic forms of religious practice.

III

We can see that while Plato restricts the kinds of practices to which the gods respond based on the ethical character of their warrant, there remains room for him to endorse the traditional theogenic model of religious practice. Moreover, there is evidence that Plato believed that the gods react to human petitions in the other two realms outlined in Chapter 1: in the polis and in the psyche. I now demonstrate Plato's belief in the psychological and social efficacy of religious practice. Plato's representation here is less controversial. Indeed, some scholars such as McPherran understand Plato to recognize *only* these forms of efficacy. It is nevertheless useful to

see how Plato understands the interaction of religious practice with politics and human psychology.

Socrates refers to divine inspiration as the cause of good things throughout the dialogues.⁴⁰ But Plato's commitment to the oracular origin-story of Socratic philosophizing suggests that Plato holds that the gods intervene in human psychology specifically in response to the religious practice of human beings. According to this story, Socrates' loyal companion Chaerephon traveled to the oracle at Delphi and returned with the news that no one was wiser than Socrates.⁴¹ The process by which the Pythia produced oracular responses that reflect the will of the god depends on the principle of divine inspiration. At the beginning of the *Timaeus*, Socrates urges the titular character to perform an invocation to the gods before he begins the speech that makes up the bulk of the work. Timaeus then addresses the importance of calling upon the gods at the beginning of every action, large or small. For Timaeus, the invocation provides some assurance concerning the accuracy of the foregoing speech [T3]:

εἰ μὴ παντάπασι παραλλάττομεν, ἀνάγκη θεοῦς τε καὶ θεᾶς ἐπικαλουμένους εὖχεσθαι πάντα κατὰ νοῦν ἐκείνοις μὲν μάλιστα, ἐπομένως δὲ ἡμῖν εἰπεῖν. (27C5-8).

Unless we are to go completely astray, we must, calling upon the gods and goddesses, pray that we say everything intelligently in the eyes of the gods most of all, and consequently to us.

⁴⁰ For example, a rather divine impulse (ὀρμὴ θειοτέρα, 279A9) leads Isocrates to write about important matters at the close of the *Phaedrus*. In the *Meno*, Socrates attributes divine inspiration to the politicians who are “no less under the gods’ influence and possession, as their speeches lead to success in many important matters, though they have no knowledge of what they are saying” (Ὁρθῶς ἄρ’ ἂν καλοῖμεν θεῖους τε οὐς νυνδὴ ἐλέγομεν χρησιμφοδούς καὶ μάντις καὶ τοὺς ποιητικοὺς ἅπαντας· καὶ τοὺς πολιτικοὺς οὐχ ἥκιστα τούτων φαῖμεν ἂν θεῖους τε εἶναι καὶ ἐνθουσιάζειν, ἐπίπνους ὄντας καὶ κατεχομένους ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, ὅταν κατορθῶσι λέγοντες πολλὰ καὶ μεγάλα πράγματα, μηδὲν εἰδότες ὧν λέγουσιν, 99C11-D5). Cf. *Laws* 9.875C; *Crat.* 396D and 400D-401A.

⁴¹ *Pl. Ap.* 20E-23C, cf. *Xen. Ap.* 14.

The substance of Timaeus' invocation, therefore, is that the trajectory of his speech not “wander off course” (παντάπασι παραλλάττειν) and that the interlocutors collectively speak “intelligently” (κατὰ νοῦν). That Socrates and Timaeus agree to perform this religious practice prior to embarking on their debate suggests that they believed that the gods would inspire them to speak accurately or otherwise assist them in their personal efforts to speak the truth.

Plato also recognizes the social benefits that accrue to those who perform religious practices, although some of the social benefits do not necessarily accrue by divine dispensation.

This is a significant point, since in the archaic age, authors tend to discuss efficacy in an exclusively theogenic framework. In the *Laws*, the successful allocation of land requires that land be considered sacred and belonging to the gods, so that “anyone who buys or sells a landholding that has been given by lot should suffer a penalty appropriate to such behavior.”⁴²

The upshot to popular belief in the sacrality of land and state ownership is that the state can exact fines accordingly. This is a good for the state, but it is not one that is accrued through divine agency. Other social benefits, however, do involve the workings of the divine. In *Laws* 7, the Athenian says that a Greek should spend their whole life “sacrificing, singing, and dancing, so that the gods may act kindly towards them and that their enemies be warded off and that they may conquer them in battle.”⁴³ In this passage, the Athenian explicitly states that the social benefits that result from the performance of religious practices are produced by the workings of the gods.

⁴² τὸν πριάμενον ἢ ἀποδόμενον ὧν ἔλαχεν οἰκοπέδων ἢ γηπέδων τὰ ἐπὶ τούτοις πρέποντα πάσχειν πάθη (741C4-6).

⁴³ θύοντα καὶ ἄδοντα καὶ ὀρχούμενον, ὥστε τοὺς μὲν θεοὺς ἴλεως αὐτῷ παρασκευάζειν δυνατὸν εἶναι, τοὺς δ' ἐχθροὺς ἀμύνεσθαι καὶ νικᾶν μαχόμενον (7. 803E1-4).

Discussions of religious practice in Plato tend to underscore the psychological and social benefits of correct performance at the expense of the cosmological. For example, Paul Elmer More writes that “Plato thought of worship as primarily a common possession of the people and as a bond of social union in the spirit.”⁴⁴ By devaluing the importance of cosmological efficacy to Plato, commentators run the risk of ignoring his commitment to the gods’ active role in these rites. This emphasis is encouraged by the view of Plato as an advocate and defender of what Michael Morgan calls a “novel type of rational piety.”⁴⁵ I am myself a proponent of this characterization of Plato. Indeed, Chapter 5 explores how Plato understood some religious practices to benefit the practitioner on a psychological scale and how Plato defended this view on rational grounds. But piety, in Plato’s philosophical conception, functions as a prerequisite to felicitous religious practice by ensuring that the petition and its fulfilment are just. It is not a replacement for the view that the gods are moved by religious acts. This view may strike the modern reader as less novel and less rational, but it is nevertheless a view which Plato appears to hold.

In this chapter, I hope to have shown that Plato does not make active efforts to restrict the scope of the efficacy of religious practice, but allows that it effects changes in all the ways that proponents of the Traditional View endorse. Scholars such as McPherran have played down the role of the gods in Plato’s theory of religious practice, and therefore emphasized their anthropogenic utility. Hence, McPherran writes that “Plato understands that the weight of such

⁴⁴ 1921, 288. See also 289-91.

⁴⁵ 1990, 192. Similarly, of Platonic religion More says: “This is the approach to religion by way of philosophy; it was Plato’s way” (1921, 19).

traditional observances can be a useful prop to the new institutions of his imagined state.”⁴⁶

Plato’s acknowledgement of religious practice’s anthropogenic value is indeed novel, and on this score, puts him in a oppositional relationship to advocates of the Traditional View, who do not typically consider religious practice as exerting non-theogenic influence. But Plato also endorsed the theogenic model of religious practice. He believed, for example, that prayer and sacrifice operated theogenically, as did most of the authors from the archaic age. While his philosophical thought was influenced by the pre-Socratics, he did not subscribe to any of the three theological arguments that called into question the idea that the gods respond to human activity.

Not only did Plato believe that the gods respond to religious practices, but he believed that they did so in all realms of life. For Plato, religious practices can be cosmologically, socially, and psychologically efficacious. Plato instituted strict limits, however, on the manner in which the gods intervene as a response to human worship. These limits are articulated in what I refer to as his apophatic doctrines. By establishing these guidelines for divine behavior, Plato ensures that his gods provide citizens with a model for ethical conduct. Indeed, Socrates asserts that the gods alone are the cause of all good things (*Rep.* 2. 379A-380C) and that gods, with chance and opportunity, “control all human affairs” (τὰνθρώπινα διακυβερνῶσι σύμπαντα, *Laws* 4. 709B8). In the context of his theology, in which the gods are greatly involved in human affairs, religious practices are just one way for the gods to interact with the human world.

Those who study Plato’s religious ideas often present them as radical, or otherwise at serious odds with the sentiments of his predecessors and contemporaries.⁴⁷ There are instances in

⁴⁶ McPherran 2000, 102.

⁴⁷ At times, this assessment is prejudiced by the scholar’s tendency to evaluate theology by the standard of their personal religious commitments. The Christian apologist Paul Elmer More, for example, is at great pains to demonstrate the close similarities between Platonic and Christian theology. He associates Platonic ideas with those hundreds of years “ahead” of his

which Plato's views concerning religious practice in particular are characterized as radically out of step with traditional conceptions. Morrow, for example, understands Plato to engage in a "profound reinterpretation of familiar practices."⁴⁸ In his estimation, Plato retains the traditional forms of religion while reimagining their significance in light of his own philosophical commitments, thus "pouring new wine into old bottles" (401). When Morrow explicates the difference between traditional interpretations and Platonic reinterpretations, it becomes evident that the so-called reinterpretations either do not constitute genuine religious innovations, or they do not represent of Plato's actual views. As Morrow describes them, Plato uniquely believes that: (i) "worship is appropriate and beneficial only to good men," (ii) worship (a) "is not an exchange of services between men and gods," but (b) "a means of assimilating oneself to the gods one worships," (iii) divine favor that results from worship "is the approbation of the worshipper's character, not an external reward for the correct performance of a ritual," and (iv) the results of divine favor are primarily divine goods "and only secondarily human goods, which include health, beauty, and wealth."⁴⁹

As we saw in Chapter 1, while (i) was not universally accepted, it is nevertheless an old doctrine, which was promoted by earlier authors such as Hesiod, Solon, and Aeschylus. Morrow claims that Plato introduces (ii), but in the *Euthyphro*, Plato's predecessor Socrates introduces (iia) into the philosophical discourse by criticizing the facile "commercial" model of religious

time. While More admits that pagan thought at its best "fell short" of Christian ideals, he underscores their resemblance, writing that "the serious rift is not between Christianity and Platonism, but between the common Greek sense of religion... and the prevailing modern ethics" (More 1921, 299-300). Additional Christianizing interpretations of Plato's theology can be found in Gocer 2000, which details problems with Christianizing analogies used to explicate the figure Socrates (116-120, esp. n. 13).

⁴⁸ Morrow 1960, 400.

⁴⁹ Morrow 1960, 400.

practice.⁵⁰ Even so, Anna Lännström has shown that Socrates' criticism of sacrifice in the *Euthyphro* did not constitute a radical criticism of Athenian practice. What Morrow pejoratively refers to as the “*do ut des* of primitive ritualism” captures only one of a wide range of reasons why sacrifice was important to individuals in Athens.⁵¹ As we will see in Chapter 5, (iib) is a main feature of the Platonic theory of religious practice, but antecedents for the view exist as early as Xenophanes, who argued that the gods ought to provide a model for human imitation.⁵² As for (iii) and (iv), these principles are in some sense contradictory. (iii) asserts that the gods do not provide external rewards to practitioners of religion (although in the present chapter (and in Chapter 4), we see that some felicitous religious performance results in the accrual of external rewards from the gods). But (iv) claims that the gods demonstrate their divine favor by providing human goods, even if secondarily.⁵³ This is but one example of a tendency to overstate the novelty of Plato's thoughts concerning religion generally, and religious practice more specifically.

⁵⁰ Socrates' criticism of piety as a commercial art (ἐμπορική) forms a part of his discussion of Euthyphro's fourth definition of piety, i.e. the care of the gods (*Euthyphr.* 12E-15C). Morrow's examination of Plato's doctrines is not a developmental one, and so he takes the words of Socrates in the early dialogues like the *Euthyphro* to provide evidence for genuinely Platonic religious innovation. In Lucian's satire *Alexander*, the titular character establishes an oracle and makes an estimated 70,000 to 80,000 drachmas *per annum*. The businesses success was proportionate with the willingness of the people to participate in religious practice as a commercial endeavor. Mocking this practice, the narrator characterizes Alexanders' customers as motivated by “greed” (ἀπληστία, 23).

⁵¹ See Lännström 2011, who rebuts the arguments of Vlastos 1991, 157-178 and McPherran 1996, 2002, and 2006b. Although Morrow is not numbered among Lännström's adversaries, her criticisms apply to his work here.

⁵² More interesting, to me, than the so-called novelty of the doctrine is Plato's account of the process of human-divine assimilation and the role of religious practice in fostering it, which I discuss in chapters 3-4.

⁵³ According to Plato, the divine goods are of greater significance to human beings. In *Laws* 10, the Athenian emphasizes that, for mortals, the divine goods are both fatal and salvific (906A-B).

While Plato's theology may be considered genuinely novel (e.g., he introduces anthropogenic efficacy and emphasizes the non-cosmological effects of religious practice), I show that Plato does not contest many of the types of efficacy religious practice is traditionally afforded. He holds religious practices to be theogenically efficacious in every sphere of life, despite the suggestions of some Sophists and pre-Socratic philosophers. I also show that Plato's theorizing on religious practice follows an intellectual tradition established by poets of former generations. He limits the scope of the gods' intervention by arguing that they interact with the human realm according to an ethical standard of conduct.

So far, I have examined where and how Plato believes religious practice to produce their effects, i.e. over which spheres of life they have influence and by whose agency their power is exerted. While these features of Plato's view are not entirely novel, the specifics of his account are indeed innovative and worthy of investigation. In Chapters 4-5, I turn my attention to two examples of how Plato integrates his view of efficacy within his broader philosophical system. What follows is not an exhaustive account of Plato's views of efficacy. Instead, these chapters focus on how Plato reconciles his views of efficacy with other realms of his thought. Chapters 4-5 defines the relationship between Plato's ideas by tackling two loci of interaction between traditional religious rites and other aspects of Platonic philosophy. In exploring these interactions, the reader can put together a uniquely Platonic theory of religious practice.

In Chapter 4, I articulate a connection that the Athenian of Plato's *Laws* makes between select religious practices and the concept of play (a concept that is developed over several dialogues, but at greatest length in the *Laws*). I also explore why he conceived of these practices as forms of play and to what end. The theory that the Athenian explicates in the *Laws* has roots in underlying criticisms that Plato levels at traditional understandings of the efficacy of religious

practice throughout his works, as discussed in the present chapter. Chapter 5 investigates the claim that prayer is an epistemically productive practice because it produces intelligence in the participant. Taken together, these chapters show that while Plato accepts some traditional notions, he does so in a novel and resolutely Platonic manner.

CHAPTER 4

Religious Practice as Play in Plato's *Laws*

In the *Euthyphro*, Plato begins to explore the connection between religious praxis and the receipt of the gods' benevolent action, an issue I refer to simply as the efficacy of religious practice. In that dialogue, he criticizes the belief that holiness is "a science of requesting and giving," which he later describes as "a kind of commercial art" (τις ἐμπορικὴ [sc. τέχνη]). In Chapter 3, I showed that in *Republic 2* (and again in *Laws 5* and *10*), Plato articulates two apophatic doctrines, or teachings that place limitations on the character of the gods. These doctrines seem to flow from the philosopher's criticism of what I call "the commercial model of religious practice." As a reminder, the apophatic doctrines are articulated as follows:

1. Gods are not misled (παράγεσθαι) by humans or by their practices.
2. Humans cannot force (βιάζεσθαι) the gods.

Each of these doctrines reflect an enduring preoccupation for Plato, which he continues to explore late into his career. In *Laws 10*, the Athenian (in)famously argues that every unholy act and lawless utterance originates in one of three misunderstandings, the last of which is the view that the gods are "easily appeased" (εὐπαραμυθήτους, 885B8) by sacrifice and supplications.

The way in which these misunderstandings are glossed throughout *Laws 10* indicates that the Athenian is targeting issues like those which were described in *Republic 2*, namely that the gods are capable of being misled or forced by human beings through their participation in religious practice. Echoing those principles, Plato criticizes the erroneous belief that the gods are

“diverted from justice through some gifts” (885D3-4, cf. 907B6) or “placated by those who do injustice” (905D4, cf. 908E4-5).¹ Only impious human beings, the Athenian of the *Laws* argues, believe that they can coerce the gods to contravene justice with gifts. As in the *Republic*, the Athenian singles out those who proliferate these mistaken views and identifies them as a detrimental force in society (885D4-7, cf. 909A8-B6). In both works, it appears that Plato regards religious practice that relies on the so-called “commercial model” of the *Euthyphro* to be illegitimate. Today, these forms of religious practice might be designated by the common pejorative “mere ritual,” which is used often to describe religious action that is ineluctably inefficacious.²

But despite his criticisms of the commercial model, Plato preserves traditional religious practice in his ideal and “second-best” states, as constituted in the *Republic* and the *Laws*.³ It is clear from these works that Plato’s ideal cities would retain the traditional religious elements that are on display in traditional, non-utopian Greek life: sacrifices, prayers, festivals, oracular visitation, temple worship, etc. As we saw in Chapter 3, Plato believed these practices to be theogenically efficacious in all spheres of life. And so interpreters of Plato are faced with a question: How can the philosopher maintain the efficacy of religious practice without endorsing the commercial model and violating the principles laid out in the *Euthyphro*, the *Republic*, and the *Laws*? How can Plato present religious practice in a way that operates non-coercively, instead of through bribery or force?

¹ Cf. *Laws*. 5. 741A. The consonance between the *Laws* and the *Republic* on this score supports the standard interpretation of Plato’s two political utopias—that doctrinally speaking, the latter accords with the former (see below, n. 34).

² On the use of the noun “ritual” in popular and academic discourse to denote “a kind of action that is ineffective, superficial, and/or purely formal,” see Sax 2010.

³ See, for example, More 1921, Morrow 1960, 399-496, Schofield 2003 and 2006, 282-326, McPherran 2006, 247-50. For the interpretation of the *Laws* as the “second-best” city, which originates in Aristotle *Pol.* 2.6, see Schofield 2010, Rowe 2010, Roochnik 2013, 145.

I argue that in his final work, the *Laws*, Plato presents a creative solution to the problem of efficacy. He preserves the traditional form of religious practice without subscribing to what he takes to be an immoral, albeit traditional, model of their interpretation. This involves the creation of a new model of religious practice, which Plato advances by analyzing religious practice as a form of play, a concept that is developed at great length in the *Laws*.⁴ The phrase “religious practice” covers a diverse set of actions, and this paper focuses on just three of them: sacrifice, singing, and dancing. Plato identifies each of these practices, which are performed in the context of the religious festival, as instances of play, and we will see that understanding the connection between religious practice and play is crucial for uncovering his solution to the problem of efficacy.

This chapter is devoted to understanding what Plato means when he identifies religious practice as play and how this relates to the problem of efficacy. In what follows, I investigate the features of play as they are articulated in the *Laws*. I also demonstrate that by analyzing these features we can understand what Plato’s identification of religious practice with play reveals about how religious practice produces an effect in the world. In Section I, I document Plato’s categorization of sacrifice, song, and dance as instances of play. I then identify three features that they share in virtue of their connection to play. In Sections II-IV, I explain each of these common features in turn, demonstrating that, in the ideal city, both play and religious practice are to be strictly regulated (Section II), that each constitutes an activity that accords with reason (Section III), and that they are to be performed for the sake of pleasure (Section IV). Finally, in Section V, I argue that sacrifice, song and dance (like other forms of play) are efficacious only if

⁴ Guthrie 1975, 56-65, Lonsdale 1993, Freydsberg 1997, Jouët-Pastré 2006. Gundert 1965, esp. 191 and 212-5 argues that the role of play becomes more prominent over the full course of Plato’s career, and rightly recognizes the increasingly religious function that play obtains in the corpus.

they are pursued *qua* play, in accordance with the features outlined in Sections II-IV. In short, I show that religious practice is efficacious only when it is regulated, when it accords with reason, and when it is performed for pleasure's sake.

I

In the opening book of the *Laws*, the Athenian stranger, along with his interlocutors Megillus and Clinias, treat the topic of war and peace (1. 625C6-632D7). Against his interlocutors, who had argued that war should be the chief concern of the lawgiver, the Athenian contends that the lawgiver ought to prioritize peace (1. 628C9-E1). In *Laws* 7, the group revisits the topic, and the Athenian grounds his preference for peace over war by claiming that “in war there neither is, nor will there ever be, play nor education worthy of the name, which we say is the most important thing.”⁵ The Athenian goes on to describe how citizens ought to conduct their lives during times of peace:

[T1] δεῖ δὴ τὸν κατ' εἰρήνην βίον ἕκαστον πλεῖστον τε καὶ ἄριστον διεξελθεῖν. τίς οὖν ὀρθότης; παίζοντά ἐστιν διαβιωτέον τινὰς δὴ παιδιάς, θύοντα καὶ ἄδοντα καὶ ὀρχούμενον, ὥστε τοὺς μὲν θεοὺς ἴλεως αὐτῷ παρασκευάζειν δυνατὸν εἶναι, τοὺς δ' ἐχθροὺς ἀμύνεσθαι καὶ νικᾶν μαχόμενον.⁶

Indeed, each person ought to spend both the greatest and best part of their life at peace. What, then, is the right way to live? They ought to spend their lives playing certain games, sacrificing and singing and dancing, so that they can make the gods kindly disposed to themselves, defend against their enemies and conquer them in battle. (7. 803D7-E4)

⁵ 803D4-7.

⁶ All Greek text from the *Laws* is taken from the Budé (vol. 11-12).

The activities that the Athenian advocates are “games” (παιδιαί) in the sense that they are discrete forms of play (παιδιά). But on what principle does Plato pick out these specific activities as forms of play?

Etymologically, the noun παιδιά derives from παῖς (“child”), and therefore in ancient Greek, as in English, the activity of children is the paradigmatic case of play.⁷ It may be assumed, therefore, that in the passage above, the Athenian seeks to highlight several activities characteristic of young people. At first glance, his identification of song and dance as forms of play seems to confirm this suspicion. For elsewhere in the *Laws*, the Athenian cites dance as an instance of play and argues that the origin of dance has its roots in the natural propensity of all animals towards motion and humankind’s natural sense of rhythm.⁸ This natural propensity exists, he says, in all young people, since their fiery nature (φύσις διάπυρος) impels them toward vocal and locomotive activity.⁹

However, sacrifice stands out from the other two forms of play listed by the Athenian. It receives no additional treatment in the *Laws* that would suggest its identification as a kind of

⁷ See Beekes 2010, Chantraine 1996, and Frisk 1960-70, s.v. παῖς. Huizinga 1950, 160 indicates that the connection of play to childhood in the Greek terminology encourages Greek authors to use a different vocabulary in reference to adult forms of play (e.g. ἀγών, σχολάζειν, διαγωγή), but as we will see, Plato makes the parallels between the play of children and adults explicit, choosing to use the same noun to describe both activities. Scholars have generally understood the verb παίζω in strict relation to being, or behaving like, a child (see Gundert 1966, 13, Burkert 2003, 96, and Halliwell 2008, 20).

⁸ 2. 673C9-D5.

⁹ 2. 664E3-665A6. At 7. 799E10-800B2, the Athenian speaks of the chorus of young people (τὴν τῶν νέων σύμπασαν χορείαν) at the festival. On the participation of children and adolescents in the traditional Greek chorus, see Golden 1990, 65-7 and 76; Kowalzig 2004, 55-7. While some participants may be described as “youths” (νέοι), for the Athenian, the salient quality that marks dance and song as some of the “finest games” is the religious associations of the practice, rather than the age of the participants. The Athenian is explicit concerning the various age groups that should all participate in the choruses of Magnesia. Three choruses are established: one for children, another for adolescents (individuals under 30), and a third for adults between the ages of 30 and 60 (*Laws* 2. 664B5-D5). It is the third chorus that is described as the “noblest element of the city” (τὸ ἄριστον τῆς πόλεως, 2. 665D).

play, nor is there a strong association between sacrifice and play in Plato's literary environment. In Athens, animal sacrifice was performed by an adult priest or magistrate. Although the attendant spectacle and feast were enjoyed by people of all ages, they are not characterized as activities of children, nor is an explanation ventured concerning the disposition of children to participate in them. Moreover, the Athenian advocates for an extensive commitment of one's life to play (διαβιωτέον), as opposed to a short period of life such as childhood or youth, which was described earlier as the greatest part of life (βίον πλεῖστον). Although play is associated with children linguistically and conceptually in Greek thought, in T1 the Athenian does not designate activities as forms of play based on the age of practitioners.

It appears that the Athenian groups the activities of sacrifice, song, and dance not on the basis of who participates or which stage of life they typify, but because of their religious associations.¹⁰ Moments before the passage under consideration, in *Laws* 7. 800C-E, the Athenian describes a scene in which these activities appear sequentially during a festival: in nearly every Greek city, it happens that "whenever some magistrate performs a sacrifice at the public expense, afterwards not one chorus, but a multitude of choruses arrive."¹¹ Indeed, immediately prior to T1, the Athenian had suggested that every human being, in their capacity as "a plaything of god" (θεοῦ τι παίγνιον, 7. 803C4-5), should engage in "the finest possible

¹⁰ McPherran and Frede (2010, 121-2), have recognized that each of the games listed by the Athenian are associated with Greek religious festivals. Frede emphasizes that their status as games implies that their value consists in the entertainment and moral development that they provide. While the development of virtue is a key feature of Plato's theory, the results of religious practice are also cosmological and social in nature. On the role of festivals in the moral development of the city, see, e.g. Lonsdale 1993 and Ingalls 2000. Concerning the educative value of the chorus in Plato, Werner Jaeger writes that "Die musische Bildung des alten Hellas war Chortanz und Gesang gewesen.... Doch Plato vermißt in der jetzigen Erziehung einen wirklichen Ersatz für sie, sobald er an sein Problem der frühen Formung des Ethos denkt" (1947, 306).

¹¹ 7. 800C5-8.

games” (ὅτι καλλίστας παιδιὰς, 803C7). This passage helps the reader to recognize that not only should sacrifice, song, and dance be performed throughout one’s life, but that their religious nature also qualifies them as games of the finest possible type. For it is during the games of the religious festival that participants are able to act as the gods’ playthings.

At this juncture, it is worth addressing one religious practice that belongs to the religious festival but that the Athenian does not explicitly identify as an instance of play: prayer. Prayer is constitutive of both sacrifice and choral performance. For example, sacrifice and prayer are closely associated in Greek culture and frequently appear together in Greek literature. As Walter Burkert has argued, “there is rarely a ritual without prayer, and no important prayer without ritual: *litai* – *thysiai*, prayers – sacrifices is an ancient and fixed conjunction.”¹² Indeed, this conjunction is manifest in Plato’s writings. The Athenian devotes a great deal of attention to prayer in the *Laws*, much of which conforms to the model of religious practice that will be described hereafter with regards to sacrifice, song, and dance.¹³ Since the Athenian does not explicitly identify prayer as a sort of play, I do not treat this practice in the present chapter. But in Chapter 5, I investigate prayer as an isolated practice. Nevertheless, it should be noted that inevitably, prayer is implicated in any interpretation of sacrifice and choral performance.

Although sacrifice, song, and dance are united by their religious associations, which in turn explains their belonging to a particular species of play—i.e., the “finest possible games”—their generic identity as play depends on their ability to meet the relevant criteria that Plato lays out in the *Laws*. If the Athenian groups these activities because of their mutual performance in the context of religious festivals and describes them as the “finest possible games” because of

¹² Burkert 1985, 73. See also Pulleyn 1997, 7-14 and 156-163.

¹³ For example, prayers are often offered for the purpose of bringing the petitioner’s desires into proper alignment with what virtue and reason demand, and for assistance in the dialectical process.

their religious associations, on what grounds does he label them as games (or as instances of play) in the first instance? Scholars have noted the important connections between religion and play in the *Laws*, but only in passing remarks.¹⁴ A full treatment of why Plato identified religious practice as play, and to what theological end, is wanting. I now demonstrate the first two features of play that the Athenian highlights, and which ground his inclusion of these religious practices into the genre of play: their regulation (Section II) and their involvement of reason (Section III). I then show that the focal characteristic of play that must obtain in addition to these features lay in its close connection with pleasure (Section IV).

II

In *Laws* 7, the Athenian gives an account of how he believes the play of children ought to be structured. He argues that children's games should be strictly regulated and performed according to convention:

Φημί κατὰ πάσας πόλεις τὸ τῶν παιδιῶν γένος ἠγνοῆσθαι σύμπασιν ὅτι κυριώτατόν ἐστι περὶ θέσεως νόμων, ἢ μονίμους εἶναι τοὺς τεθέντας ἢ μή. ταχθὲν μὲν γὰρ αὐτὸ καὶ μετασχὼν τοῦ τὰ αὐτὰ κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ καὶ ὡσαύτως ἀεὶ τοὺς αὐτοὺς παίζειν τε καὶ εὐθυμεῖσθαι τοῖς αὐτοῖς παιγνίοις, ἐᾶ καὶ τὰ σπουδῆ κείμενα νόμιμα μένειν ἡσυχῆ...

[T2] I claim that in all cities games as a class are totally misunderstood, that they are most crucial for the establishment of laws, whether those that are established are enduring or not. For the class, if it is regulated and involves the same games and likewise the same people both playing them with the same rules and delighting in the same toys, also allows institutions established for a serious purpose to remain at peace. (7. 797A7-B4)

¹⁴ For example, Lucia Prauscello, adopting the phrase from Gavin Ardley, recognizes the intersection of religion and play when, in her discussion of comedy in the *Laws*, she refers to “Magnesia’s theology of play” (2014, 205). The phrase is originally coined in Ardley 1967, 234 (cf. Rahner 1964). Gundert 1965 identifies nine areas where παιδιὰ plays a role in Plato’s corpus, including “the play of song and dance in the service of the gods” (das Spiel von Lied und Tanz im Dienst der Götter), but he does not describe how this form of play relates to the other items in his list (191). In part, the present study aims to elucidate these connections.

For the Athenian, it is important that the same games be played in the same manner over time.¹⁵

The Athenian notes that consistency in the playing of games leads to the stability of the state, but he also underscores the dangers of innovation in play. When young people display shifting tastes and interests, and when they depart from the conventional games, he argues that “there is no greater destruction for a city than this” (τούτου πόλει λώβην οὐκ εἶναι μείζω, 7. 797C3-4).¹⁶

Accordingly, the Athenian and his interlocutor Clinias agree that citizens should discourage the young from making any alterations to traditional games. It is no surprise, then, that when the Athenian identifies religious practices as forms of play, he highlights the traditional nature of the rites. For inasmuch as childhood games and religious practice are both forms of play, they are both structured by tradition and they each follow a set of customary rules.

The Athenian believes that the traditional conventions of religious practice are derived from divine instruction. Immediately following his claim that humans should spend their whole lives at play, “sacrificing and singing and dancing” in T1, the Athenian addresses what kind of songs and dances should be performed, underscoring the upshot of his comparison of religious practice with play. He quotes *Odyssey* 3.26-8, in which the goddess Athena assures Telemachus that he will be the recipient of divine communication and provides the following instruction:¹⁷

¹⁵ This feature of the Athenian’s account provokes David Roochnik to remark that, for Plato, play “isn’t all that playful” (2013, 152). David Graeber, however, argues that the uniquely structured character of games is precisely the reason that games produce the pleasure that they do (2015, 191-2).

¹⁶ Indeed, there can be no mistake that for Plato, the conventional and rule-bound nature of play is an authoritative one, where adults set the boundaries of acceptable engagement. This is in opposition to what modern educational theorists call “free play,” which proceeds according to rules established by the children (see, for example, Gray 2011, 444-7 and Chudacoff 2007).

¹⁷ In this passage from the *Odyssey*, the information at issue concerns how Telemachus ought to communicate with Nestor: “some things, Telemachus, you will perceive in your own mind, but others the guardian spirit will suggest, for I believe that you have been born and reared by the will of the gods.”

[T3] ταῦτόν δὴ καὶ τοὺς ἡμετέρους τροφίμους δεῖ διανοουμένους τὰ μὲν εἰρημένα ἀποχρόντως νομίζειν εἰρήσθαι, τὰ δὲ καὶ τὸν δαίμονά τε καὶ θεὸν αὐτοῖσιν ὑποθήσεσθαι θυσιῶν τε πέρι καὶ χορειῶν, οἷσισί τε καὶ ὅποτε ἕκαστα ἑκάστοις προσπαίζοντές τε καὶ ἰλεούμενοι κατὰ τὸν τρόπον τῆς φύσεως διαβιώσονται, θαύματα ὄντες τὸ πολὺ, σμικρὰ δὲ ἀληθείας ἅττα μετέχοντες.

Believing this, our pupils ought to think that what has been said has been said sufficiently, but that both the guardian spirit and a god will give them suggestions concerning sacrifices and choruses, with which particular gods they will live out their lives in play and propitiation, and when, in accordance with their nature, since they are puppets for the most part, and have a small share of truth. (7. 804A3-B4)

The Athenian does not explicitly state the medium of communication that the guardian spirit and the god employ to make their suggestions, but the reader is immediately reminded of the *Republic* and the *Laws*, where in each dialogue, the primary interlocutor defers to Delphi as the chief lawgiver and chief authority for religious law and customs.¹⁸ In Kallipolis, Socrates allows Apollo at Delphi to enact laws pertaining to “the founding of temples, sacrifices, and other services for gods, daemons, and heroes, the burial of the dead, and whatever services ensure the favor of those beyond.”¹⁹ In the *Laws*, the Athenian stranger endorses the same policy for the establishment of religious policy in Magnesia.²⁰ If the “suggestions” that the Athenian has in mind at T3 are voiced through oracular pronouncement, then this passage is of a piece with his comments elsewhere in the *Laws* and in the *Republic*. Taken together, these passages show that in matters involving religious rites (including sacrifice and choral performance) the oracle will

¹⁸ See Morrow 1960, 403-4. For more on this passage, and the influence of the oracle at Delphi in establishing matters of religious law, see Parke and Wormell 1956, 405-6; Bowden 2005, 82-6 and 109-33. Guthrie claims that the *Laws* imposes regulations on many of the matters that are left for the oracle to determine in the *Republic* (1962 5. 357-8).

¹⁹ *Resp.* 4. 427B6-9.

²⁰ See, inter alia, *Leg.* 5. 738B-C, 6. 759. Hernández de la Fuente (2011), in his study of the oracle’s role in the *Laws*, demonstrates the ways in which Plato reimagines the political function of the oracle in the context of the establishment of Magnesia. Nevertheless, he notes that “Plato reaffirms and codifies extensively a doctrine that, in regard to sacred laws, was already present in the *Republic* (427b-c): ‘all issues of religion and its interpreters will come from Delphi’” (16).

communicate the will of the gods, specifically their desires concerning when, and to whom, those activities ought to be performed. Interestingly, the Athenian views oracular visitation, and the inspired instructions that accompany it, as a method of establishing order upon the accomplishment of playful acts such as choruses and sacrifice, rather than as a form of play in itself.

In this sense, the Athenian's views on sacrifice, song, and dance parallel what we find in his description of the paradigmatic form of play in T2. Just as the games of young people are regulated by adult citizens in order to ensure fidelity to traditional norms, the games of religious practice are to be consistent with the suggestions of the guardian spirit and the god. In both cases, participants are discouraged from innovating based on personal preference, but must follow the suggestion of the relevant authorities, who impart specific instructions concerning the manner in which the games are to be played. Relatedly, in *Laws* 10. 909D3-910B6, the Athenian proposes that lawmakers prevent unregulated sacrifice from taking place in the city by banning the establishment and use of private shrines. These private shrines escape the notice of the priests and priestesses, authorities who are to be consulted for all sacrifices to ensure that they are executed properly.

Private, unregulated sacrifice can result in an undesirable proliferation of shrines throughout the city, but more significantly it can incite the gods' reproach. For in private, the unjust can impiously attempt to win the gods' favor through religious practice and to coerce them into contravening justice. In T3, the gods and the guardian spirit are cited as the relevant authorities who direct the religious action of mortals. But in *Laws* 10, the Athenian legitimizes also the authority of mortal officials in regulating religious practice. Indeed, Plato's well known regulations that impose restrictions on religious narrative, outlined in both the *Laws* and the

Republic, similarly give mortals the authority to regulate the boundaries of acceptable religious expression.

Their regulation by authoritative mandate may be the clearest and most obvious point of connection among sacrifice, dance, song, and play, since this is the generic feature of play that is most proximate to the discussion of the religious practices of the festival (T3 follows immediately upon T1). But in the final line of T3, the Athenian evokes a second feature of play that is shared with religious practice. There, the Athenian notes that the divine instructions that are given to humans regarding how to perform their religious rites allow them to live in accordance with their nature as “puppets for the most part” (θαύματα τὸ πολὺ), but having a share of truth in some small measure (σμικρὰ δὲ ἀληθείας ἅττα μετέχοντες, 7. 804B3-4). This statement appeals to an analogy that was developed earlier in the same dialogue, at *Laws* 1. Here, in its initial framing, the Athenian uses the analogy to adumbrate his views on moral psychology. The Athenian’s renewed appeal to the so-called “puppet analogy” in *Laws* 7 (at T3) suggests that he understands there to be a salient connection between the performance of festival rites, their rule-governed nature, and human psychology.

III

How exactly does participating in the play of sacrifice and choral performance accord with the nature of human beings as puppets? In *Laws* 1, where the Athenian first claims that each human being is a “divine puppet” (θαῦμα θεῖον, 644D7-8), he uses the analogy to present a psychological account that departs from the famous account of the tripartite soul given in

Republic 4.²¹ In the *Laws*, the three forces that pull on the puppet are grouped into two categories, i.e., the rational (the golden cord) and the non-rational (the iron cords), which represent two distinct parts rather than three.²² Plato appears to have eliminated the spirited part of the soul (τὸ θυμοειδές) as a discrete division or motivational force of the soul, but to have assigned its various functions to other elements within the puppet analogy.²³ In the *Laws*, Plato retains the remaining two parts of the soul from the *Republic*: the golden string of calculation serves a like function to the reasoning part of the soul (τὸ λογιστικόν), and the iron cords of pleasure and pain to the appetitive part (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν).

The complex psychological mechanics involved in the analogy discourage what, at first glance, may seem like a sensible view: that it represents the unthinking movement of a puppet resulting from the tugs of the gods. As Frede indicates, the translation “puppet” is misleading in this respect, for “it suggests that humans are mere marionettes whose strings are pulled by the gods.”²⁴ The Athenian’s analogy makes clear that the puppets are not to be understood in this way, even if the English translation “puppet” readily brings this image to mind. Unlike a marionette, whose strings are manipulated by an external agent that exerts determinative control,

²¹ The distinctions between the two treatments are documented in Bobonich 2002, 261-4, but the central difference is that the *Republic* concerns distinct parts of the soul, whereas the *Laws* represents discrete types of impulses that pull on a single person.

²² In support of the two-fold distinction in the *Laws*, see Müller 1951, 22; Rees 1957, 112-6; Graeser 1969, 102-5; Robinson 1970, 124-5; Fortenbaugh 1975, 24; Schöpsdau 1994, 229-30; Bobonich 2002, 263-4; Sassi 2008, 133-8; Frede 2010, 18. The two iron cords are described as “foolish advisors” (συμβούλω ἄφρονε, 644C6-7), highlighting their function as non-rational impulses.

²³ As Meyers 2015 notes, Plato’s “treatment of ‘anticipations,’ fear and daring, [in the *Laws*] at 646e-647a invokes many features of *thumos* from the *Republic*—in particular the task of resisting pleasures and pains” (183). She also points out the parallels between the helpers (ὕπηρέται, 645a6), who provide guidance in the service of the golden cord, and the spirited part of the soul.

²⁴ Frede 2010, 116.

the puppet is ruled by internal mechanical forces that are invisible to the observer.²⁵ Indeed, the puppets, he argues, are motivated by three cords that pull at them, and against each other, internally: the two iron cords of pleasure (ἡδονή) and pain (λύπη), in addition to one golden cord of calculation (λογισμός). The analogy is used to illustrate the nature of self-rule, a condition that is achieved when the golden cord is victorious over the two iron cords.²⁶ The Athenian offers another player-toy analogy in *Laws* 10, where the gods' involvement likewise does not violate the self-rule of mortals. Here, the Athenian depicts a god as a "player of board games" (πεπτευτής, 10. 903D6), who ensures the proper functioning of the cosmos: the gods promote and demote souls, assigning them to better or worse bodies according to their character.²⁷

The type of actions that result from following the golden cord of calculation is described as uniquely appropriate to human beings. When Plato elaborates on the various parts of the human soul, he describes the rational element as being the part that is essentially human, while the non-rational parts of the soul are characterized as unhuman. This feature of Platonic imagery is also found in the philosopher's account of tripartite soul in the *Republic*. In *Republic* 9, Socrates and his interlocutors agree to fashion the image of a soul in words. The image they

²⁵ Accordingly, some scholars understand the Athenian's analogy to evoke the image of a wind-up toy (see Schöpsdau 1994, 236-7; Frede 2010, 116-20; contra Schofield 2016, 136 n. 12). For the related discussion of the self-moving αὐτόματα in Aristotle's *De Motu* 701B2-13, see Nussbaum 1976, 146-52 and 1978, 347.

²⁶ 1. 645A1. As the Athenian points out, virtue is developed through education, i.e., a process of bringing about internal agreement between one's three internal forces. Cf. *Resp.* 9. 589A6-B6, where the rational part of the soul is assigned two discrete functions: (1) to be in charge (ἐγκρατέστατος) of the non-rational parts, and (2) to placate and promote harmony among them. On the competing arguments regarding the role of the golden cord, see Meyer 2015, 180-2.

²⁷ For a discussion of the gods in their capacity as cosmic players, see Jouët-Pastré 2006, 130-6. The Athenian's metaphor alludes to a passage of Homer's *Odyssey* (1. 106-7), where the gods amuse themselves with a game of πεπτεία ("draughts"). Denyer 2002 provides evidence suggesting that later philosophers (Diodorus Cronus and Clearchus of Soli) took the passage as a metaphor for the gods' manipulation of celestial objects, but in Plato's metaphor the various pieces of the game appear to represent human souls.

create is one of a composite creature that reflects the divisions of the tripartite soul: one part beast, one part lion, and one part human.²⁸ The third element is referred to as “the human within” (ὁ ἐντὸς ἄνθρωπος, 9. 589A7-B1) and symbolizes the rational part of the soul, as opposed to the appetitive (beastly) and the spirited (lionlike) parts. The only division, therefore, in the tripartite structure that is identified as truly human in nature is the rational part.²⁹ In the *Timaeus*, where, as in the *Laws*, human nature is said to be twofold, the rational part is “such that it should then [on earth] be called ‘man.’”³⁰ The Athenian’s reference to the puppet analogy at T3 indicates that participating in the play of conventional and divinely suggested sacrifice and choral performance accords with our nature as puppets. This suggests that participation in these activities assists the participant in achieving optimal psychic balance as the puppet is supposed to do, being moved by each cord as is appropriate. For sacrifice and choral performance to constitute action that accords with our nature signifies that doing so activates the cord of calculation and fulfills our proper function as humans (or, in in this case, as puppets) to participate in well reasoned activity.

This kind of activity that engages the reasoning part of the soul includes more than play, let alone religious forms of play. In fact, in the Athenian’s view, all of Magnesia’s laws should reflect the directives of calculation.³¹ Calculation, he argues, directs humans as to what is better

²⁸ Although the creature will *appear* as a human, its internal workings will reflect this composite nature, much as the “puppet” of *Laws* 1 provokes wonder for its seeming to be, but not in fact being, a living creature (see Kurke 2013). On the description of the rational part of the soul as singularly human, see further Kamtekar 2006; Singpurwalla 2013, 54-5.

²⁹ The other elements of the soul are beastly, and, as we see elsewhere in Plato, accretions that are added as a necessary feature of embodiment. See below, n. 34.

³⁰ 42A1-3.

³¹ In making this statement, the Athenian also makes clear that the laws of a city should reflect a consensus of the citizens. This may be, *inter alia*, why the Athenian on two occasions describes the enterprise of the dialogue itself as a form of play (3. 685A, 6. 769A). Their prescriptions for the city reflect the consensus of but three old men from various cities, and so are neither authoritative nor legally binding. On the dialogues as play, see Desjardins (1988) and Press (2007) 118-29.

over what is worse, and “when this becomes the common view of a city, is called ‘law’.”³² This statement brings together the two features of religious play that we have identified so far: their conventional nature and their conformity with reason. It also explains why these features are so closely related in the Athenian’s mind, with the latter emerging in T3 immediately after the former. In the Athenian’s view, sacrifice and choral performance should conform with legal and divine dictates, which result from the use of individual or collective reason.

The Athenian counts the play of religious practice as one form of well reasoned activity, as illustrated in T3. And Plato’s characterization of the laws governing religious practices (τὰ ἱερά) as “sacred law” (νόμοι ἱεροί) demonstrates that, in his view, calculation leads to participation in religious practice.³³ In the psychological accounts given in the *Laws* and the *Republic*, the rational part of the soul is identified as sacred or holy. In *Laws* 10, the Athenian references the golden cord, noting that there is a divine assistance within human beings, and that without the gods, they would be unable to grasp or make an account of the happiness and misery of human life (905B-C). Later, the Athenian glosses what he now calls “the golden and sacred guidance of calculation” (τὴν τοῦ λογισμοῦ ἀγωγὴν χρυσοῦν καὶ ἱεράν) as “the common law of the city.”³⁴ The Athenian’s description of the cord of calculation’s pull as “sacred” implies that

³² *Leg.* 1. 644D2-3.

³³ See, e.g. 6. 759D1-4, 6. 784A1-B1.

³⁴ *Leg.* 1. 645A1-2. The same concept is expressed in *Laws* 4, but it is the result of “intelligence” (νοῦς) rather than “calculation” that ought to be implemented as law: “inasmuch as there is immortality in us, we should, obeying it in public and in private, manage our households and our cities, and apply the name ‘law’ to this intelligent management (τὴν τοῦ νοῦ διανομήν)” (4. 713E6-714A2). The apparent synonymy of this statement with those in the puppet analogy, combined with the association of intelligence and immortality (ἀθανασία) suggests that Plato is not concerned with rigorous terminological consistency (cf. Delcomminette 2014, 59-67).

to act, generally speaking, in accordance with calculation is a kind of sacred or holy act.³⁵ The attentive reader of Plato will recall that when Socrates articulates the tripartite model of the soul, he characterizes the rational part of the soul (τὸ λογιστικόν) as divine.³⁶

With these comments in mind, it is easier to understand the Athenian's purpose in drawing upon the puppet analogy in *Laws* 7. At the end of T3, where the analogy is invoked, the Athenian reminds his interlocutors that the nature of humans is to act according to the psychological principle that is most proper to themselves, and that the play of religious practice accords with their nature. If the nature of a human puppet is to follow the sacred guidance of calculation, and the guidance of calculation accords with the laws of the state, then the Athenian's statement in T3 that the nature of puppets involves the play of sacrifice and choral performance makes good sense. For religious practice results from following calculation, and this is the very nature of humans.³⁷ When the Athenian connects obedience to divine suggestions concerning the performance of religious practices with the nature of humans as puppets, he

³⁵ This accords with passages elsewhere, where the Athenian recognizes the harmony in the *Laws* between natural and divine action. As Russon 2013 explains, the Athenian views childhood dance as a display of their natural grasp, but also of divine movement" (67, see also *Leg. 2.* 654A). See also Schofield, who writes that Plato's use of the adjective "golden" suggests that the pull is "an influence within us that we should not conceive of in solely human terms," and the adjective "golden" suggests its high value as well as the "gentle and non-violent" nature of its influence 2016, 140. It is also consistent with the view, articulated by Menn 1995 and Mayhew 2010, 206-7, that in the *Laws*, god is a kind of divine nous.

³⁶ I follow Schofield 2003 in regarding the *Laws* as a dialogue that was written for a "practiced reader" of the dialogues (9-11), and believing that it comports with the philosophical doctrines found in the other Platonic dialogues. The rational part of the soul is denigrated by its association with the body and the non-rational parts of the soul. In the *Timaeus* (69D6-E1), Plato suggests that in the process of embodiment, necessity requires partial corruption of the rational, divine part of the soul. In the *Republic*, the immortal part of the soul is "corrupted by both its assimilation with body and with other evils" (10. 611B10-C1). Cf. Pl. *Plt.* 309C1-9. *Contra* Johansen 2000.

³⁷ In the *Timaeus*, humans souls are implanted into bodies on earth and told (1) that they ought to become the most god-fearing of animals (ζῴων τὸ θεοσεβέστατον) and (2) that the superior part of their soul should be called man (Pl. *Ti.* 41E4-42A3).

shows that the proper performance of religious practices is consistent with following the rational part of the soul, calculation, or the golden cord.

Therefore, for the Athenian, play ought to be regulated, and insofar as it is regulated correctly, the activity of play engages the rational part of the soul. But there is another element to the Athenian's description of play, which helps to determine what the Athenian has in mind when he calls religious practices "forms of play." Understanding this feature of play also helps identify the upshot of his comparison as it relates to the problem of efficacy. Indeed, the Athenian is perhaps most emphatic in his insistence that play requires this third feature, which I call its "focal characteristic": it is motivated by pleasure.

IV

The quality that most characterized the play of children, and by analogy the play of adults, in archaic and classical Greece was the pleasurable nature of their activity. The pleasure of play seems to have been related to what ancient authors understood to be the inferior rationality of children. Often, when adults are said to play, it is when they behave unintelligently or with great pleasure. For example, a prominent arena of adult play is the symposium, where intoxicated adults artificially reach a state of decreased rationality and heightened pleasure, imitating a childlike nature.³⁸ Plato points this out himself in *Laws* 1, for example, when the Athenian describes intoxication as a game for adults that leads an old man (γέρων) to become "a child for a second time" (δὲς παῖς, 1. 646A4).³⁹

³⁸ See Kidd 2019, 21-29.

³⁹ Intoxication is described as a "test and play in wine" (τῆς ἐν οἴνῳ βασάνου καὶ παιδιᾶς, 1.649D9) and "inspection with play" (τὸ μετὰ παιδιᾶς τὴν ἄλλως ἄνευ μισθοῦ ζημιώδους θεωρεῖν, 1.650A6-7). For a treatment of intoxication as play, see Jouët-Pastré 2002.

While these general trends in early Greek literature are a helpful starting point, Plato further theorizes the connection between play and pleasure. When the Athenian identifies song, dance, and sacrifice as instances of play in *Laws* 7, he draws on concepts that were theorized in an earlier moment in the dialogue. In *Laws* 2, the Athenian provides a definition of play during an exchange with the Cretan lawgiver Clinias. The exchange reflects the centrality of pleasure in the Athenian’s conception of play [T4]:

AΘ. Οὐκοῦν ἡδονῇ κρίνοιτ’ ἂν μόνον ἐκεῖνο ὀρθῶς, ὃ μήτε τινὰ ὠφελίαν μήτε ἀλήθειαν μήτε ὁμοιότητα ἀπεργαζόμενον παρέχεται, μηδ’ αὖ γε βλάβην, ἀλλ’ αὐτοῦ τούτου μόνου ἔνεκα γίγνεται τοῦ συμπαραπομένου τοῖς ἄλλοις, τῆς χάριτος, ἣν δὴ κάλλιστά τις ὀνομάσαι ἂν ἡδονήν, ὅταν μηδὲν αὐτῇ τούτων ἐπακολουθῆ;

ΚΛ. Ἀβλαβῆ λέγεις ἡδονήν μόνον.

AΘ. Ναί, καὶ παιδιάν γε εἶναι τὴν αὐτὴν ταύτην λέγω τότε, ὅταν μήτε τι βλάβη μήτε ὠφελῆ σπουδῆς ἢ λόγου ἄξιον.

A: Therefore, that alone would rightly be judged by pleasure which provides neither any benefit nor truth nor likeness when it is being completed, nor any damage in turn, but is for the sake of this very thing alone, which accompanies the others, i.e., enjoyment, which one would do best to call pleasure whenever none of these things accompany it.

C: You mean only harmless pleasure.

A: Yes. And I say that this same thing is “play” whenever it does no harm nor benefit worth taking seriously. (2. 667D9-E8)

In this passage, play is defined teleologically: it is an action which is undertaken for the sake of “harmless pleasure.”⁴⁰ Therefore, according to this definition, for an activity to qualify as play the agent must accomplish it in order to experience pleasure and not for any other express purpose. The Athenian also claims that the only action that could appropriately (ὀρθῶς) be accomplished for the sake of pleasure is action which does no harm or benefit worthy of serious attention.

⁴⁰ The connection between play and pleasure is so close for Plato that on several occasions he uses the two nouns as near synonyms in a hendiadys. At *Critias* 115B2-3, agricultural crops that are difficult to store grow for the sake of “play and pleasure” (παιδιᾶς τε ὄς ἔνεκα ἡδονῆς τε). See also Pl. *Ti.* 26B-C; *Leg.* 1. 635B, 7. 819B.

We can be confident that when identifies festival practices with play, the Athenian of *Laws 7* draws upon the definition that he provided in *Laws 2*. The Athenian’s concern with play runs throughout the entirety of the *Laws*, from the first book to the last.⁴¹ It would, therefore, be odd for him to change course and begin using the term differently without notice, and nothing in the text indicates that the Athenian intends to revise or replace his prior definition. Moreover, the Athenian views *Laws 2* and *Laws 7* as complementary books that pursue a common theme. The definition of play in *Laws 2* (T4) appears in the context of a discussion of music, which the interlocutors agree comprises the first half of education. At the end of *Laws 2*, the Athenian reminds the group that while they have now discussed the first part of education, they still need to investigate the second (i.e., gymnastics), a discussion that is taken up in *Laws 7*, after a lengthy excursus.⁴² Together, these books illustrate the lawmaker’s responsibility to judge and to foster proper education, in both of its parts. That these books work together to explore a unified theme makes it all the more unlikely that the Athenian uses discrete definitions of play in these books, and more likely that he uses the term consistently.⁴³

In part, then, what the Athenian means to say when he calls sacrifice, song, and dance forms of play is that they are activities that are performed because they are pleasurable. How the practitioner might perform religious practices in this way will be discussed in Section V. For now, it is worth noting the *prima facie* correspondence between the Athenian’s conception of play and the group of religious activities listed at T1: song, dance, and sacrifice are all supervised

⁴¹ For scholarship on the importance of play in the *Laws*, see n. 4, above.

⁴² *Leg. 2*. 672E-673C.

⁴³ The Athenian’s definition of play is also consistent with Plato’s comments about play outside of the *Laws*. In the *Statesman*, for example, the Eleatic stranger asserts that playthings (παίγνια), with which the Athenian of the *Laws* identifies human beings, are “created only for the sake of pleasures” (πρὸς τὰς ἡδονὰς μόνον ἡμῶν ἀπειργασμένα, *Pl. Plt.* 288C3-4). For more on Plato’s definition of play as activity performed for the sake of pleasure, see Kidd 2019, 56-62.

and regulated by state authority, and these regulations are to be established in accordance with reason. Additionally, the Athenian's definition of play at T4 highlights the central feature that unites the list of activities proposed in T1. Humans commonly come together in order to sing and dance because it is a pleasurable experience.⁴⁴ As for the practice of sacrifice, the Athenian likely uses it as synecdoche for the jubilant sacrificial celebration and meal that sacrifice occasions.⁴⁵ The sacrificial slaughter of an animal is itself a practice requiring sincere gravity on the part of practitioner and witness alike.⁴⁶ But as a stand-in for the entire festival experience, one can see how Plato could consider the participants in a festival to participate in order to experience a panoply of accompanying pleasures.

It is now worth recalling the Athenian's description of humans as playthings of the gods. The activities that characterize humans as playthings of the gods are the "finest possible games," which are later glossed in *Laws* 7 (T1) as the festival practices that have been our principal concern throughout. Here, the Athenian draws upon an analogy that compares puppets, puppet

⁴⁴ Song and dance are, in fact, exemplary cases of play in early Greek literature. In *Odyssey* 8, Alcinous encourages the Phaeacians to play (παίσατε) thus demonstrating to Odysseus their prowess, inter alia, in dance and in song (ὄρχηστῶν καὶ ἀοιδῶν, 251-3). Later, in *Odyssey* 23, a "divine bard" arouses the desire for "sweet song and pleasant dance," and the hall is subsequently described as resounding "with the feet of men and fair-girdled women at play" (ποσσιν ἀνδρῶν παίζοντων καλλιζώνων τε γυναικῶν, 146-7). In the Homeric Hymn to Apollo, the gods devote themselves to lyre music and song (ἀθανάτοισι μέλει κίθαρις καὶ ἀοιδή), and Zeus and Leto are delighted to see their son Apollo playing among the immortal gods" (Λητώ τε χρυσοπλόκαμος καὶ μητίετα Ζεὺς | ὕψι φίλον παίζοντα μετ' ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσιν, 179-206). Hesiod, in the *Shield of Heracles*, describes participants in choruses as playing (παίζοντες, 275-7, 281-4). On song and dance as instances of "pure play," see Huizinga 1950, 159-66 (see also Lonsdale 1993, 34-5).

⁴⁵ As Huizinga 1950 notes: "The rites may be bloody, the probations of the young men awaiting initiation may be cruel, the masks may be terrifying, but the whole thing has a festal nature.... Whether we think of the Ancient Greek festivities or of the African religions to-day we can hardly draw any sharp line between the festival mood in general and the holy frenzy surrounding the central mystery" (21). On the playful elements of sacrifice per se, as "the culmination of the ritual hunt," see Lonsdale 1993, 36-7.

⁴⁶ The act of sacrifice was accompanied by a ceremonial cry (ὄλολυγή, e.g. Aesch. *Sept.* 268; see Burkert 1985, 56).

activities, and puppet-players with humans, religious practice, and the gods. The analogy of humans as playthings of the gods, and of humans as puppets, suggests that the gods take pleasure in the religious activity of humans, as humans take pleasure in playing with toys. (As mentioned previously, “puppets” is a poor translation for the Greek (θαύματα), which is rendered into English more literally as “marvel”). Therefore, human practitioners and the gods alike experience the pleasure of song, dance, and sacrifice.

According to the Athenian’s teleological definition at T4, to be properly considered play, an activity must (1) be done for the sake of pleasure, on account of (2) its impotence to cause any *serious* harm or benefit. The application of this definition to the case of song, dance, and sacrifice will require further investigation, including an investigation of non-religious examples of play from the dialogue. But a few items are immediately apparent. With respect to (2), the Athenian’s refusal to grant play the ability to harm supports the Socrates of the *Republic*’s belief that the Gods cause no harm to humans in the afterlife for the non-performance of religious rites. Likewise, his refusal to grant play the power to benefit supports Socrates’ assertion that religious practice does not absolve humans of their transgressions. But it appears to conflict with his commitment to the efficacy of religious practice (2. 364B-365A), an apparent conflict that will be explored further in Section V.

In sum, to be efficacious, sacrifice, song, and dance must, like other forms of play, be properly regulated and engage the rational part of the soul. And inasmuch as these activities are performed for the sake of pleasure, on account of their impotence to cause harm or benefit, they meet the Athenian’s definition in T4. Some scholars go wrong in isolating the pleasurable aspect

of play as the only relevant element in the analogy between play and religious practice.⁴⁷ In missing other important elements at work in the analogy, this work fails to recognize the explanatory value that the concept of play has with regard to the efficacy of religious practice, i.e., under what circumstances religious practice performs real work in the world, and under what circumstances it is of no effect. Let us now turn to this final issue.

V

So how does Plato explain the difference between efficacious religious practice and “mere ritual”? If the Athenian’s comment at T1 is to be taken seriously, the efficacy of religious practice, like the efficacy of play, is contingent on its proper performance. It must be regulated properly, in accordance with reason. And perhaps most radically of all, it must be accomplished solely for pleasure’s sake, on account of its impotence to cause harm or benefit. A broader analysis of the efficacy of non-religious games in the *Laws* will assist the interpreter in determining how these criteria may be met in the case of religious practice. Specifically, it will help explicate two mysterious qualities of the Athenian’s account of play: (1) play is defined as activity that does “no harm or benefit worthy of taking seriously,” yet how the forms of play examined in the *Laws* are used is of indisputably high stakes. And although these forms of play

⁴⁷ Morrow 1960 mentions in passing that for Plato, traditional cult constitutes “intrinsically desirable forms of that ‘serious play’ in which men should pass their lives,” though he does not elaborate on the significance of the concept of play for Plato in a religious context, or how, for example, identifying cults as a form of play gives religious practice a function above and beyond the production of social solidarity and human happiness, which Morrow cites immediately before (401). McPherran 2000 argues that Plato recommends religious practice for people of all ages because it is “delightful in itself—as simply a kind of ‘serious play’” (103). On a similar note, John Russon argues that the Athenian associates play with “spontaneity of expression, a spontaneous bodily motion and vocalizing that is communal and pleasant” (2013, 63).

are of high stakes, (2) they are nevertheless supposed to be performed with a view to pleasure alone, which may seem unlikely or unrealistic.

In his discussion of the paradigmatic case of play (i.e., a child's play), the Athenian makes clear that the efficacy of play depends on its proper performance, i.e., on its taking on the features of play. If the activity is not performed in the proper manner, and so fails to meet the definition of play, it will be inefficacious. Again, the Athenian's account is fleshed out in his discussion of education.

The Athenian understands there to be a close conceptual connection between play (παιδιά) and education (παιδεία), where the former functions as a means to achieving the latter. Play, therefore, is a fundamental instrument for childhood education and thus an important point of discussion for lawmakers.⁴⁸ For the lawmaker, a child's desire to play can be exploited to induce them to take part in productive activities which instill virtue in the practitioner at an early age. In *Laws* 1, for example, we see that games can be used as a tool to acclimate children to participate in activities that will be useful and necessary in adulthood.⁴⁹ The Athenian argues as follows:

Λέγω δὴ, καὶ φημι τὸν ὀτιοῦν ἀγαθὸν ἄνδρα μέλλοντα ἔσεσθαι τοῦτο αὐτὸ ἐκ παίδων εὐθὺς μελετᾶν δεῖν, παίζοντά τε καὶ σπουδάζοντα ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πράγματος ἐκάστοις προσήκουσιν. οἷον τὸν μέλλοντα ἀγαθὸν ἔσεσθαι γεωργὸν ἢ τινα οἰκοδόμον, τὸν μὲν οἰκοδομοῦντά τι τῶν παιδείων οἰκοδομημάτων παίζειν χρή, τὸν δ' αὖ γεωργοῦντα, καὶ ὄργανα ἐκατέρω σμικρά, τῶν ἀληθινῶν μιμήματα, παρασκευάζειν τὸν τρέφοντα αὐτῶν ἐκάτερον, καὶ δὴ καὶ τῶν μαθημάτων ὅσα ἀναγκαῖα προμεμαθηκέναι προμανθάνειν, οἷον τέκτονα μετρεῖν ἢ σταθμᾶσθαι καὶ πολεμικὸν ἵππευεῖν παίζοντα ἢ τι τῶν τοιούτων ἄλλο ποιοῦντα, καὶ πειρᾶσθαι διὰ τῶν παιδιῶν ἐκεῖσε τρέπειν τὰς ἡδονὰς καὶ ἐπιθυμίας τῶν παίδων, οἳ ἀφικομένους αὐτοῦς δεῖ τέλος ἔχειν.

[T5] In fact, I think that everyone who wants to become a good man in any way ought to engage in this very thing right from childhood, i.e., both playing and being serious in

⁴⁸ See Murray 2004, 376-7.

⁴⁹ See Kurke 2013, 128-9. For the forms of play available to professionals-in-training, and on the identity of relevant ὄργανα σμικρά, see Saunders 1972, 5-6.

each task that is appropriate. Whoever wants to become a good farmer or a builder should play, by building a kind of play structure and in turn by farming, and each of their caretakers should provide miniature tools for each activity, replicas of the real ones. They must learn, in particular, whatever knowledge is necessary to learn, e.g., the builder to make measurements or estimates and the warrior to ride a horse, or doing some other such thing, when they play. And the caretaker should try, through games [παιδιά], to turn the pleasures and desires of the children towards that to which they need to come to reach their end. (1. 643B4-643C8)

According to this passage, when performed correctly, education produces two main effects: it teaches the child professional skills and it directs the child towards useful activity later in life.

The pedagogue accomplishes these tasks through games or “instances of play” (παιδιά). In order to become a good practitioner of an craft (say, farming or building) in adulthood, the child ought to engage in these activities beforehand in the manner of play, using, when applicable, miniature tools provided by their caregivers.⁵⁰

It should be no surprise that the role of pleasure is specifically addressed in the passage, since pleasure relates to the focal characteristic of play and is at issue in the Athenian’s definition at T4. Games are a tool for the caretaker, which enables them to focus the child’s pleasure on serious targets. It is through games that the child becomes well disposed towards serious work, so that as adults, they might also feel pleasure at performing, or even desire to perform, productive tasks.

But this positive result is only achievable if the educational task is performed *as play*, i.e., for the sake of pleasure. Children, the Athenian recognizes, are not inclined towards serious work *qua* serious work. In fact, the Athenian describes lack of interest in serious tasks as a fundamental characteristic of children. Incantations, for example, “are serious” about producing harmony in the practitioner, but because “the souls of children are unable to bear seriousness,”

⁵⁰ Miniature tools, such as those the Athenian describes in T5, have been discovered in the children’s burials from Greek Antiquity (see Pilz 2011) and earlier from the Bronze Age (see Marangou 1991).

they are “performed as games and songs.”⁵¹ The Athenian notes that if the pedagogue forces a child to farm for the sake of utility rather than pleasure, the intended benefits of the exercise are not achieved. Likewise, if children build for the purpose of acquiring a professional skill, they may be said to build in miniature form, but they do not properly “play” and therefore they do not obtain the educational benefit, since they fail to acquire the intended knowledge or foster the intended desires. When performed in this decidedly non-playful mode, the activity fails to produce the desired effects, and is therefore inefficacious. Rather, the children become well disposed toward building and develop the desired proficiency only by performing the part of a builder as a form of play.

It is easy to see how these forms of play—or games—might be rendered ineffective by virtue of being performed incorrectly. In order to obtain professional knowledge, the game needs to be structured thoughtfully, in such a way as to actually convey the appropriate knowledge. To induce the pupil to feel pleasure towards a particular professional activity, the game form of that activity needs to be structured in a way that is actually pleasurable to the child. Both require attention to the regulation of play. As we saw in Section II, the Athenian understands the efficacy of childhood games to require proper regulation. He argues that children who participate in ill regulated games have a deleterious effect on society and that only well regulated games can foster the peaceful preservation of the institutions of the state. As we saw in Section III, well regulated play is performed in accordance with reason. Indeed, in *Republic* 9 we find that individuals in whom the rational part of the soul rules live the most pleasant life (585A1-3), so

⁵¹ *Laws* 2. 659E3-4.

games that are well regulated to accord with reason will be the most effective at producing the pleasures necessary for education through play.⁵²

But one may now recall the definition of play in T4, and wonder whether, by the Athenian's standard, all play is definitionally inefficacious. For that passage claims that play is performed (1) for the sake of pleasure, on account of (2) its impotence to cause harm or benefit that is worthy of taking seriously (σουδῆς λόγου ἄξιον). This suspicion is buttressed by the fact that each of the examples we get in the *Laws* provides evidence that the Athenian believed play to produce effects of great import.⁵³ Games are a medium of childhood education, which the Athenian notes is a "most serious thing" (σπουδαιότατον, 803D7). They equip children with the skills they will need to participate in a well ordered society. As we saw in Section II, the Athenian argues that when young people begin to play in innovative ways, abandoning the conventional games, "there is no greater destruction for a city than this" (7. 797C3-4). How can these be forms of play if they produce such serious effects?

For the Athenian's statements to be consistent, his qualification that play does not produce benefit or harm that is "worthy of taking seriously" could be understood in two ways. First, the Athenian could presuppose in T4 a statement that he makes explicit in *Laws* 7, where he comments that "human affairs are not worthy of great seriousness" (μεγάλης σπουδῆς οὐκ ἄξια, 7.803B3-5), although it is necessary to take them seriously. This reading dilutes the significance of the qualification in T4, and greatly ameliorates the problems for the efficacy of

⁵² On the pleasures of the virtuous life, see Russell 2005, 106-37 and 205-38; Rudebusch 1999, 97-114 and 123-8 (revised from Rudebusch 1994 and 1998).

⁵³ In the secondary literature, religious practices are sometimes considered forms of "serious play" (see above, n. 46 and Roochnik 2003). Scholars who use this phrase are, however, obliged to explain what makes religious practice serious, i.e., how the function of religious practice extends beyond the provocation of delight. On Plato's regular association of the playful and the serious, and the Athenian Stranger's presentation of them as "false alternatives," see Prauscello 2014, 205; Jouët-Pastré 2006.

play. For an action that produces an effect in the human realm would still qualify as a form of play. Nevertheless, according to this reading, activities that produce an effect for non-humans (e.g., for the gods) are disqualified from being considered a form of play. The Athenian, therefore, would need to explain his identification of propitiation as a form of play at T1, and demonstrate how propitiation could not be considered a serious effect. He provides no such explanation.

A more satisfying reading of the passage might understand the qualification on harm and benefit as relative to the individual practitioner. An activity may be called play, therefore, insofar as it is performed for the sake of pleasure and produces neither harm nor benefit that is worthy of taking seriously *in the eyes of the practitioner*. This reading accords with the Athenian's discussion of childhood education in T2 and T5, where the children's play produces a considerable effect, but the effect falls outside of the children's consideration. In both instances, the efficacy of games is the object of the lawmaker's study, but is not of concern to the children. In T2, the cumulative effect of well regulated games is political in nature: they allow "institutions established for a serious purpose to remain at peace." But since this consequence is realized over time rather than immediately as a result of participating in a single activity, it cannot conceivably be the object of the children's attention during performance. In T5, the effect of the game results from the children's performance, but the effectiveness of the game relies on their focusing on the immediate and trivial effects of their activity rather than on their long-term and serious effects. The caretaker is charged with directing the children's attention towards what they understand, as an outside observer, to be productive over time. But there is no serious activity on which the children could focus their attention, for children with miniature tools cannot contribute much, for example, to the work of farming or construction.

In both cases, the practitioner's lack of attention to the serious consequences of their actions results in part from the remoteness of those effects. This feature of play is reflected in the Athenian's definition, at T4. Here, the Athenian specifies that "play" accurately describes an activity that provides no harm or benefit "when it is being completed" (ἀπεργαζόμενον), or whose harms and benefits do not "accompany" (συμπαρέπεσθαι), or alternatively "follow quickly upon" (ἐπακολουθεῖν), the activity's performance. In each of the examples described above, if the practitioner were to complete the tasks with a view to their minimal practical benefit (those benefits which are immediately perceived), the activity would no longer serve as an effective educational tool. The efficacy of the activity would be neutralized because the activity's serious effects would have come into the purview of the practitioner. When this happens, the activity may still colloquially be referred to as a game, but it ceases to meet the Athenian's definition. The effects of play are worthy of much consideration by the lawmaker, who sets the terms of play as an outside observer. But play operates as a success term: strictly speaking, its proper use in describing an activity requires that the activity be accomplished without view towards its farther-reaching serious effects, but only for pleasure's sake.

It will be useful now to return to the Athenian's treatment of religious practice specifically. His description of the religious festival and its efficacy in *Laws 2* seems to use the conception of the efficacy of play explored above. Here, the Athenian describes religious festivals as a locus of human-divine interaction, where the gods constitute intimate members of the play group. He says that the gods gave humans "the Muses, their leader Apollo, and Dionysus as fellow celebrants, in order that they may be restored, and the nurturing that takes place in the festivals with the gods."⁵⁴ He later describes the immortal gods as "dancing partners"

⁵⁴ 653D3-5.

(συγχορευταί, 2. 654A1), who act as chorus leader (χορηγεῖν, 2. 654A3), stimulating human practitioners to motion. The gods interact with humans as they participate in religious practices of the festival, and both parties experience pleasure in virtue of their interaction with one another.⁵⁵ The Athenian's image of humans as playthings of the gods highlights the reciprocal nature of much play: both the player and the plaything experience pleasure as a result.

This feature of play speaks to another concern regarding efficacy that this chapter has so far left unexplored, i.e., what the gods get from religious practice. In his original criticism of the commercial model of religious practice, Socrates wonders how the gods are benefitted by the gifts of mortals. In the *Laws*, the Athenian appears to have landed on an image that recognizes the benefit that human beings can give to the gods: pleasure. Human-divine interaction is characterized throughout the work as a kind of play. Humans are repeatedly described as a plaything of the gods and represented by the image of a puppet, a dancing partner, or a piece to a boardgame. Parties to a commercial transaction meet on the basis of equality and trade goods of equal values. The commercial model operates according to a notion of debt, whereby one party's contribution or "gift" necessitates the giving of a corresponding contribution from the other party. While most Greeks likely did not understand their offerings to correspond to the value of the gods' response or compel them to respond, Plato appears to have believed that this model of religious practice was nevertheless used to justify the impious belief in *Laws* 10 that humans can force the gods' hand. The new model that the Athenian articulates (what I call the "recreational

⁵⁵ The resulting pleasure grounds a typical Platonic etymology: the chorus (χορός) is so named for the joy (χαρά) produced by the collective song and dance of the mortals and gods (2. 654A4-5; cf. T4, where pleasure, when unaccompanied by serious harm or benefit, is called enjoyment (χάρις)).

model” of religious practice) requires no such delusion about the value of mortal gifts and their consequent ability to demand a response from the gods on the basis of their indebtedness.⁵⁶

The charismatic image of dancing gods vividly illustrates how religious practice functions according to the Athenian’s model of play. He envisions choral performance as an activity in which humans and gods dance together, and so the practitioner propitiates the gods as a dancer pleases their dancing partner. The characteristics of a successful practitioner of play are likewise qualities of a good dancing partner: one who is single-mindedly devoted to the immediate pleasure of the act. A bad dancing partner is one who is distracted by considerations external to the immediate moment of the dance, including one who is motivated by a desire to manipulate or otherwise extract from their partner a future benefit for themselves.⁵⁷ Yet a fully engaged dancer may in fact propitiate their partner, and so elicit from them some (as yet unspecified) benefit at some (as yet unspecified) future time. The interlocutors introduce this image to demonstrate the pedagogical value of choral performance, which comes from Apollo and the Muses. With it they demonstrate that education is produced as a natural result of taking pleasure in dance, where again education constitutes a distal goal of the lawmaker, and pleasure the proximate goal of the participant.

In our original passage, the Athenian enumerates three benefits that occur subsequent to participation in sacrifice, song, and dance. When humans play these types of games, they (i) make the gods kindly disposed to themselves, (ii) defend against their enemies and (iii) conquer

⁵⁶ In explaining the commercial model of sacrifice, Pulleyn writes that Greeks understood their religious practice to operate in like manner to what the recreational model: “The worshipper establishes with the god a relationship not of strict indebtedness but rather one where the god remembers the gift and feels well disposed in future” (1997, 13).

⁵⁷ By casting the gods into human roles, the Athenian invites his interlocutors to consider religious practice in the context interpersonal human-human relationships. The Athenian’s illustration thus accords well with Plato’s criticism of instrumental friendships in the *Lysis* and the *Phaedrus* (see Curzer 2014 and Sheffield 2011).

in battle. If the Athenian claimed that humans ought to spend their lives participating in religious practices *with the purpose of* achieving the effects outlined, then the passage would be at odds with the theory that I am now ascribing to him. For on this view, to engage in a religious practice for the purpose of achieving anything but pleasure disqualifies it from being a type of play and guarantees its inefficacy. The subordinating conjunction that connects the religious practices to their outcomes (ὥστε) can be used to express either a purposive or non-intentional relation between them on the part of the practitioner. The context demonstrated above leads me to follow England in reading the conjunction as introducing a natural result clause in order to describe the connection between the practices and what they produce.⁵⁸

So far in this section, I have outlined the Athenian's argument that religious practice, like play, is conditionally efficacious. Specifically, the efficacy of religious practice is predicated on its being accomplished *as play*: it must be performed in a well ordered manner, in accordance with reason, and for pleasure's sake. The Athenian conceives of the relationship between the proper performance of these activities and their efficacy as unintentional. Plato's conception of play and his focus on intentions is consistent with the methodology of modern theorists who study the role of play in education. Peter Gray, for example, defines play as to include only activities that are "undertaken for [their] own sake, not consciously pursued to achieve ends that are distinct from the activity itself," and the benefits of play result unintentionally.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ The Athenian's use of the result clause is noted by England 1921, *ad loc.*

⁵⁹ Gray 2011, 444 (cf. 2009, 479-84). For this reason, however, Gray (unlike Plato) does not include adult-led activities in his definition of play, or therefore in his study of play's educational benefits.

Plato's conception of the efficacy of play resembles a phenomenon in ethical philosophy called "the paradox of hedonism" (or, alternatively, "the paradox of happiness").⁶⁰ The paradox says that theories which aim at achieving happiness or pleasure are ultimately self-defeating, for humans often fail to pursue actions which will best promote this end. In practice, they are better served by acting with a view to smaller, and theoretically secondary goals that produce human happiness, but may be neglected were the agent told to pursue happiness directly. Peter Railton concisely sums up the upshot of this paradox for human behavior: "the hedonist, it would appear, ought not to be a hedonist."⁶¹ Like the human who wishes to be happy, the sacrificant or the choral dancer may desire a positive response from the gods, but they are better served by not concentrating their aim on that particular end. Rather, they would be best served by performing these activities as forms of play. But while the paradox of hedonism suggests that humans could maximize their pleasure by pursuing action that does not immediately appear to do so, Plato suggests that by seeking primarily the immediate pleasures to be found in festival activities, the practitioner is able to win additional theogenic benefits that could not have been achieved by their play alone.

In the examples of children's games, the ability of practitioners to participate with a view to pleasure alone is aided by the fact that the benefits of their practice are unknown to them. To be sure, the lawmaker recognizes the harms and benefits associated with children's games, but the children themselves are ignorant of such matters. In the case of religious practice, the remote

⁶⁰ Sidgwick 1877, 41. Likewise, F.H. Bradley, speaking of pleasure, argues that "we must aim at it, then, by the way, without caring or trying too much to get it" (1927, 102). For in practice, humans often fail to make decisions that promote their happiness. They are better served, therefore, either by acting with a view to smaller, but theoretically secondary goals, which produce human happiness, but may otherwise be neglected (i.e. the development of familial relationships, etc.).

⁶¹ Railton 1984, 141. On the paradox generally, see also (in addition to Sidgwick and Bradley above) Hodgson 1967, 58-61; Parfit 1984, 3-10; Elster 1984, 40-1; Martin 2012, 91-118.

effects are more readily known by practitioners. Indeed, at T3, we learned that practitioners determine which sacrifices and choruses to perform “in play and propitiation” by heeding the suggestions given by the gods and the guardian spirit. The propitiatory effects of religious practice are transparent to the practitioner. The task of the practitioner, then, is to perform their activity with their focus set on the immediate rather than the remote advantages of their action. The Athenian charges the choral performer with this task in the context of receiving a complete education, but at T1 recognizes that this charge also helps the choral performer and the attendant of sacrifice to propitiate the gods. The Athenian’s requirement that humans act in the moment without consideration of distal effects is not unfamiliar to other forms of religious practice (e.g., meditation), where the practitioner paradoxically minimizes the efficacy of their action by focusing on benefits that they might produce.

The theory that the Athenian proposes in the *Laws* has several advantages for Plato. The first is that this concept of religious practice is distinct from the forms of religious practice (or “mere ritual”) that Plato deprecates elsewhere. Specifically, it avoids the criticisms that Socrates levels against the commercial model of religious practice in the *Euthyphro*, and accords nicely with the two apophatic doctrines in the *Republic* that result from these criticisms. The Athenian of the *Laws* moves away from the commercial or transactional model and turns instead toward a recreational model of religious practice. The practitioner participates for pleasure’s sake, and therefore does not complete the activity in order to fulfill the terms of a contract. Like the child who participates in proto-professional play, the religious practitioner’s activity succeeds in bringing about a serious effect only insofar as their view is fixed on the immediate and pleasurable, yet per se trivial, results of their action. Since the human agent accomplishes the

religious practice without regard for what is given or gained, these practices cannot be said to mislead the gods or to force them, the possibility of which Plato denies. Thus, the Athenian produces a clever solution to the problem of efficacy, which allows him to preserve traditional practices while simultaneously avoiding common errors concerning how they operate.

Whether Plato endorses the recreational model of religious practice *in propria persona* as a theological theory is a different matter, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation. But I have shown that this is the view that the Athenian articulates in the context of the political deliberation in the *Laws* and that resolves long-standing concerns that appear throughout Plato's corpus. The *Laws* emphasizes to a greater extent than the *Republic* the role of persuasion and pragmatism in the process of communicating the city's legal system,⁶² and the recreational model of religious practice assists in this rhetorical project. It helps the city's residents avoid the three errors outlined in *Laws* 10. It presumes belief in the gods and their involvement in human affairs, but it denies the possibility of the third error, that the gods can be misled or forced by unjust practitioners to contravene justice as the result of religious practice. This last belief fosters an environment in which members of society are emboldened to commit injustice, since they believe that they can trade the gods sacrifice in exchange for divine appeasement (885D-E). The recreational model of religious practice, therefore, encourages society to participate in the practices of the state religion and reap the attendant benefits, but also protects society from the pitfalls of traditional conceptions.

Plato's solution to the problem of efficacy is a novel one, yet it has the added advantage of being quite sensible, even mundane. In accordance with popular understanding, he accepts

⁶² See e.g., Bartels 2017 and Bobonich 1991. Even if, as argued in Mayhew 2007, the Athenian does not always maintain a full commitment to "rational" persuasion, as in *Laws* 10, persuasion, broadly understood, is central to the political project of the Athenian and his interlocutors.

that humans should participate in traditional religious practices such as sacrifice, song, and dance. And although he denies that these activities operate according to traditional interpretation, he centers his discussion of their efficacy around one of their most salient features—that they are fun.⁶³ Several years before Plato was born, Pericles delivered his famous funeral oration. In this speech, Pericles cites the number of Athenian festivals as evidence of the city’s greatness: “we have provided for the mind many relaxations from distress, making regular use of games and sacrifices throughout the year... our daily delight in which drives out our distress.”⁶⁴ The Athenian of Plato’s *Laws* believes that the practice of religion involves the gods and influences them, but argues that humans ought to participate in religious practice with their immediate view not towards extracting goods from them, but towards the delight that they produce. In short, he argues that humans should approach what he takes to be an emphatically serious activity with altogether less seriousness.

⁶³ Much research has been conducted about the educational role song and dance, but little has been done on how the playful mode of their performance contributes to this role. See, e.g. Abert 1899, Anderson 1966, Lord 1978, Woerther 2008, Pelosi 2010. Socrates’ views on the educative role of music is partially reducible to his views on poetic storytelling, since the latter often constitutes an element of musical performance. In his discussion of early education through music at *Republic* 3, Plato indicates that he views music and poetry as interconnected (376E4, 377A5). For, as Lonsdale notes, “the mixture of the verbal and nonverbal are two elements of what was understood by the Greek word *mousikē*” (1993, 30). Socrates’ description of state-authorized music is therefore bound up with his discussion of the proper content of poetic stories, and so they are often treated together (see *Republic* 4.424B3-425A5). On this feature of the secondary literature, see Schofield 2010, 239-46. Thus, the large literature on Plato’s theory of poetic education directly bears upon Plato’s theory of musical education. Yet Plato clearly believes that instrumental music, divorced from the linguistic content that may accompany it, is of educative value and so constitutes a distinctive object of theoretical discussion (397C, 398C-399C).

⁶⁴ Thuc. 2. 38.

If I am correct, the Athenian of the *Laws* encourages the residents of Magnesia to perform traditional festival activities such as choral performance and sacrifice with a view to their ability to produce pleasure, not to move the gods to intervene in human affairs. But he nevertheless recognizes the persuasive effect of felicitous religious practice and understands it to stimulate the gods to action.

This overall picture may conflict with the expectation of some readers, who may think that Plato uses popular conceptions about the gods to influence the actions of non-philosophers, or *hoi polloi*. This view of Plato is rooted from one reading of the *Republic*, where Socrates propounds a traditional autochthony narrative that is popularly known as the “noble lie.” This reading, popularized by Karl Popper (but adopted by philosophers before him such as Karl Marx, Bertrand Russell, and John Rawls), views Plato’s myth as a vehicle of sinister deception, a “pharmacological lie” that aids Plato in the enforcement of his own view on an otherwise unsympathetic public.⁶⁵ If this particular view of the noble lie is accepted, it may seem intuitive for Plato to use religious practices the way that he uses religious narratives, i.e. as a means of manipulating the masses to participate in an activity of which Plato approves, but on philosophical, non-traditional grounds. On this view, Plato appeals to traditional religion to coerce others to act according to his philosophically derived standard.

But Plato’s belief in the efficacy of religious practices, demonstrated in Chapter 2, should disincline us from the view that his encouragement of religious practices is disingenuous. And

⁶⁵ Marx 1867, 370-1; Russell 1945, 113; and Rawls 1971, 454. Popper 1945 has had perhaps the greatest influence on the scholarly discourse, and his interpretation of the passage has prevailed among scholars (e.g., see Crossman 1963, 39; Bok 1978, 169-70; Page 1991; De Chiara-Quenzer 1994, 39-45; Hesk 2000, 151-62; Dombrowski 2004 and 1997, Williams 2013).

the Athenian's integration of festival activities into his psychology—in particular his view that participation in these activities constitutes an enactment of reason—also suggests that for Plato, the enactment of religious practice and the belief that they are theogenically efficacious does not contradict his philosophical conclusions. Moreover, the noble lie of the *Republic* need not be characterized as a manipulative or coercive tool for social organization.⁶⁶ In fact, the Athenian's stance towards festival activities in Books 1-2 and 7 accord well with his underlying orientation towards guarding the city from religious dissidents throughout the *Laws*. The Athenian would have the citizens of Magnesia perform the finest games for reasons that have nothing to do with the gods. The practitioner employs the divine part of their soul without needing to accept any particular doctrine concerning the traditional gods' nature. An unorthodox practitioner will reap benefits for themselves and their city regardless of their aberrant theology, which the Athenian will go on to interrogate (in)famously in *Laws* 10.

In Chapter 7, I discuss a similar charge of deceit that is often articulated against Aristotle's use of religious practice in the *Politics*. There, I argue that the charge of deception is unjustified in Aristotle's case as well. But before we turn to Aristotle, let us first investigate Plato's treatment of prayer, another religious practice that Plato addresses throughout his corpus, but most especially in the *Laws*. We will see how Plato charts a path for individuals to participate in the practice in an ethical manner, which requires that it not operate according to the commercial model, on the basis of reciprocity. In Chapter 5, I extend my discussion to prayer and explain that Plato believes humans to reap epistemological benefits by engaging in this activity.

⁶⁶ For a persuasive alternative to this interpretation of the noble lie that does not implicate Plato in deception, see Rowett 2016.

CHAPTER 5

Plato on Petitionary Prayer

In Chapter 4, we saw that Plato understood sacrifice, song, and dance to perform various functions for human practitioners. For example, the Athenian of the *Laws* describes individual psychological benefits that practitioners derive from participating in festival activities. Engaging in sacrifice and choral performance produces delight and contributes to the development of individual virtue. But we also saw that these activities lead to larger-scale social and cosmological benefits, such as the protection of the polis and the cohesion of its people. We now turn to Plato's discussion of petitionary prayer as an independently performed practice.¹ Here, Plato focuses on the psychological benefits that accrue to the petitioner and attempts again to reconcile participation in a traditional religious practice with his earlier criticisms of traditional performance.

The present chapter begins with an analysis of two examples of infelicitous prayer that the Athenian stranger provides in the *Laws* (Section I). In this section, I show that, in each case, the cause of the prayer's infelicity is the epistemic deficiency of the petitioner. In these passages, the Athenian proceeds to endorse a positive theory of how successful petitionary prayer is to be

¹ As distinct from prayers which are performed in conjunction with sacrifice or other religious ceremonies. Plato does not discuss the role of prayer in the context of the various religious events in which they were offered. Sacrifice, for example, is treated as a part of a complex of festival activities, but the slaughter of an animal victim was preceded invariably by a prayer to the relevant gods (see McClymond 2008, 29-34 and Chapter 4, 115 with n. 12).

achieved, which concerns itself with meeting an epistemic criterion for successful prayer that the characters in the Athenian's examples do not satisfy. In presenting this criterion, the Athenian articulates a way to predict felicitous or infelicitous prayers, and to understand why some prayers are felicitous and others are not. This new method of viewing petitionary prayer likewise avoids the problems that Plato sees in the commercial model of religious practice and is consistent with the recreational model discussed in Chapter 4. In Section II, I sketch Plato's description of petitionary prayer and its efficacy and demonstrate how Plato avoids some of the ethical problems that he identifies in traditional views of prayer that rely on the commercial model. In pursuing these goals, I demonstrate how Plato's formulation constitutes a novel account of petitionary prayer. Most of the evidence used in this section comes from the *Laws*, but I also draw upon Socrates' prayer to Pan in the *Phaedrus*. Along the way, I show how, in these passages, Plato illustrates the benefits of the traditional practice of petitionary prayer by showing how the practice operates in the context of his theory of the soul: using prayer, the practitioner is aided in the process of refining their desires, bringing them into proper alignment with what virtue and reason demand.

I

In *Laws* 3, the Athenian leads his interlocutor Megillus into an excursus concerning what he takes to be a human failing: when humans take notice of an attractive object (“some great thing”), they suppose that the possessor of that thing could be happy, provided that they use it correctly.² Implicit in this line of thinking, the Athenian suggests, is the notion that, whatever

² Ἴσως· ἐννοῶ γε μὴν ὡς πᾶς, ὃς ἂν ἴδῃ τι μέγα καὶ δύναμιν ἔχον πολλὴν καὶ ῥώμην, εὐθὺς ἔπαθε τοῦτο, ὡς εἴπερ ἐπίσταιτο ὁ κεκτημένος αὐτῷ χρῆσθαι τοιούτῳ τε ὄντι καὶ τηλικούτῳ, θαυμάστ' ἂν καὶ πολλὰ κατεργασάμενος εὐδαιμονοῖ (3.686E4-8)

this object turns out to be (e.g., wealth or honors), it will give its possessor “everything they desire, or most of it, and that which is most worthy of having.”³ Rather than focus on this claim, namely that any possession could have such a significant impact of the life of its possessor, the Athenian targets a more innocuous proposition that underlies it. He questions whether it is, in fact, desirable for a person to obtain all their desires.

The practice of prayer provides an exemplary case in which this assumption is often taken for granted. The Athenian and his interlocutor recognize that, in prayer, the petitioner frequently prays for their desires to be fulfilled.⁴ The tacit belief which motivates these prayers is that the life of the petitioner would improve if their desires were fulfilled, since humans pray for what they think will benefit them. On this view, petitions for material goods (which appear to have been commonplace in the fourth century BCE) can be viewed in two ways. The material goods in question are requested either because it is thought that it is beneficial in itself to possess them, or because to possess them is an intermediate end that will enable the petitioner to fulfill other, higher-order desires. In the first instance, the petitioner assumes that the wealthy are blessed in virtue of their wealth, in the second instance the petitioner assumes that the material goods allow their possessor to fulfill their ultimate desires.

But there is a problem here. The Athenian argues that often the wishes of humans are not properly calibrated to what is truly good, and so they desire what is not in fact beneficial in either

³ ὧν ἂν ἐπιθυμῆ πάντα ἢ τὰ πλεῖστα καὶ ὅσα ἀξιώτατα λόγου (3.687B7-8).

⁴ The Athenian asks, Οὐκοῦν ἐπεὶ βουλόμεθα πάντες τὸ τοιοῦτον ἀεὶ, παῖδες τε ὄντες καὶ ἄνδρες <καὶ> πρεσβῦται, τοῦτ’ αὐτὸ καὶ εὐχοίμεθ’ ἂν ἀναγκαίως διὰ τέλους; To which Megillus responds, Πῶς δ’ οὐ; (3.687C9-12). The polysemous nature of the verb εὐχομαι (here translated as “to pray”) produces some initial doubt as to whether the Athenian is continuing his treatment of desire, or is transitioning to a discussion of prayer. Aristotle, for example, uses the verb, and the noun from which it is derived, without religious signification (for an exhaustive study of Aristotelian usage, see Mayhew 2007).

sense. For example, a human petitioner might properly desire the wellbeing of their familial or social relations, but they may also at times be mistaken concerning what is in their best interest. To illustrate this phenomenon, the Athenian provides two scenarios in which a father and son independently pray concerning an issue of mutual interest. In the first scenario, the son's prayer precedes the father's, who prays in response to his son's petitions. We are told that the father often "prays back to the gods" (ἀπεύξαιτ' ἄν τοῖς θεοῖς) those things for which his son prays (εὔχεται), as if he is intercepting and rerouting the blessings that are called down by his son. The father prays that the son's desires not be fulfilled according to his prayer.⁵ When asked why there is a discrepancy between the wishes of the father and son, Megillus correctly guesses that this is because the son is unintelligent (ἀνόητος) and still young (ἔτι νέος, 3. 687D9).⁶ For this reason, the son prays foolishly, requesting benefits that the father rightly understands will be either of no benefit, or detrimental to his son's wellbeing. The father's superior knowledge assists him in identifying his child's error, and in making an intelligent counter-request of the gods.

As the Athenian notes in his second example, intelligence does not always follow age or parentage, and so it is not *only* because the son is young that he errs. In other situations, the father may be the person who prays for the wrong object. In these cases, the errant character is described as suffering a state of childishness (σφόδρα νεανίας, 687D10-E1) despite their age.⁷

⁵ This example describes a situation in which a father and his son differ in their desires, contrary to that offered in the description of the "ensouled statues" from Chapter 3 (see pp. 99-101), who pray distinctly, but univocally with their relatives, having a doubling effect on the efficacy of the child's prayer.

⁶ For other instances in the *Laws* of Plato describing youth as characteristically devoid of intelligence, see 1. 635E2-3, 5. 716A6, 11. 934A2.

⁷ This is reminiscent of the old man mentioned briefly in Chapter 4, whose deteriorated intellectual capacity, brought on by intoxication, makes him into "a child, twice over" (δις παῖς, 1. 646A4). In the *Laws*, even the elderly whose souls are disturbed, particularly when angered, are described as youthful (4. 715D ff., 9. 864D5, 11. 929D-E, cf. 11. 931B8).

Such a father is likened to the figure Theseus, who according to tradition prayed to Poseidon for the destruction of his son Hippolytus because he was under the mistaken impression that Hippolytus had raped his wife Phaedra.⁸ In the myth, Theseus' prayer is tragically fulfilled, and Hippolytus is killed despite his innocence. That is, Theseus' prayer was theogenically and cosmologically efficacious, to the detriment of his son.⁹ Stepping outside of the mythical frame and back into the world of Plato's *Laws*, the Athenian sees parity in the father's mistake and Theseus'. In his example, the Athenian attributes the father's misplaced desires to his ignorance of what is noble and what is just (μηδὲν τῶν καλῶν καὶ τῶν δικαίων γιγνώσκων, 3. 687E1). In such a case, the son is justified in not underwriting his father's prayers by vocalizing them on his own behalf. And in the Athenian's first example, the father is justified in offering "counter-prayers" in response to his son's prayer because of their relative wisdom.

By using these examples, the Athenian highlights two features of prayer that he takes to be significant. The first is that in the act of prayer, the practitioner often makes assumptions about the certainty of their knowledge concerning what is good for them. The second is that human knowledge is fallible, and therefore the petitioner is sometimes mistaken in their assessment. The Athenian, therefore, points out an epistemological obstacle that all petitioners must face. In order for a petitioner's prayer to be beneficial, they must possess the requisite

⁸ For the mythological account, see Eur. *Hipp.*, 882-1100 and cf. *Laws* 3. 931B. Socrates contests the veracity of this claim in *Republic* 3. 391C-E, where poets are made to deny the role of heroes and gods in impious deeds.

⁹ Similarly, the Athenian believes that "poets, knowing that prayers are requests addressed to the gods, must take the utmost care never inadvertently to request an evil under the guise of a good; for indeed I think that it would be a ludicrous misfortune, if such a prayer were made" (*Laws* 7. 801A-B). The extreme nature of the mythical example conveys the responsibility of the petitioner to discover whether their desired ends are good before praying for them (*contra* Dillon, who quotes the passage above as evidence that prayer should contain provisional language, such as that found in the Christian prayer formula "but God's will be done" (2016, 9)).

knowledge so that their petition is to secure an appropriate desire. This epistemological requirement for the participant is twofold. When humans pray, they often pray for something to occur, and additionally, they tend to desire that all of their wishes be fulfilled. This introduces the first epistemic requirement: The petitioner must have the proper wishes. But in order for humans to know what wishes are appropriate to their circumstances, they must fulfill the second, and more fundamental, epistemic requirement: The petitioner must know what is noble and what is just. Only then can they work to ensure that their wishes are calibrated to the good, and therefore appropriate to include in their prayers to the gods.

In the examples that I have explored from the *Laws*, the Athenian identifies the shortcomings of a son and a father. In each case, the errant character’s failure to have the proper desires results from an underlying epistemological deficiency that is articulated differently in each example. Although each articulation has been given above, for convenience they have been tabulated below in Table 1.

Example	Errant Character	Deficiency
1	Son	ἀνόητος
2	Father	μηδὲν τῶν καλῶν καὶ τῶν δικαίων γιγνώσκων

Table V. 1: Human Deficiencies in Plato’s Examples from Laws 3

At first, the Athenian’s characterization of the father and son may appear glib and colloquial. But the Athenian’s description of the errant character from the first example uses epistemological terminology that has a precise application in Plato’s works, and the Athenian’s formulation of each deficiency becomes more meaningful when read with Plato’s epistemology in mind,

particularly as it is set forth in *Republic* 6. From this perspective, we can see that the failures of the father and the son result from the same basic epistemological problem.

In the famous analogy of the divided line in Plato's *Republic* (6. 509D-511E), Socrates divides a line into two segments, each of which Socrates defines by its association with a particular type of object.¹⁰ The first segment represents that which is visible (τὸ ὄρατόν) and the second represents that which is intelligible (τὸ νοητόν). These two segments are further bisected in order to produce four segments in total, the first two belonging to perception of the visible and the latter two belonging to perception of the intelligible. Socrates claims that humans are able to have differing levels of knowledge about each type of objects. About the visible world, humans can only attain a relatively low level of truth. They can enjoy "conjecture" (εἰκασία) concerning the objects represented by segment one, or they can have "belief" (πίστις) concerning objects represented by segment two. About the intelligible world, humans can attain to higher levels of truth, beginning with "thought" (διάνοια) and culminating in "intelligence" (νόησις), the latter of which is only held concerning objects covered by segment four.¹¹ Intelligence is the highest form of knowledge because it is concerned with what really is.

¹⁰ The typical account, known as the Two Worlds Doctrine, claims that the association is strict: humans can only have knowledge concerning the intelligible world, and opinion concerning the visible world. Others, following Fine, argue for a more flexible reading of Plato's epistemology, in which one can have knowledge of sensible objects, and opinion concerning the forms: "This makes Forms the primary objects of knowledge, but not necessarily the only ones; knowledge begins, but need not end, with knowledge of the Forms. This also leaves open the possibility of having only beliefs, and not knowledge, about Forms" (Fine 1978, 122). For more on this issue, see discussion below.

¹¹ This reflects the standard formulation of Plato's taxonomy. More precisely, as Trabattoni argues, Plato uses διάνοια to indicate the general process of thought, which covers νόησις. The term νόησις picks out the higher species of thought, which is distinctive of the philosopher (2016, 144-50).

In the first example, therefore, the son's epistemological deficiency (i.e., his being ἀνόητος) may refer to his exclusive participation in the visible, and his consequent neglect of that which is intelligible (νοητόν). On this view, the Athenian's criticism targets the son's complete immersion in the world of conjecture and belief. Alternatively, the adjective ἀνόητος could apply more specifically to the son's lack of engagement with objects represented by the highest segment of the Divided Line, thus picking out his lack of intelligence (νόησις) in particular. So far, we may remain agnostic concerning which alternative the Athenian intends in his criticism of the son from the first example. But provided that the terminological usage in the *Laws* is consistent with Plato's epistemological usage in the *Republic*, the Athenian's remarks signal that the son's misguided desires stem from a rather specific epistemological deficiency: either the son does not attend to objects in the intelligible realm, or he does not possess intelligence, the highest form of knowledge after which the philosopher seeks.

The father's epistemic deficiency in the second example is also articulated in a somewhat ambiguous manner. He errs because he knows nothing of "the noble or the just" (τῶν καλῶν καὶ τῶν δίκαιων). The Athenian's description of the father here raises a question about the scope of his criticism: does the father's deficiency concern his inability to identify particulars or general qualities? Does the father's prayer miss the mark because he is unable to identify the relevant goods for his son as they are manifest in the perceptible world? Or does the father have a more fundamental misunderstanding relating to the forms ("the noble itself" and "the just itself"), which leads him to misidentify what his son really needs, and so to offer an errant prayer to the gods?

The plural form of the substantives suggests that the father is unable to identify particular noble and just objects, as opposed to the forms of "the noble" and "the just," which Plato would

more formally pick out with the formulae “ἀπὸ τὸ F,” “F ὃ ἔστιν,” or “F καθ’ αὐτὸ.” But the fact that no specific reference to Plato’s theory of forms is made here does not mean that the reader should not read the text with the theory of forms in mind. In the *Laws*, Plato speaks through the Athenian, a non-philosopher whose theorizing constitutes a playful pastime among old men. The Athenian uses concepts and theories familiar to Plato’s other dialogues, despite his personal lack of familiarity with Socrates’ ideas (the theory of forms appears nowhere in the *Laws*). After all, in sketching these examples of an epistemically deficient father and son, the Athenian uses vocabulary that calls to mind Socrates’ theory of knowledge in the *Republic*, which posits the forms as the proper object of intelligence. It seems reasonable that the plural construction is just a more colloquial expression (befitting these particular interlocutors) that is nevertheless compatible with Plato’s metaphysics.

Like the son in Example 1, the father in Example 2 lacks intelligence because he does not know the noble or the just. In this case, the interlocutors of the *Laws* understand the father’s inability to recognize particular noble and just objects to reflect his lack of familiarity with the relevant forms. Because of his general ignorance, the father is unable properly to identify (and consequently pray for) the specific objects that would be noble and just as they relate to his son’s specific circumstances. Because nobility and justice are concepts that belong exclusively to the realm of the intelligible, and particularly to its highest division, the father’s ignorance reflects his lack of familiarity with the intelligible realm (τὸ νοητόν) in general, and also his lack of familiarity with the forms, or “intelligence” (νόησις) in particular.¹² For this reason, he cannot

¹² The verbal noun νόησις denotes the activity of νοῦς. Because νόησις is the activity of νοῦς, the two words are often used interchangeably, as in Aristotle, where the first principle in the *Metaphysics* is called alternately νοῦς and νόησις (see Menn 2012, 423). In “syncretizing Anaxagoras’ doctrine of *nous* with Milesian and Heraclitean monism,” Diogenes of Apollonia collapses the substance “air” with νοῦς, stating that air must possess νόησις (fr. 3; see Menn

properly align his desires with what is noble and just in the physical world. The Athenian also characterizes the errant father as given over (in the parlance of the *Republic*) to the passionate part of his soul, since he compares him to the figure Theseus, who is described as “enraged” (θυμωθέντα, 931B8). The son, on the contrary, refrains from joining in with the father’s prayers because he “has understanding” (γινώσκειν, 687E4). It is also worth noting that the phrase used to describe the father’s deficiency recalls the epistemological virtue of the philosopher in the allegory of the cave in *Republic* 7, who liberates himself from the cave, and then re-enters after acclimating their eyes to the brightness of the sun. Upon adjusting to the relative darkness, they will see better than those who never beheld the sun, for they have seen “the truth of the noble and just and good” (καλῶν τε καὶ δικαίων καὶ ἀγαθῶν, 7. 520C5). In the context of the allegory, the objects which provide them with insight into the world of the cave are the forms, familiarity with which qualified them as philosophers.

After analyzing each of the examples that the Athenian provides, it becomes clear that the deficiencies of each errant character stem from the same epistemic problem, which the interlocutor describes with different locutions. They lack intelligence. Now, it seems unlikely that the Athenian believes that unintelligent prayer can be felicitous (i.e., can achieve the intended effect). The hallmark of the unintelligent prayer is its misdirected plea for what is unjust over what is just, and fulfilling such a prayer would contravene the Athenian’s principle that the gods cannot be “charmed into turning against justice” (παρὰ τὸ δίκαιον... παρατρέπεσθαι κηλεῖν, *Laws* 10. 885D3-4). In his criticism of the poets, which Socrates issues in *Republic* 2

1995, 30-1 and 40). Plato adopts Diogenes’ argument, using it himself in the *Philebus* (Menn 1995, 31). Diogenes argues that all things receive their νόησις from “air” or νοῦς (fr. 5, and alternatively in fr. 4 that air or νοῦς is νόησις). This is not unlike Aristotle, who in *De Anima* 3. 5, argues that νοῦς actualizes the soul’s capacity for νόησις (an activity) by acting upon the soul.

(and the Athenian upholds in *Laws* 12), Plato contends that the gods are good. In the *Republic*, Socrates argues that several claims follow from this central contention, including that a god “can do no harm” (μη βλάπτειν), “effects no evil” (μηδὲν κακὸν ποιεῖν), and is therefore “not responsible for evil” (τῶν κακῶν ἀναίτιον, 379B). The Athenian’s use of Theseus as an example of misguided prayer does not, then, appear to reflect a sincere worry that the gods will fulfill unintelligent prayers such as Theseus’ prayer for his son’s death.¹³ The Athenian is aware that some people may take him seriously when he claims that to pray without intelligence is “risky” (σφαλερόν), and so he distances himself from making a definitive claim about how far this principle extends. Rather, the Athenian offers the myth as an extreme (and well known) instance of an ignorant prayer. Contrary to the traditional narrative of the myth of Theseus, the gods respond only to prayers whose fulfillment implicates the gods in good, not to those that would implicate them in evil. Even if the gods will not fulfill the unintelligent desires of a petitioner, the petitioner’s act of calibrating their desires with what is noble and just appears to help them to avoid the pitfalls associated with desiring (and vainly praying for) the inappropriate ends.

In one sense, the Athenian’s two examples of misguided prayer refashion this false dilemma. The image of two individuals vying against each other with conflicting prayers loses much of its dramatic character if the gods fulfill only intelligent prayers. But the agonistic nature of the examples illustrates the zero-sum nature of the familial conflict, and so the fact that the gods can fulfill only one of the two prayers. For in each case, one party prays to secure an object the possession of which the second party seeks to frustrate. Because the prayer-objects of each party is incompatible with the other, the story forces the interlocutor to reckon with the gods’ dilemma and to work out, along with the Athenian, the gods’ criterion for making their choice of

¹³ See n. 8, above.

which prayer to fulfill. But that the intelligent petitioner in each of the examples express some anxiety regarding their family member does not reflect the experience of the philosopher, who knows that it is not in the character of the gods to fulfill an unintelligent prayer by effecting evil in the world.

The examples that the Athenian provides give no clue as to how the prayers ended and which party is fulfilled, but the Athenian's conclusion that "to use prayer is *dangerous*, if you do not possess intelligence" (εὐχῆ χρῆσθαι σφαλερὸν εἶναι νοῦν μὴ κεκτημένον), is undercut by the suspicion that he is being insincere.¹⁴ In the passage relating to the ensouled statues in *Laws* 11 (discussed in Chapter 3), the Athenian's views are clearer. There, the Athenian reminds his interlocutor that to be an unjust distributor of goods is "not at all appropriate for gods" (ἥκιστα θεοῖς πρέπον, 931D2-3).

II

After the Athenian provides the two examples discussed above, his Spartan interlocutor Megillus puts the pieces together for himself. He summarizes what he takes to be the upshot of the Athenian's examples:

Μανθάνω ὃ λέγεις. λέγειν γάρ μοι δοκεῖς ὡς οὐ τοῦτο εὐκτέον οὐδὲ ἐπεικτέον, ἔπεσθαι πάντα τῆ ἑαυτοῦ βουλήσει, τὴν βούλησιν δὲ πολὺ μᾶλλον τῆ ἑαυτοῦ φρονήσει· τοῦτο δὲ καὶ πόλιν καὶ ἕνα ἡμῶν ἕκαστον καὶ εὐχεσθαι δεῖν καὶ σπεύδειν, ὅπως νοῦν ἔξει.

I understand what you mean. I think you mean that a person shouldn't pray or exert themselves so that everything follows their own desire, but much rather that their desire should follow their own prudence. But both the city and each one of us ought to pray and exert themselves for this, that they shall have intelligence. (3. 687E5-9)

¹⁴ He tells his interlocutors that they can interpret him as if he is being serious (ὡς σπουδάζων) or as if he is joking (ὡς παίζων, 688B5-6). Pages earlier, however, the Athenian had characterized the first generation of primitive, postdiluvian Greeks as simpletons who were unable "to find undermeanings in falsehood" (ψεῦδος ὑπονοεῖν, 3. 679C4-5), and instead believed everything that was said about the gods to be true.

Megillus describes the ideal object of prayers in two ways: humans should pray (1) that their desires follow from their prudence, and (2) that they have intelligence.¹⁵ One way to understand the relationship between objects (1) and (2) is by viewing them as two formulations of the same prayer-object. On this reading, a practitioner may have prudence, since, generally speaking, they may know what is good. But they may still lack intelligence if they do not allow such knowledge to motivate and appropriately direct their desires (i.e., if their desires do not follow their prudence). If the second object of prayer is simply a reiteration of the first, perhaps intelligence consists in the calibration of human desires to prudence.¹⁶

Unfortunately for this reading, Plato does not seem to use “intelligence” in this specialized sense in any other context. If anything, Plato’s use of “intelligence” in this passage is unremarkable and non-technical, since the phrase “*νοῦν ἔχειν*” is a stock phrase that appears in colloquial contexts. The epistemological vocabulary here—“prudence” (*φρόνησις*) and “intelligence” (*νοῦς*)—seems important for correct interpretation of the passage, but the relation between “intelligence” and “prudence” is more straightforward, both in this passage and elsewhere in the dialogues. Commenting on the passage above from Megillus, the commentator Klaus Schöpsdau argues that “a clear distinction between *φρόνησις* (e7) and *νοῦς* (e9), which in the phrase *νοῦν ἔχειν* also denotes ‘practical reason,’ is impossible here.”¹⁷ Herwig Görgemanns

¹⁵ Saunders translates as follows: “Your point, I take it, is that you should demand your own way in your prayer only if your wishes are supported by your rational judgment—and this, a rational outlook, should be the object of the prayers and efforts of us all, states and individuals alike.” According to this translation, Megillus argues for a modified view of (1): that the content of one’s prayers should conform with rational judgment. The Greek, however, makes it clear that the content of the prayer is *that* desires conform to rational judgment.

¹⁶ As in Hoffman 1966, 12 ff.

¹⁷ Schöpsdau 1994, 3. 409: “Eine klare Abgrenzung der *φρόνησις* (e7) vom *νοῦς* (e9) der in der Wendung *νοῦν ἔχειν* auch die ‚praktische Vernünftigkeit‘ bezeichnet, ist hier unmöglich.”

concurr that the phrase νοῦν ἔχειν, like φρόνησις, refers to practical knowledge and claims that both signify “the presence of nous in the human being.”¹⁸ But Plato also uses the word νοῦς with this designation when it appears as a technical term, not just in this common phrase. And at times throughout his corpus, Plato uses the terms “prudence” and “intelligence” (both as a part of the phrase νοῦν ἔχειν and otherwise) interchangeably with this meaning.

This is certainly the case in some parts of the *Laws*. An example from *Laws* 1 should clarify the point. Here, the Athenian states that good laws produce benefits of two kinds: human and divine. The Athenian lists the divine benefits as follows, ranked in descending order of importance (1. 631C5-D1):

- (i) prudence (φρόνησις)
- (ii) a moderate disposition of the soul with intelligence (μετὰ νοῦ σώφρων ψυχῆς ἕξις)
- (iii) justice (δικαιοσύνη)
- (iv) courage (ἀνδρεία)

One feature of the Athenian’s list of human and divine goods is that they are oriented towards each other. In describing this phenomenon, the Athenian notes that the human goods have a view to the divine goods, and the divine goods have a view to intelligence, which is their guide (ἡγεμόνα, 631D5). The characterization of intelligence as a guide puts it on a par with prudence, which the Athenian described just a few lines earlier as the “leader” or “guide” (ἡγεμονοῦν) of the divine goods (631C6). Understanding φρόνησις and νοῦς as describing the same quality in this case also produces an internal coherence within the list of divine goods. The Athenian describes the elements in the list of divine goods as dependent on one another. This is most

¹⁸ Görgemanns 1965, 152: “In diesem Sinne kann man es auch verstehen, daß für die Phronesis gelegentlich der Ausdruck „νοῦν ἔχειν“ eintritt: sie bedeutet die Anwesenheit des Nus im Menschen.”

clearly demonstrated in his description of justice (the third benefit), which the Athenian says is produced “from these [i.e., prudence and a moderate disposition] when mixed with courage” (ἐκ δὲ τούτων μετ’ ἀνδρείας κραθέντων, 631C7-8). Recognizing the synonymy of “prudence” and “intelligence” helps the reader understand a similar dynamic that obtains between the Athenian’s definition of the second benefit, “a moderate disposition of the soul *with intelligence*” and the other virtues, since the second benefit now looks forward to the first. The Athenian successfully conveys the idea that each of the divine benefits looks towards the others, and points ahead toward its leader, which is alternately described as “prudence” and “intelligence.”¹⁹ The synonymy, in this case, of prudence and intelligence clarifies the Athenian’s comments in this passage from *Laws* 1 and is also consistent with much of Plato’s usage elsewhere in the *Laws* and in other dialogues.²⁰

¹⁹ *Laws* 1. 631C5-D1. To achieve this interlocking effect, I accept the reading of Eusebius (followed by Meyer, Schanz, Burnet, England, des Places, and Saunders), who transmits μετὰ νοῦ in place of the MSS reading μετὰ νοῦν (*Praep. evang.* 12. 16. 4). As Meyer notes, the MSS reading entails that “the kind of moderation that is ranked second must therefore involve wisdom; otherwise instances of moderation that are foolish or otherwise lacking in wisdom (for instances of such moderations see *Euthyd.* 281c and *Pol.* 306a-b; cf. 308b) would be divine goods second in rank only to wisdom, a position the Athenian explicitly rejects in later books” (2015, 112-3).

²⁰ In the *Laws*, the Athenian notes that the lawmaker should not concentrate on goodness of one kind, when there are four kinds, but rather on goodness in its entirety—especially the foremost leader of the whole of virtue, i.e. φρόνησις and νοῦς and δόξα, with the passion (ἔρωσ) and desire (ἐπιθυμία) that go with them (3. 688A-B). Cf. 2. 672B3-C6, where the Athenian speaks of the development of intelligence in animals, using φρόνησις and νοῦς interchangeably. In the *Philebus*, Plato states that “all the wise agree, exalting themselves, that intelligence is king of both heaven and earth,” and that “a certain wondrous and coordinating (συντάρτουσα) intelligence and prudence govern all things, and this so-called universe” (28C6-8, D5-9). Later in the same work, he treats prudence and intelligence as two names “that deserve the highest honor,” for they are used “in thoughts concerning true reality” (ἐν ταῖς περὶ τὸ ὄντως, 59D4). On the synonymy of φρόνησις and νοῦς as describing an intellectual virtue in the *Philebus*, see Menn 1995, 17 and Kucharski 1949, who writes that “En somme, ces termes de νοῦς et de φρόνησις ont la même signification dans le *Philèbe* et les *Lois*, et, par conséquent, même quand ils désignent la plus haute vertu, ils ne veulent pas dire «sagesse» ou science morale et pratique, mais conservent leur sens originel, celui d’intellect et de pensée, et signifient ce pouvoir ou cette

Given the overlapping semantic range of these terms in other contexts, readers of the passage in *Laws* 3 should favor an interpretation that treats them as picking out the same intellectual virtue. If we apply these findings to Megillus' words, then we understand φρόνησις and νοῦς as both referring to the intellectual virtue of "intelligence," as it is described and theorized in the *Republic*. After all, Megillus' comments respond to the particular circumstances of the Athenian's examples, which as I have shown, describe two characters (a father and a son) who display the epistemological deficiency of lacking intelligence.

However, by treating these terms in this way, we run the risk of making the passage appear somewhat circular. Returning to the two prayer-objects that Megillus summarizes, (1) assumes that the practitioner already possesses a certain degree of intelligence (φρόνησις), on which to base their desires. For the prayer-object here is that the petitioner's desire aligns with their intelligence. But (2) encourages the petitioner to pray that they may possess intelligence (νοῦς) at some future time.²¹ At first glance, it may seem that, because the petitioner has intelligence prior to uttering their prayer, the request for intelligence in (2) makes little sense. But this problem occurs only if Plato views the possession of intelligence and ignorance as an absolute binary, which of course he does not. In the *Theaetetus*, for example, Socrates describes his role as attending to the progress of his associates from a state of ignorance to wisdom, and likewise their regression and occasional readvancement along a continuum of knowledge (150D-

aptitude de l'esprit, qui peuvent seuls atteindre à la véritable réalité" (43); Görgemanns 1960, who perceives a distinction between the terms, recognizes their largely overlapping roles in the *Laws*. He argues that φρόνησις is the mortal state of enjoying the divine principle of νοῦς; Sofern nun die Phronesis ein „Nus-Haben" ist, muß sie nicht unbedingt ein Teilhaben an der höchsten Form des Nus sein, sondern kann sich auch auf seinen praktischdiessseitigen Aspekt beziehen" (153). In Plato's works generally, see Armstrong 2004, 175; Delcomminette 2014, 59-67.

²¹ One recent proponent of the circular interpretation is Terence Sweeney, who argues that "our prayers should be supported by our rational judgement and we should pray for rational judgement" (2021, 250).

151A). The second prayer-object may reasonably be that the petitioner have a comparatively higher degree of intelligence than they currently possess, or that they obtain intelligence of an altogether different sort.

But we might also allow that the two prayer-objects are not listed in sequential order. In this way (1) constitutes a request for the practitioner's desire to follow their intelligence, and (2) constitutes a request that intelligence (the prerequisite of (1)) obtain, and in greater abundance. If the practitioner understands, as Megillus has just learned from the Athenian, that unintelligent prayer is infelicitous (or *dangerous*, in the mythic sense), they are motivated to gain the intelligence necessary to pray intelligently. The prayer process can still be formulated as a two-step process, but the sequence of the steps are as follows. First, the practitioner prays for intelligence, which includes knowledge of the good and the bad. With this intelligence, the practitioner prays that their desires be calibrated appropriately, to align with this knowledge.²²

According to Megillus, then, prayers are offered as a means of obtaining a higher degree of knowledge and bringing one's desires into conformity with knowledge. In the Athenian's examples, both the errant father and the errant son would have benefited from participating in such a prayer, for it would have enabled them to remedy their epistemological deficiencies and so avoid praying for the wrong objects. If the father, for example, had possessed intelligence, then he would have known the good and the bad, and thus he would have been able to recognize particular instantiations of the good and the bad as they related to his son and to calibrate his desires appropriately.

²² Plato's endorsement of this particular benefit of petitionary prayer is more appropriate to the *Laws*, which fully appreciates the general weakness and akratic tendencies of humankind, than to his earlier works, wherein the philosopher assumes that the possession of knowledge leads ineluctably towards virtue, according to the dictum "virtue is knowledge" (e.g., see Williams 2013, 377-81).

What is missing from the Athenian's account is any discussion of prayer that is directed toward an external object, such as the prayers uttered by the intelligent petitioners in the Athenian's examples. Instead, Megillus summarizes a method of prayer whose aim is to effect positive change in the petitioner's soul and would therefore prevent the petitioner from praying unintelligently. The absence of any specific, external prayer-object in Megillus' summary of legitimate prayer brings to mind the Athenian's strategy for sacrifice and dance that was discussed in Chapter 4. There, sacrifice, song, and dance are efficacious only, *inter alia*, when performed for pleasure's sake, without reference to other benefits. Likewise, the Athenian's conception of prayer limits the expected outcomes of the practice and focuses instead on restraining the intended desires of the participant. In sacrifice and dance, the Athenian wants the participant to engage with specific intention, which is specified as pleasure. In prayer, we see that the practitioner should also use the practice in order gain intelligence and properly integrate their intelligence with their desires. Here, the reader may again recall the strong connection between intelligence and pleasure in Plato's works: those whose lives are ruled by the rational part of the soul live the most pleasurable lives.²³

Whereas, in the case of sacrifice, song, and dance, the Athenian divulges the various external (social and cosmological) benefits that may accrue as a result of proper participation, here we get no such discussion. In this case of petitionary prayer, the Athenian focuses instead on what he considers to be the first-order, psychological prayer-objects. Here, the locus of efficacy is the soul, where the constitution of the petitioner's soul is ameliorated as a result of the prayer. The petitioner obtains the "chief virtue" from the Athenian's list in *Laws* 1 (alternately described as φρόνησις and νοῦς) and is able to calibrate their desires accordingly. In this way,

²³ See Chapter 4 n. 135, above.

the petitioner first prays for intelligence or prudence, which orients the soul towards the divine goods, or puts them in a noetic frame of mind. What the petitioner is supposed to do afterwards is not discussed, but presumably, when the petitioner has prayed for intelligence, they have license to pray for the object of their intelligent desire, whatever that may be. In other words, now that they have obtained the first-order prayer-object (i.e. intelligence and its concordant desires), they can now offer a second-order petition for the objects that intelligence demands.

Socrates, at the end of the *Phaedrus*, models this type of prayer. In that dialogue, Socrates and Phaedrus summarize their view on what qualifies a person to be called a true philosopher, and before leaving their pleasant spot in the countryside, Socrates offers a prayer to the god Pan:

ὦ φίλε Πάν τε καὶ ἄλλοι ὅσοι τῆδε θεοί, δοίητέ μοι καλῶ γενέσθαι τάνδοθεν· ἔξωθεν δὲ ὅσα ἔχω, τοῖς ἐντὸς εἶναί μοι φίλια. πλούσιον δὲ νομίζοιμι τὸν σοφόν· τὸ δὲ χρυσοῦ πλῆθος εἴη μοι ὅσον μήτε φέρειν μήτε ἄγειν δύναιτο ἄλλος ἢ ὁ σώφρων.

Dear Pan and other gods who are in this place, grant that I may be beautiful on the inside. Let all that I have externally be friendly to that which is within. And may I consider the wise person rich. And may I have the abundance of gold that nobody but a moderate person could plunder. (*Phaedrus* 279B8-C3)²⁴

This petitionary prayer is often called the “philosopher’s prayer,” since it shows how the lover of wisdom might most appropriately appeal to the gods, and because it comes on the heels of Socrates’ description of the philosopher and his declaration that “such a man, Phaedrus, would be just what you and I would both pray to become.”²⁵ It has been characterized alternatively as

²⁴ Studies of the prayer to Pan include Rosenmeyer 1962, Jackson 1971, 27-30; Clay 1979.

²⁵ *Phaedrus* 278B2-4: οὗτος δὲ ὁ τοιοῦτος ἀνὴρ κινδυνεύει, ὃ Φαῖδρε, εἶναι οἷον ἐγὼ τε καὶ σὺ εὐξαίμεθ’ ἂν σέ τε καὶ ἐμὲ γενέσθαι.

one of Socrates' more "philosophical," "moral," and "spiritual" prayers because of its emphasis on internal affairs, or on "the beauty that is a property of the soul."²⁶

In the prayer, Socrates petitions the god for his intelligent desires (the object of Megillus' first-order prayers) to be fulfilled. Although Socrates' intelligent desires focus on the amelioration of his internal affairs, the philosopher also includes an unusual request regarding the possession of gold. Socrates' negative use of the verbal pairing of φέρειν and ἄγειν, a set phrase to describe military plunder (often translated "rape and pillage"), offers a clue for uncovering the philosopher's meaning.²⁷ Since the moderate person must not pillage (as Plato legislates at *Laws* at 10. 884A2-4, using the same verbal pairing), in his final request Socrates continues his distinction between material and intellectual wealth, the latter of which the moderate person may rightly possess in abundance.²⁸

Significantly, the prayer to Pan shows that the prayer of the philosopher aims not only at aligning one's desires to reason, but also at securing those desires. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates aims to secure these desires theogenically, but the prayer appears to effect the psychological realm exclusively. The prayer also highlights how prayers can function in accordance with the apophatic doctrines articulated in Chapters 3-4. Because Socrates pleads for objects that accord with intelligence, the content of the prayers does not ask the gods to stray from the course of justice. The petitioner, rather than *misleading* the gods into doing something unjust, in fact encourages the gods to follow a just course of action. In this sense, by using this model of prayer,

²⁶ Yunis 2011, 247. See also Farnell 1907, 5. 434; Heiler 1932, 79; Greeven 1964, 781; Dorival 2016, 34.

²⁷ On the phrase "μήτε φέρειν μήτε ἄγειν," LSJ s.v. ἄγω A. I. 3 and φέρω A. VI. 2. See also Clay 1979, 352-3; Yunis 2011, 248.

²⁸ In the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon of Athens juxtaposes the prayers of the historical Socrates with those who pray "for gold or silver or political power or any other such thing" (χρυσίον ἢ ἀργύριον ἢ τυραννίδα ἢ ἄλλο τι τῶν τοιούτων, 1. 3. 2).

the philosopher seeks advantages that accord with justice and in so doing pursues an enterprise that is common with the gods. The prayer of the philosopher does not create a tension between human and divine will. So conceived, prayer is a practice that brings these wills into harmony and assists the petitioner in their Platonic quest of “becoming like god, as far as possible” (ὁμοίωσις θεῶν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν, *Theaet.* 175B1).²⁹

In my previous discussion of the two errant petitioners in *Laws* 3, we saw that the goodness of the gods prevents them from taking part in unjust acts. For this reason, as Socrates explains in the *Republic*, god is only responsible for the good in the world, not for the evil. Socrates’ formulation suggests that the gods are immune from the criticism that, because they refrain from correcting injustice, they are responsible for the unjust action that they fail to prevent. For Plato, it seems that the gods choose to what extent they will cause good in the world and the existence of evil indicates that their ability or willingness to intervene in the world is limited. In this context, as in the festival games from Chapter 4, prayer is a method for the practitioner to persuade the gods to add to their existing caseload and to intervene in cases where they otherwise may not.

Again, the existence of evil suggests that Plato’s gods do not seize upon every opportunity to do good, even in cases that would not contravene the autonomy of human will. The chasm between what the gods accomplish and what they could accomplish produces a category of divine action that the petitioner seeks to encourage: actions that would be just for the gods to pursue and either equally just (or at least not unjust) for the gods not to pursue.³⁰ In this

²⁹ On the centrality of the goal of achieving unity with the divine in the Platonic tradition, see Sedley 1997 and 1999.

³⁰ Mayhew (2008, 51-3) argues that prayer seeks to influence outcomes that are ruled by chance, a distinctive yet overlapping category to the one that I propose here.

context, appeals to the gods in prayer have intellectual coherence. They persuade the gods to participate in a kind of supererogatory action, which they may not have accomplished in the absence of the petitioner's solicitation. For such a prayer to be efficacious does not make it certain that the relevant prayer-objects would not have been accomplished had the prayer not been uttered, for the mortal practitioner is unable to access such information. But in order for prayer both to act as a method of genuine persuasion and simultaneously not to *mislead* the gods into veering from a just course of action, there must be a category of tasks whose fulfillment involves a redirection on the part of the gods that is in the service of the good. In the prayer to Pan, Socrates prays for the intelligent objects of his desire, whose fulfillment by the gods would be eminently just. But presumably, if Socrates had not made this petition, the gods would have been under no obligation to provide these gifts as a requirement for justice. In this case, not to provide the gifts would not implicate the gods in injustice and therefore it would not cause them to violate Plato's apophatic doctrines.

Thus far, we have focused on the practice of prayer, and seen that this form of religious action functions as follows: (1) the petitioner prays for intelligence, the highest of the epistemological categories outlined in the *Republic*, which is responsible for the apprehension of the forms. Those without intelligence are liable to offer misguided, and therefore inefficacious, prayers. In popular mythology, such prayers were deleterious, although Plato does not endorse this feature of traditional myth. Plato characterizes infelicitous petitioners as displaying a youthfulness derived from a disordered soul, given over to its emotional impulses.³¹ The prayer for intelligence seeks to address this epistemic deficiency and puts the petitioner in a better position to understand what is noble and just. To understand the nature of the petitioner's

³¹ See above, nn. 6-7.

subsequent revelatory experience, it is important to note how Socrates characterizes the receipt of intelligence. Consistently, he argues that intelligence results from dialectic. In the *Republic*, he speaks of “the other [higher] subsection of the intelligible,” and explains that by this category he means “that which reason itself grasps by the power of dialectic.” It is through dialectic that the interlocutor can draw conclusions “without making use of anything visible at all, but only of forms themselves, moving on from forms to forms, and ending in forms.”³²

It is little wonder, therefore, that the most common prayer in the Platonic corpus is offered to solicit the gods’ help in the dialectical project. The petitioner either seeks assistance in remembering a previous conversation (*Euthyd.* 275D) or in providing a dialectical contribution that is adequate to the interlocutors’ shared philosophical task (*Phaedr.* 237A-B; *Rep.* 4. 423C, 8. 545D-E; *Ti.* 27 B-D, 48 D-E; *Crit.* 108C-D; *Phil.* 25B, 61B-C; *Laws* 4. 712B, 10. 887C, 893B; *Epin.* 980B-C). These prayer-objects are aimed at the advancement of Socrates’ god-given mission as described in the *Apology*, and therefore appear to constitute well founded prayers in the service of both intelligence and the gods. Inasmuch as the prayer assists the practitioner in the dialectical process, it also assists them in the proper ordering of their soul, since, as we have seen in Chapter 4, dialectic is the activity of the reasoning part of the soul and operates without recourse to the visible world.³³

³² Τὸ τοίνυν ἕτερον μάνθανε τμήμα τοῦ νοητοῦ λέγοντά με τοῦτο, οὗ αὐτὸς ὁ λόγος ἄπτεται τῆ τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι δυνάμει, τὰς ὑποθέσεις ποιούμενος οὐκ ἀρχὰς ἀλλὰ τῶ ὄντι ὑποθέσεις, οἷον ἐπιβάσεις τε καὶ ὀρμάς, ἵνα μέχρι τοῦ ἀνυποθέτου ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ παντὸς ἀρχὴν ἴων, ἀψάμενος αὐτῆς, πάλιν αὖ ἐχόμενος τῶν ἐκείνης ἐχομένων, οὕτως ἐπὶ τελευτὴν καταβαίνει, αἰσθητῶ παντάπασι οὐδενὶ προσχρῶμενος, ἀλλ’ εἶδεν αὐτοῖς δι’ αὐτῶν εἰς αὐτά, καὶ τελευτᾷ εἰς εἶδη (6. 511B2-C2). Furthermore, it is the intelligence of the gods that allows them to see the forms in the *Phaedrus* (247D1-E6).

³³ See discussion in Chapter 4 (pp. 122-6) on the relationship between calculation (λογισμός), the reasoning part of the soul (τὸ λογιστικόν) and intelligence (νόησις). Later in *Republic* 7, Socrates compares those who seek to perceive the intelligible with those who seek the visible: “And so whenever someone tries, with dialectic and through reason without any

The petitioner then prays that (2) their desires follow from the knowledge that they have obtained. (1) and (2) involve what I have called “first-order” prayer-objects, since obtaining them is prerequisite to the subsequent acquisition of the petitioner’s desired object. Additional examples from Plato’s corpus illustrate the paramount importance of the first-order prayer.³⁴ Socrates’ prayer at *Phaedrus* 257A-B and his statement at 278B result from the interlocutors’ intellectual and philosophical insights. In the former, he expresses regret concerning erroneous views that he and Phaedrus expressed in the past, and requests that the god Eros aid the conversion of Lysias to philosophy. In the latter, Socrates and Phaedrus declare that they would pray to become like the virtuous person formerly described in the conversation (i.e., the philosopher). Understanding Plato’s conception of prayer also makes sense of the biographical sketch of Socrates reported in *Symposium* 220D, although the text in this passage does not convey anything about the content of Socrates’ prayer. In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades recalls an occasion when Socrates spent an entire day during the Potidaea campaign standing erect in one place, thinking about a philosophical problem. Alcibiades informs us that Socrates ends his prolonged period of contemplation with a prayer to the sun, suggesting that in this instance, Socrates associated prayer with the struggle for philosophical insight.

Having developed intelligent desires, (3) the petitioner prays to the gods for their fulfillment. According to the model that Plato has laid out, the gods intervene in human affairs at

sense perceptions, to find the being itself of each thing and doesn’t stop until they grasp the good itself with intelligence itself, they come to the end of the intelligible, just as the other comes to the end of the visible” (οὕτω καὶ ὅταν τις τῷ διαλέγεσθαι ἐπιχειρῆ ἄνευ πασῶν τῶν αἰσθήσεων διὰ τοῦ λόγου ἐπ’ αὐτὸ ὃ ἐστὶν ἕκαστον ὁρμᾶ, καὶ μὴ ἀποστῆ πρὶν ἂν αὐτὸ ὃ ἐστὶν ἀγαθὸν αὐτῆ νοήσει λάβῃ, ἐπ’ αὐτῷ γίνεται τῷ τοῦ νοητοῦ τέλει, ὥσπερ ἐκεῖνος τότε ἐπὶ τῷ τοῦ ὄρατοῦ, 7.532A5-B2, cf. *Philebus* 57E6-7, 59D4). On the role of dialectic in perceiving the forms, see Irani 2002, 381-3.

³⁴ I use here the helpful catalogue of prayers in the Platonic corpus published in Jackson 1971, 15-16.

each juncture. In response to steps (1) and (2), the benefit that humans accrue is epistemological and therefore psychological. But in response to step (3), the benefit is fungible, since the nature of the gods' intervention will accord with the nature of the request. As we saw in Chapter 2, it is possible that Plato recognizes all theogenic forms of divine response, i.e., psychological, social, and cosmological. But the examples that we have observed from the Platonic corpus reveal that the prayers of the philosopher appeal to the gods for a psychological response.

The prayer of Timaeus, at the beginning of the *Critias*, follows the form of legitimate prayer offered above. Here, Timaeus prays to the cosmos, and seeks two principal blessings: that the god grant preservation (σωτηρία) to whatever he had spoken properly, and that, as regards that which was spoken improperly, the god bring him into proper harmony with what is right. These two objects recognize the importance of praying only for just prayer-objects, as illustrated in the Athenian's examples in *Laws* 3. Moreover, Timaeus seeks what he calls the "most perfect and best" (τελεώτατον καὶ ἄριστον) medicine, which will ensure that he is brought into alignment with the truth. Predictably, the medicine that Timaeus has in mind is knowledge (ἐπιστήμη, 106B4-6). Timaeus wants to speak rightly about the cosmos. In order to encourage this result, Timaeus' prayer follows the steps outlined above. He seeks knowledge, and the proper alignment of his knowledge with his teachings.

Plato understands religious practices to aid the petitioner in achieving the good life. He endorses the continuance of traditional religious practice, including prayer, in his ideal cities on the grounds that they help the petitioner live a better life, in their traditional and unmodified physical form. In the case of prayer, proper participation in the practice orients the petitioner towards the forms, by helping them obtain the highest level of knowledge, the possession of

which defines the philosopher.³⁵ In this sense, Plato presents the practice of prayer, when accomplished according to the proper method, as an important tool for those who wish to participate in the philosophical enterprise.

In Part II, I hope to have shown that Plato has a sophisticated view of religious practice, and that he believed it to serve an important function in society. In these chapters, I have elucidated some of Plato's positive views on religious practice and shown how he wanted these practices to function in Greek life. Plato integrates his vision for religious practice with other spheres of his philosophical thought, and so proper worship, according to Plato, would require significant modification by most practitioners. In view of Plato's detailed attention to these matters, it cannot be, as Fritz-Gregor Herrmann suggests, that the inclusion of traditional religious piety throughout the dialogues was simply a rhetorical device that Plato contrived as an effort towards risk-management. According to Herrmann, Plato includes religious practice "to avoid all possibility of suffering the same fate as Socrates," or to escape the possibility of "being equated with the doctrine of Protagoras," Critias, or "others again who claimed that there were either no gods at all, or if there were gods, that they did not care for us."³⁶ Instead, it appears that Plato continued the project of religious reform that his teacher Socrates had begun: Both Socrates and Plato brings conventional religious duty into harmony with the philosophical life. In the *Apology*,

³⁵ Witnessing adults participate in prayer may also, as Mayhew 2008 argues, provide the young with a model to assist them in developing "proper views about the gods and their nature" (58).

³⁶ Herrmann 2007, 389 and 395.

Socrates famously describes his peculiar manner of practicing philosophy as motivated by oracular instruction. Like his teacher, Plato articulates how conventional religious practice can be used in service of his philosophical mission. Both redefine piety in the mold of the philosopher, but they each retain a commitment to piety and therefore they each maintain a traditional reverence for religious practice.

As we saw in Chapter 2, some features of Plato's thought are orthodox. For one, he believes that traditional religious practice can be efficacious. More specifically, he subscribed to the Traditional View, which asserts that religious practice is theogenically efficacious and is able to effect change in the cosmos, in society, and in the individual human soul. Considered in this light, the assortment of religious practices that were performed in Socrates' Kallipolis and in the Athenian's Magnesia were not just "traditional-appearing," as McPherran has it.³⁷ Rather, they were traditional both in their appearance and in their effect.

However, in other respects Plato's characterization of religious practice is far from traditional. Like the religious thinkers who preceded him, such as Hesiod and Solon, Plato explained infelicitous religious practice by setting limitations on what counts as a "legitimate" practice. This project of redefining the character of conventional religious conduct is reflected in entries of the Platonic *Definitions*, such as "piety," and "holiness." According to this work, piety is a "*correct* conception of the honor due to the gods," and holiness is defined as "service to a god *which is agreeable* to the god" (413A and 415A). The criteria that Plato recognizes pushed traditional religious conceptions in a more philosophically rigorous direction. While Plato may have been more conservative than other philosophers of his time in preserving traditional religious conceptions and practices, his understanding of traditional religious practice seems to

³⁷ McPherran 2006, 249 (cf. McPherran 2000, 102).

have represented a significant departure from conventional views, and to have set him apart from great majority of Greek practitioners.

As seen in Chapter 4, Plato imposes requirements of how practitioners ought to participate in sacrifice, song, and dance. He argues that practitioners should act in accordance with reason and the law, and that they should participate for the sake of pleasure alone, rather than for the sake of receiving any additional benefit. This innovation allows participants to engage in conventional practices while rejecting what Plato understood to be a dominant conception of how religious practice operated, namely through the “commercial model” of religious practice. In the present chapter, I have shown that Plato adopts a model of prayer that contrasts markedly with other contemporaneous methods of prayer. The philosopher intellectualizes the practice by focusing on the importance of choosing the proper prayer-objects that accord with intelligence. In turn, prayer becomes part of a larger intellectual and philosophical project, which is why we so often see prayers connected with the dialectical process in the dialogues. As Megillus notes in *Laws* 3, practitioners ought to pray for intelligence, the highest form of knowledge available to mortals, which is attainable through dialectic. Plato’s merging of the work of philosophy with the work of prayer expands upon Socrates’ characterization of his mission as the work of the god Apollo. From this vantage point, both prayer and dialectical philosophy work together to help the petitioner become like god.³⁸

³⁸ At several points in his work, McPherran isolates two functions of religious practice, the assimilation of the participant to the gods, and the reciprocity between gods and humans. The present chapter shows that Plato understands prayer to fulfill each of these functions together. McPherran characterizes them as distinct features of religious practice and tiers them in relation to their putative importance to Plato. Assimilation to the gods “takes precedence over those few places in the *Laws* where direct god-to-individual rewards are projected” (McPherran 2000, 103. See also McPherran’s similar view of Socrates, whose belief in just gods makes “burned sacrifice and petitionary prayer much less central to the lived piety of one’s life” (2006, 246; cf. 1996, ch. 3)). This perspective is somewhat discordant with my own interpretation of prayer, but

Some interpreters dismiss the belief in theogenic efficacy, and therefore reciprocity, in Plato. This contradicts the findings of Part II, which highlights the role of religious practice to move the gods to action, particularly through prayer, sacrifice, and choral dance. But it also gets the mechanism of psychological efficacy wrong, as we have seen in the present chapter, as it relates to prayer. Prayer is not itself a form of justice, nor is it “a kind of theatrical portrayal of divinity,” but rather it is a request for intelligence, a divine quality.³⁹ The traditional model of reciprocity is not obsolete in Plato. Indeed, it is the mechanism by which the petitioner is able to fulfill the injunction to become like the gods insofar as they can. For Plato, prayer is a means to the end of divine assimilation rather than a bygone feature of religious practice that Plato subordinates to divine assimilation.

While Plato believes in the theogenic efficacy of religious practice and characterizes the results of sacrifice, choral performance, and prayer as coming from the gods, there is a sense in which he paves the path for future theories in which religious practice produces only social and psychological benefits that are accrued anthropogenically. First, Plato gives serious thought to the anthropogenic effects of religious practice in a way that is not seen in other literature of his time. In Chapter 1, we saw that on the whole, the Traditional View understands religious practice to produce its effects through the intermediacy of the gods. Subsequent philosophers, such as Aristotle, follow Plato in exploring the anthropogenic effects of religious practice. Second, Plato makes religious practice subsidiary to the project of philosophy.⁴⁰ In Chapters 4-5, we found that

McPherran’s preference for assimilation over reciprocity nevertheless brings him to views to which I am inclined to agree, namely that “piety as a form of psychic virtue seems to be nothing other than justice *simpliciter*” (2006, 247).

³⁹ McPherran 2000, 104.

⁴⁰ See Sweeney 2021, who comes to a similar conclusion, but writes that “these two activities [prayer and philosophy] are not competing and do not have different ends,” and that neither “is prior to the other in importance of chronology” (249-50). While, broadly speaking,

religious duties and practices help the practitioner in their efforts to attain to virtue and to quicken their intellectual development, not the other way around. Plato frames religious practice as a set of activities that are pursued for the sake of a more fundamental goal, as opposed to one that is performed for its own sake and according to its own discrete logic. In making this move, Plato shows that the limits of religious belief and practice can be modulated to conform with the needs and demands of philosophy. Third, although Plato's account of prayer does not preclude the possibility that prayer can have a cosmological or social effect, the emphasis is unambiguously psychological and social. In all cases, Plato regards the gods as the agents who fulfill the religious practitioner's requests. But divine agency does not seem to be a necessary feature of his account. For Plato, when a petitioner's desires align with the intelligence they have received from the gods, their prayers are capable of being answered. But others, such as Aristotle, soon argue that humans use religious practice such as prayer as a mechanism through which they can work out social and psychological problems themselves. In other words, Aristotle recognizes the beneficial effects of religious practice, but sees no reason to retain the divine mechanism according to which Plato and his predecessors believed them to operate.

religion does not compete with philosophy, it is used as a means of achieving philosophy's more fundamental goals.

CHAPTER 6

Aristotle's New Gods and the Impossibility of Theogenic Efficacy

Like Plato, Aristotle advocated for the performance of traditional religious practices such as sacrifice, prayer, the observance of religious festivals, and temple cult. In *Politics* 7-8, the philosopher preserves conventional religious institutions and practice by writing them into the constitution of his “best regime.” In the works of Aristotle, therefore, we run into the same basic interpretive question as in Plato’s works: on what grounds does Aristotle condone the observance of religious practice? The answer to this question is a point of scholarly dispute. Geiger, for example, argues that Aristotle is silent on these matters: according to him, Aristotle neglects questions that concern “the truth of religious beliefs,” the “meaning of sacrifices and prayers,” and “the usefulness of religion.”¹

But is Aristotle silent on these issues?² Questions regarding the “meaning” of religious practices have little bearing on this study. (This is good news, since what exactly it signifies for a

¹ Geiger 2013, 37-8: “Dennoch ist es auffällig, dass sich Aristoteles in der *Politik*, wenn es um Fragen der Religion geht, fast ausschließlich mit Fragen der Organisation und Klassifikation beschäftigt. Fragen nach der Wahrheit religiöser Überzeugungen werden hier genauso wenig gestellt wie solche nach dem Sinn von Opfern und Gebeten, und selbst Fragen nach dem Nutzen der Religion (oder bestimmten Aspekten derselben) stellt Aristoteles im Grunde genommen nur für die verfehlten Verfassungen. Insofern ist die Religion und ihre Stellung im Rahmen der Polis für Aristoteles zwar ein Thema, aber in seiner Systematik der politischen Analyse ist es nur am Rande von Bedeutung.”

² Aristotle authored the now lost dialogue *On Prayer* (preserved only in one fragment, F49 R³), which suggests that the philosopher considered religious practice a field of legitimate inquiry. His student and successor to the Lyceum, Theophrastus, wrote concerning proper cultic practice in the treatise *On Piety*, fragments of which have been recovered chiefly from

practice to have “meaning” is unclear.³) But in the next two chapters, I argue that Aristotle addresses the other issues raised by Geiger: He makes claims both regarding the truth-status of Greek religious belief, which are explored in Chapter 6, and regarding the usefulness of religion, which is addressed in Chapter 7.

In Chapter 6, I show that Aristotle further limits the efficacy of religious practice by rejecting the possibility of theogenic efficacy. In Chapter 7, I demonstrate how Aristotle understood religious practice to operate anthropogenically to produce social and psychological benefits to practitioners. I also defend Aristotle against the accusation that his advocacy of religious practice involves deceit. Together, these chapters show how Aristotle was able to, on the one hand, criticize traditional conceptions of the gods and, on the other, facilitate the use of religious practice as a method of honoring the gods of Greek tradition.⁴

In the present chapter, I argue for two distinct propositions: In Section I, I show that Aristotle rejects the possibility of theogenic efficacy and, with it, notions of cosmological efficacy: Aristotle’s gods do not and cannot intervene in human affairs. To defend this point, I take up two of the most forceful arguments in favor of the view that, for Aristotle, they can and do. In Section II, I examine a tension between Aristotle’s political and ethical use of the traditional gods and their cult, and his views concerning their true nature, as expressed in *Metaphysics* Λ. I argue there that despite his theological commitments expressed in that work, Aristotle accepts the gods of traditional cult, and could even be said to believe in them.

Porphyry’s *On Abstinence from Eating Animals* (Fortenbaugh et al. 1992, 404-37; Pötscher 1964).

³ The basic trouble with these sorts of question are demonstrated in Sax 2010. See also Chapter 1, n. 4 above.

⁴ This tension is stated by, among others, Rowland, who points out Aristotle’s skepticism of state religion and his simultaneous conservatism “concerning its rites and practices” (1953, 191).

I. Precluding Theogenic Efficacy

In this section, I argue that, according to Aristotle, religious practice does not operate theogenically. I contend that Aristotle's metaphysics, particularly his writings in *Metaphysics* Λ concerning the Unmoved Mover(s), which Aristotle identifies with the gods, entails that the gods are unable to intervene in the lives of human beings, whether in response to religious acts or for any other reason. If this is correct, Aristotle must consider the effect of religious practice in the best regime to operate anthropogenically (or be guilty of deception). In eliminating theogenic efficacy, Aristotle also precludes the possibility of cosmological efficacy, since it is difficult to imagine how the performance of religious practice could exert influence over the natural world without appealing to a supernatural agent of change.

This view has been, until recently, the prevailing view in Aristotelian scholarship. Indeed, Robert Sharples documented that many of Aristotle's early followers believed him to argue that the gods do not exert providential care over human beings.⁵ He found that the standard interpretation among these commentators was that "the heavenly region is the object of divine providence but the sublunary world is not."⁶ (To these interpreters, the source of order in the

⁵ Sharples 2007, 601-5; 2002, 22-9.

⁶ Sharples 2002, 22. Nevertheless, some of these ancient interpreters (such as Aëtius, Diogenes Laertius, and the author of the pseudo-Aristotelian *De Mundo*) allowed for the influence of the god to extend into the sublunary world in an indirect, or accidental, manner. The question of how divine providence reaches into the sublunary world depends, in part, on the nature of the Unmoved Movers as a cause, about which modern scholars have offered several accounts (Sharples 2002, 4-12). For further discussion on this issue, see below, pp. 202-4 with n. 51. Sharples notes that an isolated reading of *Metaphysics* Λ might lead one to doubt whether the "supreme god" should have providence even over the heavens, but he provides some provisions to counter this inclination (2007, 601-2).

sublunary world derived alternatively from its “sympathy” with the heavenly region, its own nature, or accidentally).⁷ Modern scholars have largely endorsed the view of the ancient commentators.⁸ For example, Bernays anticipates something like my distinction between theogenic and anthropogenic efficacy in 1863, using instead the terms “external” (äussere) and “internal” (innere) efficacy. In his discussion of Aristotle’s lost dialogue *On Prayer*, he argues that the contemplative nature of Aristotle’s god forecloses the possibility of its responding to human action such as prayer, and so precludes the possibility of external forms of efficacy.⁹

However, the view that Aristotle’s metaphysics precludes the possibility of theogenic efficacy is contradicted by some influential scholars who study Aristotle’s account of religion. They argue that Aristotle advocates for the performance of religious practice in the best regime of *Politics* 7-8 at least in part because he believes that the gods respond to it. Perhaps the two most forceful proponents of this view are Richard Bodéüs and Sarah Broadie. Both authors criticize what they see as an overreliance on *Metaphysics* Λ by scholars when trying to establish Aristotle’s views on the limited reach of the gods’ agency.¹⁰ Bodéüs argues for a more conventional view of Aristotelian theology than is often defended, in part by identifying

⁷ For these views, see, respectively, DL 5. 32; Atticus fr. 8, Hippol. *Haer.* 7. 19. 2; and Aëtius 2. 3. 4. Epiphanius provides a clear statement of this view, which he probably received from Critolaus, the peripatetic philosopher of the second century BCE. He writes that “the things below the moon exist without providence and are borne along in some irrational way as chance has it” (τὰ δὲ κάτωθεν τῆς σελήνης ἀπρονόητα ὑπάρχειν καὶ φορᾶ τινὶ ἀλόγῳ φέρεσθαι ὡς ἔτυχεν; Epiph., *On Faith* 9. 35 = Diels, *Dox.* 592. 9-14 = Critolaus fr. 15 Wehrli).

⁸ Zeller 1897, 422 with n. 1; Ross 1924, cxxx-cliv; Randall 1960; and Sedley 2007, 168 n. 4

⁹ Bernays 1863, 122. See also Pépin 1967, who, adopting Bernays’ distinction, speculates that “l’efficacité extérieure ou intérieure de la prière” would have been a natural point of discussion in the dialogue (68). Olle-Laprune describes Aristotle’s so-called “métaphysique religieuse,” by which he takes away “la connaissance du monde à Dieu” (1881, 6).

¹⁰ For example, Bodéüs writes that the “prevailing view” of Aristotle requires the interpreter to overlook “everything he wrote apart from Lambda” (Bodéüs 2000, 9).

Aristotle's gods with the gods of traditional Greek religion. To counter the notion that *Metaphysics* Λ "gives a definitive account of the divine or the divine role," Broadie distinguishes between the "strictly cosmological function" ascribed to the Unmoved Mover(s) in that work and non-cosmological functions that may bring the gods and human beings into relation.¹¹ These latter functions go beyond what is illustrated in the *Metaphysics*, and for Broadie, they bring humans and gods into a relationship of an intellectual nature: humans show piety through intellection and are rewarded by intellectual growth, in a manner similar to what we found in Plato's theory of prayer.¹²

The views of Bodéüs and Broadie are reflected most commonly in scholarship related to Aristotle's theology and politics. Jeff Chuska, for example, writes that Aristotle "seems to support the notion that, as the Greeks believed, the gods are active in their own realm and that they are also active with respect to human affairs."¹³ He argues that the philosopher includes religion in the best regime of *Politics* 7 because it "can be politically useful," but also because "there might indeed be gods or at least there might be things that are divine."¹⁴ In this context, invoking the (possible) reality of gods or divine entities in Aristotle's system suggests a relationship between these entities and religious practice, but this relationship remains unclear. Chuska does not elaborate on what he means when he says that Aristotle understands religious beliefs to be "in part, true opinions," or how this might influence the philosopher's view of

¹¹ Broadie 2003, 64.

¹² See above, Chapter 5.

¹³ Chuska 2000, 203. On the influence of Bodéüs in particular, see Wattles 2006, 462 n. 9; Botter 2001, 2005; and Naddaf 2010.

¹⁴ Chuska 2000, 205 (see also 205-7, 249).

theogenic forms of efficacy.¹⁵ Section II investigates the extent to which Aristotle believes traditional religion to convey true opinions about the gods, but it is necessary first to examine whether traditional practice (implicated with true or false notions of divinity) can effect any change in the gods' behavior, as Bodéüs, Broadie, and other such as Chuska suggest.

These interpreters are united by a shared view of Aristotle's theology, which they believe grants gods the ability to intervene in human affairs. I call this the Interventionist Gods view (IG), since the linchpin of this view is that religious practice works theogenically by inducing the gods to intervene in human affairs:

Interventionist Gods View (IG): Aristotle promotes religious practice because he believes, *inter alia*, that it can be theogenically efficacious.

Due to the increased articulation of this view and the renewed skepticism about the "prevailing view," IG must be addressed before we can responsibly mark out the boundaries of efficacy on Aristotle's behalf. In what follows, I take up its most persuasive articulations, by Bodéüs and Broadie. Bodéüs invokes passages from Aristotle's ethical works and from the *Politics* to show that Aristotle took seriously the traditional gods as a point of theological belief.¹⁶ Broadie's criticism focuses on one such passage from *Nicomachean Ethics* 10. I first consider Broadie's interpretation of *NE* 10 (in Section I. 1), and then show that the other problem passages raised by

¹⁵ Chuska leaves open the possibility that Aristotle advocates legal reform because it is socially efficacious, but also because the gods might intervene in human affairs non-socially as a result.

¹⁶ Here, Bodéüs reflects the sentiment of Anton-Hermann Chroust, who in 1973 wrote of his frustration that, although religion was "a vital aspect of Aristotle's philosophic thought," it has been "almost completely overlooked or, still worse, simply ignored" (1973, 221-2).

Bodéüs are in fact no problem at all for those who view Aristotelian theology as entailing a rejection of theogenic efficacy (in Section I. 2). If Aristotle rejected theogenic forms of efficacy, then we can dispense with interpretations such as IG, which require Aristotle to posit gods who can be influenced by human action and, in turn, influence the sublunary, human world.

I. 1 Broadie's Objection

Broadie uses a famous passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics* that appears *prima facie* to support IG in order to complicate the prevailing interpretation of Aristotelian theology. Broadie's interpretation of this passage, which contains the so-called *theophilestatos* argument, forms the basis of her objection. Here, Aristotle proposes a hypothetical: if the gods do give attention to human affairs, then they would act to intervene in human affairs. If Aristotle intends the protasis of this conditional to express a truth about the nature of human-divine interaction, he might also uphold the principle of theogenic efficacy, for it seems to confirm IG. The full passage runs as follows:

[T1] εἰ γὰρ τις ἐπιμέλεια τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων ὑπὸ θεῶν γίνεται, ὥσπερ δοκεῖ, καὶ εἴη ἂν εὐλογον χαίρειν τε αὐτοὺς τῷ ἀρίστῳ καὶ συγγενεστάτῳ (τοῦτο δ' ἂν εἴη ὁ νοῦς) καὶ τοὺς ἀγαπῶντας μάλιστα τοῦτο καὶ τιμῶντας ἀντευποιεῖν ὡς τῶν φίλων αὐτοῖς ἐπιμελουμένους καὶ ὀρθῶς τε καὶ καλῶς πράττοντας. ὅτι δὲ πάντα ταῦτα τῷ σοφῷ μάλισθ' ὑπάρχει, οὐκ ἄδηλον. θεοφιλέστατος ἄρα. τὸν αὐτὸν δ' εἰκὸς καὶ εὐδαιμονέστατον· ὥστε κἂν οὕτως εἴη ὁ σοφὸς μάλιστ' εὐδαίμων.

For if the gods give any attention to human affairs, as is thought, it would be reasonable both that they should delight in what is best and most akin to themselves (that would be intelligence), and that those who love and honor this most the gods should, in response, treat well, because they give attention to the things that are dear to them and they act both rightly and nobly. It is no mystery that all of these things belong to the wise person most of all; so they are dearest to the gods. And it is reasonable that this person also be the most happy, so that in this way also the wise person would be the happiest. (*NE* 10. 8, 1179a24-32)

The thesis of Broadie’s paper is that the *theophilestatos* argument provides an “implicit definition” of piety, a topic that is conspicuously absent in Aristotle’s writings.¹⁷ Specifically, she argues that in T1, Aristotle presents his own view that the gods reward those who love (ἀγαπᾶν) and honor (τιμᾶν) intelligence by “treating them well in response” (ἀντενποιεῖν).¹⁸ This interpretation, according to Broadie, is evidenced by Aristotle’s earlier testimony at *NE* 10. 8, 1178^b8-22 that “divine activity is theoretic.”¹⁹ She therefore rejects the view that in T1 Aristotle is simply “sing[ing] along with the vulgar” and paying lip service to a traditional notion that “heaven rewards those who love the gods and are good.”²⁰

Whether Aristotle believes that the gods intervene in human affairs to treat humans well in return for their devotion to intelligence hinges upon whether he accepts the premise contained in the protasis, i.e., that the gods give attention to human affairs (τις ἐπιμέλεια τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων ὑπὸ θεῶν γίνεται).²¹ Aristotle addresses the attention that gods give to human affairs in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1, in a passage that again comes in the form of a protasis of a conditional statement: “If, then, humans have any other gift of the gods, it is reasonable that happiness be god-given, especially to the extent that it is the best of human things” (*NE* 1. 9, 1099^b11-13).²² The protasis in T1 offers up what human behavior (if anything) the gods reward, whereas this

¹⁷ In response to Broadie, Aufderheide 2017 provides an interpretation of the *theophilestatos* passage that does not refer to piety but rather discusses a more general connection between external resources and happiness.

¹⁸ See also Chroust 1973b, 1. 224-8 and 234-5 who argues that Aristotle recognized this kind of divine reciprocity as a “mystical (personal and intimate) union of, and communion between, man and God (225).

¹⁹ Broadie 2003, 62.

²⁰ Broadie 2003, 61-2. See also Verdenius 1960, 60.

²¹ At least some early commentators on Aristotle believed the philosopher to hold that god “knows particulars” (e.g., Averroes’, *Commentary of Aristotle’s Metaphysics* §§ 1707-8 and Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics* 11. 2614-16).

²² εἰ μὲν οὖν καὶ ἄλλο τί ἐστι θεῶν δῶρημα ἀνθρώποις, εὐλογον καὶ τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν θεόσδοτον εἶναι, καὶ μάλιστα τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων ὄσφ βέλτιστον.

latter passage, along with T1, articulates what reward (if any) the gods provide to humans in response. But Aristotle never endorses the view that the gods give attention to human affairs, neither in T1 nor in *NE* 1. For this reason, in both passages the philosopher’s personal commitment to the content of the apodosis is subject to doubt.

In *NE* 1, the question of whether the gods give gifts is put off for a later inquiry, and Aristotle only commits himself to the weaker view that happiness is “a divine and blessed thing” (θεϊόν τι καὶ μακάριον, *NE* 1. 9, 1099^b17-8). In T1, Aristotle restricts the statement that the gods give attention to human affairs with the parenthetical phrase “as it seems” (ὡσπερ δοκεῖ). This phrase suggests that the thesis Aristotle introduces is meant to convey a common view rather than a view to which he is personally committed. In his use of the phrase, Aristotle refrains from expressly stating to whom such a thesis would seem best. Without an accompanying dative, which informs the reader about who accepts the thesis under discussion, the construction signals that the proposition is simply a commonly accepted view.²³ Indeed, if Aristotle meant to express his own view, there would be more natural ways to do so.²⁴ Moreover, as the argument unfolds, Aristotle further distances himself from the common view that he put forth. In the final sentence of the passage, at 1179^a32, the philosopher reasserts his agnosticism with the potential optative (κἄν... εἴη).²⁵

²³ So read the translations of Ross 1925, Bartlett and Collins 2011, and Sachs 2012. The phrase is translated more neutrally in Reeve 2014 and Irwin 1999, although the latter reads Aristotle as accepting the basic proposition that someone living an intellectual life “will be befriended by the gods” (312). Aristotle uses the phrase in five other contexts, where it is likewise used to convey common views (*An. Pr.* 95a25, *EE* 1227b14, *Gen. corr.* 332b10, [*Mag. mor.*] 1. 34. 30. 2 and 2. 11. 2. 3).

²⁴ For an examination of Aristotle’s use of the phrase ὡσπερ δοκεῖ in T1 and similar idioms, see Olle-Laprune 1881, 7-9 n. 1.

²⁵ The conditional does not explicitly convey Aristotle’s disbelief, as would a contrary-to-fact conditional (εἰ οὕτως ἦν). The present general construction expresses his agnosticism, which as we will see, is justified elsewhere in the corpus. Aristotle typically avoids using contrary-to-

It is nevertheless possible that Aristotle does not explicitly endorse the argument in the text, but accepts it. Broadie identifies two chief objections that scholars raise to this interpretation, with which she needs to contend in order to establish that the gods “treat well in return” those who honor and love intelligence: (1) these scholars mistakenly believe that *Metaphysics* Λ denies the possibility of interventionist gods, and (2) the kinds of interventions traditionally attributed to the gods seem too childish for Aristotle to accept. On the latter point, it is the possibility that the gods intervene non-psychologically that seems to be of greatest concern. Broadie argues that those who love the gods are, according to Aristotle, rewarded not with “flocks and herds multiplying and ships coming home,” nor with “successful economic and social ventures,” as proponents of the Traditional View from Chapter 1 may believe. Rather, they are rewarded intellectually, with “bursts of understanding.”²⁶ This interpretation resists the belief that gods intervene cosmologically or socially in the affairs of human beings (i.e., in a “childish manner”), but it maintains for Aristotle a commitment to theogenic efficacy. Broadie produces this interpretation *ex hypothesi*, in order to provide a maximally plausible story for how Aristotle could accept the argument provided in T1. While it seems possible that this would be Aristotle’s view if he were to accept the argument in T1, we need not worry ourselves with it overmuch as yet, since it is wholly dependent on our accepting both her reading of the protasis in T1 and the broader argument against objection (1) concerning *Metaphysics* Λ.

Broadie argues that Aristotle’s goal in *Metaphysics* Λ is to establish the cosmological necessity of god rather than to establish anything like a comprehensive account of god’s nature. If this is true, Aristotle’s account of the gods can attribute to them qualities that go beyond what

fact constructions, even when it is obvious that he is proposing a fictitious condition (see, e.g. *Met.* Λ, 1071^b6).

²⁶ Broadie 2003, 62-4

is found in that text. But in order for Aristotle to posit interventionist gods, his theology must make allowances that are irrelevant to Aristotle's purposes in that context. Specifically, he must allow for gods (either the Unmoved Movers of *Metaphysics* Λ or other entities) who possess non-cosmological functions. To read T1 as an endorsement of interventionist gods, Aristotle must not mean for the entity that he refers to as "god" in *Metaphysics* Λ to preclude the possibility of other gods, who fulfill non-cosmological roles and take on qualities distinct from the Prime Mover of Λ 6-7 and the unmoved movers of Λ 8.

Metaphysics Λ is organized around a simple distinction between sensible substance (Λ 1-5) and non-sensible substance (Λ 6-10).²⁷ It is the latter discussion that is relevant now, since it is in these chapters that Aristotle uses his metaphysical theory to generate various theological insights. Here, Aristotle treats two types of non-sensible substances: in chapters 6-7, he discusses the first unmoved mover, the so-called Prime Mover, which is the singular and ultimate source of motion. Aristotle connects his metaphysical investigation of substance with theology at the end of Λ 7, where he famously describes the Prime Mover as "god" (1072^b18-30) in virtue of being a "living being, eternal, and most good" (ζῶον αἰδίων ἄριστον, 1072^b29). In chapter 8, Aristotle then identifies additional unmoved movers, and in doing so treats "Unmoved Movers" as a general class that includes the Prime Mover.

Of course, Broadie is right to deny the proposition "that nothing can be true of Aristotle's god that is not present or prefigured in the theory in Lambda."²⁸ Indeed, there is an unfortunate tendency to read *Metaphysics* Λ as arguing from the premise that "the Prime Mover is god" to the conclusion that the "god has determinate qualities Q₁, Q₂, Q₃." In fact, the argumentative

²⁷ For Λ's place in the *Metaphysics* as a whole, see Menn 2021, n. 5.

²⁸ Broadie 2003, 64.

strategy is reversed: Aristotle describes the Prime Mover as “god” in *Λ* 7, 1072^b18-30 only after establishing the nature of the Prime Mover (i.e. that it is both a “living thing” (ζῶον) and “immortal” (ἀθάνατον)), which accords with the independently established criteria for being a god (*Top.* 122^b13, cf. *Met.* *Λ*, 1072^b28-9; *Meteor.* 1. 2, 339^b19-30).²⁹ This retrospective application of the term “god” to substances that meet a broad definition elucidates Aristotle’s later description of additional substances as gods. It also leaves room for him to predicate other substances as gods beyond these. There is, in short, no logical necessity for Aristotle to confine his view of gods to those non-sensible substances that he treats in *Metaphysics Λ*. Aristotle could offer up the gods of *Metaphysics Λ* as an explanation for motion in the cosmos, but he could also, in principle, recognize other discrete entities as gods who are not treated in *Metaphysics Λ*, since they have no bearing on the philosophical investigation that takes place there. But one might reasonably ask: If this is Aristotle’s view, why does he choose to identify the non-sensible substances of *Metaphysics Λ* as gods at all? Surely, this only confuses the issue.

Λ 8 is a pivotal text for clarifying this interpretive issue. It demonstrates that Aristotle understood *Metaphysics Λ* to shed light on the field of theology and the nature of the gods specifically. It opens with reference to the Prime Mover discussed in previous chapters, stating that the theme of the new chapter is to determine whether there is only “one such substance or many.”³⁰ The characteristics of the substance under investigation are listed immediately prior, and include exactly those qualities that motivated Aristotle to describe the Prime Mover as god: it is a living being, eternal, and most good, but also unmovable, non-sensible, without magnitude, without parts, and indivisible (*Λ*.7, 1073^a3-7). Aristotle’s answer to the question at the opening

²⁹ For an examination of the structure of Aristotle’s argument, see DeFilippo 1994.

³⁰ *Met.* *Λ* 8, 1073^a14-5: πότερον δὲ μίαν θετέον τὴν τοιαύτην οὐσίαν ἢ πλείους, καὶ πόσας, δεῖ μὴ λανθάνειν.

of Λ 8 is that there are indeed multiple such substances. Given that they possess the relevant characteristics, we can safely assume that Aristotle would also describe them as gods. Scholars have raised questions about the compatibility of Λ 6-7, which proposes a single god and Λ 8, which proposes a theology of many gods. Indeed, some have called into question the place of chapter 8 in the *Metaphysics* Λ and with it, Aristotle's insistence on a plurality of Unmoved Movers or gods.³¹

The hypothesis that Λ 8 does not belong to the original composition of the *Metaphysics* has fallen out of favor, and indeed Broadie draws on passages from Λ 8 in her own analysis.³² But talk of the tension between the "monotheism" of Λ 6-7 and the "polytheism" of Λ 8 persists.³³ The use of the terms "monotheism" and "polytheism" in framing this debate suggest that, on either view, Aristotle is broadly regarded as identifying the non-sensible substance(s) of the *Metaphysics* as the god(s) of religious cult. For in Λ 8, Aristotle makes clear that his non-sensible substances do not just satisfy a general definition of "god," but additionally that they are

³¹ Jaeger and Ross, for example, read Aristotle's treatment of a single unmoved mover (the "Prime Mover") in Λ 6-7 as incompatible with Λ 8, which explicitly states that unmoved movers are many (cf. von Arnim 1931 and Guthrie 1933-4). Jaeger, followed by Ross, argues that Λ 8 was composed much later in Aristotle's career than the rest of the *Metaphysics*, and was subsequently and mistakenly inserted by editors. He writes that the "grotesque multiplication of the prime mover, this army of 47 or 55 movents, inevitably damages the divine position of the prime mover and makes the whole theology a matter of mere celestial mechanics" (1948, 347). Jaeger earlier describes the theology outlined in Λ 6-7 as a "transcendental monotheism," which fits rather poorly with Aristotle's late-career innovations in Λ 8 (1948, 139). Jaeger's view that Λ 6-7 proposes a system of Aristotelian monotheism and Λ .8 proposes, presumably, a doctrine of polytheism reflects a reading of Aristotle's description of the Prime Mover as god at Λ 7, 1072^b18-30 as making an exclusive claim about what can be considered a god (i.e. the Prime Mover alone).

³² For detailed criticism of the hypothesis, see Judson 2019, 238-41, who had hesitantly accepted the hypothesis in her earlier work (see, e.g., 1994, 156).

³³ See Menn Forthcoming (§III β 2b).

to be identified as the gods of the popular imagination, as described in traditional religious narrative:

παραδέδοται δὲ παρὰ τῶν ἀρχαίων καὶ παμπάλαιων ἐν μύθου σχήματι καταλειμμένα τοῖς ὕστερον ὅτι θεοὶ τέ εἰσιν οὗτοι καὶ περιέχει τὸ θεῖον τὴν ὅλην φύσιν. τὰ δὲ λοιπὰ μυθικῶς ἤδη προσῆκται πρὸς τὴν πειθῶ τῶν πολλῶν καὶ πρὸς τὴν εἰς τοὺς νόμους καὶ τὸ συμφέρον χρήσιν· ἀνθρωποειδεῖς τε γὰρ τούτους καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ζῴων ὁμοίους τισὶ λέγουσι, καὶ τούτοις ἕτερα ἀκόλουθα καὶ παραπλήσια τοῖς εἰρημένοις, ὧν εἴ τις χωρίσας αὐτὸ λάβοι μόνον τὸ πρῶτον, ὅτι θεοὺς ᾤοντο τὰς πρώτας οὐσίας εἶναι, θείως ἂν εἰρησθαι νομίσειεν, καὶ κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς πολλάκις εὐρημένης εἰς τὸ δυνατὸν ἐκάστης καὶ τέχνης καὶ φιλοσοφίας καὶ πάλιν φθειρομένων καὶ ταύτας τὰς δόξας ἐκείνων οἷον λείψανα περισεσῶσθαι μέχρι τοῦ νῦν. ἢ μὲν οὖν πάτριος δόξα καὶ ἢ παρὰ τῶν πρώτων ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον ἡμῖν φανερὰ μόνον.

[T2] A tradition, left behind in the form of a story, has been handed down to later humanity by people of ancient and very old times, that these [heavenly bodies] are gods and that the divine encloses the whole of nature. And the remainder has been added later mythically with a view to the persuasion of the multitude and to its usefulness for the laws and the [common] advantage. For they say that they are both of human form and that they resemble some of the other animals, and other things consequent on and similar to what has been mentioned. To take the first point alone (i.e. that they thought that the first substances were gods), separating it from the additions, they would think that it had been divinely spoken, and that, while probably each craft and branch of philosophy has often been discovered as far as possible and has perished once more, these opinions of those people have been saved from ruin, like remnants, until the present. The opinion of our ancestors and that from the first people are clear to us only to this extent. (Λ 8, 1074^a38-^b14).

Broadie's contention, noted above, allows for the interpreter to separate the discussion in Λ 7 from Aristotle's views concerning the gods cited in the *theophilestatos* argument in T1. But in T2, Aristotle again uses insights from first philosophy to make conjectures concerning the nature of the gods and their reception in contemporary times. And here he is explicit in connecting his insights from first philosophy to conceptions of traditional religion.

In order to recognize interventionist gods in T1, one might still posit gods who are separate from the gods of Λ 6-8 and of traditional religion. This solution is unworkable for a few reasons. According to this view, the gods of T1 would not be the same as the gods of T2. In this

case, Aristotle's gods would be of at least two kinds: first, the Unmoved Movers of *Metaphysics* Λ, which he uses to synthesize his cosmological account with traditional conceptions about the gods in T2; and second, a distinct type of god(s) who intervene in human affairs in order to reward human devotion to the intellect in T1.³⁴ The former are the object of explicit discussion, and are used to explain phenomena in the reader's world. But the existence of the latter is derived from an idiosyncratic interpretation of a single passage in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, a treatise that has no obvious connection to theology.

Additionally, the gods of T1 oddly borrow features from the traditional accounts of the gods (e.g., they are interventionist and operate on the principle of reciprocity), which T2 claims are mistakenly attributed to the traditional gods. This view requires that the traditional gods mistakenly accrued such attributes over time, but that a separate set of divinities (unknown to the masses) may be accurately said to possess them. It also conceives Aristotle as adopting a quite elaborate theology that is never elaborated upon, but which contradicts the few sources of evidence that interpreters possess. Furthermore, it creates a notion of piety that must operate on two levels, corresponding with the two proposed types of divinity: an intellectualist piety to explain the *theophilestatos* argument in T1, and a vulgar piety that can explain Aristotle's commitment to the traditional religious practice in the best regime of the *Politics*.

Relatedly, the theory rejects the view that *Metaphysics* Λ reflects Aristotelian theology, since on this view Aristotle's identification of the Prime Mover and the Unmoved Movers as gods represents only a recognition that they possess the requisite characteristics to be considered

³⁴ This approach is perhaps suggested by Broadie in her response to Natali's commentary on 1179a22-32 (1999, ad loc) in Broadie 2003, 62 n. 25. She further notes that Bodéüs, to whom we turn next, is on "less firm ground in holding that the gods [Aristotle] refers to are 'those who are honored in the city'" (Broadie 2003, 62 n.24; quoting Bodéüs 2000, 11).

divine. Yet T2 provides the Prime Movers and the Unmoved Movers with a genuine place in his theological world: Aristotle explicitly identifies the heavenly bodies, which the Unmoved Movers move, with the gods of traditional religion. This element of Aristotelian theology appears to have been articulated in Aristotle’s lost dialogue *On Philosophy*. There, Sextus Empiricus reports, Aristotle used to say that humanity’s concept of god derives from their observation of the heavenly bodies and from their attributing the cause of heavenly movement to god.³⁵ Philo corroborates Sextus’ report, when he writes that, for Aristotle, the great and visible god “carries in motion the sun and moon and truly the remaining pantheon of planets and fixed stars.”³⁶

Aristotle denies to the gods many of the attributes traditionally used to characterize them. But his theory redirects human beings to associate the gods with new objects. The apparent fusion of cosmology and theology also accords with Aristotle’s longstanding interest in providing a cohesive theory that brings together various aspects of his philosophical program (e.g., physics, cosmology, first philosophy) with theology, as evidenced in the *Physics*.³⁷ In that work, Aristotle pulls together physics, cosmology, and first philosophy. In *Metaphysics* Λ he advances this synthesizing project by bringing together these fields of study with theology.

³⁵ *De Philosophia* F10 R³ (= Sext. Emp., *Math.* 9. 20-3).

³⁶ *De Philosophia* F18 R³ (= Philo, *de aetern. mund.* 3. 10-11): διαφέρειν τοσοῦτον ὀρατὸν θεὸν ἥλιον καὶ σελήνην καὶ τὸ ἄλλο τῶν πλανήτων καὶ ἀπλανῶν ὡς ἀληθῶς περιέχοντα πάνθειον.

³⁷ In his account of movement in *Physics* 8, Aristotle argues that “all things that are moved are moved by something” (ἅπαντα ἂν τὰ κινούμενα ὑπὸ τινος κινοῖτο, *Phys.* 8.4, 256^a2-3). Eventually, he posits an ultimate cause of motion (the Unmoved Mover) in order to prevent an infinite regress, wherein one might seek further and further causes of motion *ad infinitum* (8. 5). The account of the Unmoved Mover in *Physics* 8 incorporates physics, cosmology, and first philosophy, which includes the study of sensible objects, or physics, as a part of its larger investigation of “being as being” (see Judson 2018, 255-65).

Aristotle does this first at Λ 7, 1072^b18-30 when he moves from establishing the nature of the Prime Mover to identifying it as a god and characterizing the kind of life it enjoys.³⁸

Although Broadie avoids attributing to Aristotle “childish” forms of theogenic efficacy that involve social and cosmological realms whereby material goods are given in return for human adoration, in her view Aristotle nevertheless endorses theogenic efficacy of a psychological nature. For according to T1, the gods give attention to and intervene in human affairs to benefit those who attend to their intellect.³⁹ For example, T1 highlights the ability of the god to improve human beings’ psychological states, ultimately contributing to their happiness.⁴⁰

I hope to have shown that Aristotle cannot have endorsed such a view, since in *Metaphysics* Λ he denies providential gods *tout court* and so did not countenance a two-tiered conception of the gods: a class of interventionist gods (from T1), and a class of Unmoved Movers (including the Prime Mover), who do not act in the human realm. That view is

³⁸ The twofold division of *Metaphysics* Λ highlights the cohesive nature of physics, cosmology, and first philosophy. Together they treat two cohesive and complementary investigations: the investigation of sensible substance is physics, and the investigation of non-sensible substance is first philosophy and theology. In his introduction to *Metaphysics* M, Aristotle refers back to Λ 1-5 with the phrase “in our discussion of physics” ($\epsilon\nu\ \mu\epsilon\nu\ \tau\eta\ \mu\epsilon\theta\acute{o}\delta\omega\ \tau\eta\ \tau\acute{\omega}\nu\ \varphi\upsilon\sigma\iota\kappa\acute{\omega}\nu$), showing that he recognizes *Metaphysics* Λ to cover multiple interrelated disciplines. Annas translates the phrase as “in the treatise on *Physics*” (Annas 1976, ad loc.). The locution “ $\epsilon\nu\ \tau\eta\ \mu\epsilon\theta\acute{o}\delta\omega$,” however, is not Aristotle’s usual way of referring to his works, and appears elsewhere only in the *Politics*, where Aristotle refers to a subject broached in an earlier chapter of the same work (6, 1317^b34).

³⁹ Broadie 2003, 60-7; *contra* Zeller 1897, 422; Burnet 1900, ad 1179a22; Dirlmeier 1956 and Gauthier and Jolif 1959, ad loc.; Burger 1991, 137.

⁴⁰ While Aristotle does allow that material goods (or “external prosperity”) are required for happiness, these are taken as necessary but insufficient conditions for the production of happiness (*NE* 10. 8, 1179^b33-1179^a17). The discussion of external prosperity constitutes a brief caveat for Aristotle’s claim that happiness is a form of intellectual activity ($\theta\epsilon\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\alpha$, *NE* 10. 8, 1178^b31-2). T1 offers one route towards explaining how the wise person, who engages in contemplation, attains the happiness that Aristotle promises through the intermediation of the gods.

contradicted by the evidence of Λ 8, which explicitly identifies the Unmoved Movers with the gods, and with the eventual gods of traditional religious narrative. Broadie is right that Aristotle is not “singing along with the vulgar” or giving “lip service” to the idea that the gods intervene in human affairs in T1. For that would suggest that he pretends to accept IG, while rejecting it in reality. I argue that Aristotle neither believes the argument that he presents in T1, nor does he pretend to believe it. Rather, Aristotle demonstrates that the wise man is happiest, even if he grants that the dominant view is correct (i.e., that the gods “treat well in return” those that honor them).

1.2 Richard Bodéüs’ Objection

Richard Bodéüs’ makes two points that are crucial to our present investigation. First, like Broadie, he criticizes what he calls “the prevailing view,” which restricts Aristotle’s theology to what is written in *Metaphysics* Λ concerning the Unmoved Movers. Bodéüs differs from Broadie, however, in identifying Aristotle’s gods with the gods of traditional civic religion and not with the Unmoved Movers of *Metaphysics* Λ or some distinct entities. The second point relates to this identification: Bodéüs argues that the Aristotelian gods accord with traditional conceptions. This means that they react to religious practice theogenically and intervene in ways depicted in popular culture.

Bodéüs argues for his first point in the first chapter of his book, *Toward Reconsideration of the Prevailing View*. Here he catalogues several passages, drawn from the ethical works and the *Politics*, that are thought to conflict with the theological account in the *Metaphysics*. In addition to those already treated in the discussion of Broadie, Bodéüs marshals thirteen passages

that contradict the so-called “cosmic theology” from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. They can be found in the order in which they are cited, in TABLE VI. 1, below:

#	Passage	Bodéüs (p.)
1	<i>NE</i> 4. 3, 1123b18	7
2	<i>NE</i> 8. 9, 1160b24	7
3	<i>Top.</i> 1. 11, 105a5-7	8
4	<i>NE</i> 8. 12, 1162a4-7	8
5	<i>Pol.</i> 6. 8, 1322b18ff.	8
6	<i>Pol.</i> 7. 10, 1330a11-13	8
7	<i>Pol.</i> 7. 9, 1329a29-30	8
8	<i>NE</i> 7. 11, 1244 ^a 14-15 ⁴¹	8
9	<i>Pol.</i> 7. 9, 1329a32	9
10	<i>Pol.</i> 7. 16, 1335b14-16	9
11	<i>NE</i> 8. 9, 1160a19-20	9
12	<i>Pol.</i> 2. 4, 1262b7-9	9

Table VI. 1: Passages Cited in Opposition to the “Prevalent View”

Bodéüs argues that these passages, taken together, demonstrate Aristotle’s commitment to seven theses. He takes these theses to discredit the view that the character of the Unmoved Movers bounds Aristotle’s understanding of the character of the gods. They are listed below, and the passages from the table above that support each thesis are provided in parentheses.

1. Humans ought to honor the gods (1-3)
2. Humans have obligations to the gods because they are our greatest benefactors (4)
3. Political leaders should ensure the worship of the gods (5-7)
4. Celebrations “provide necessary relaxation after labor” (9-10)
5. Celebrations provide community solidarity through shared “pious rejoicing” (11-12)
6. There is no divine hierarchy such as exists in Aristotle’s account of his “metaphysical gods” in Λ 8 (8)

⁴¹ The passage is quoted, but incorrectly cited as *NE* 9. 3, 1165b15 (Bodéüs 2000, 8).

Bodéüs successfully demonstrates that Aristotle holds a place in his philosophical thought for gods who share many qualities with those depicted in Greek popular culture, particularly in arguing for theses (1) - (5). In these passages, Aristotle never speaks of the Unmoved Movers of *Metaphysics* Λ, but takes for granted that the character of the gods is an uncontroversial point of shared understanding. Elsewhere, Aristotle speaks of the gods as immortal living beings that possess body and soul (*Top.* 5. 1, 128b39-129a2; *Met.* 5. 26, 1023b32; *Pol.* 7. 14, 1332b16-20). The philosopher is comfortable taking for granted traditional conceptions about the gods and is willing, in some cases, to speak about the gods using traditional ideas. In many passages, Aristotle seems to believe that humans ought to worship the traditional gods by their traditional names and in the traditional manner.⁴² In fact, he argues that such worship should be mandated by the laws of the state.

Yet in the passages provided by Bodéüs, Aristotle's does not suggest or imply that the gods or their cult entails that they interact with the human realm or respond to human action. Indeed, the theses that Bodéüs' derives from these passages do not suggest as much. Thesis (1) does not commit Aristotle to a belief in any particular conception of gods beyond what is established in *Metaphysics* Λ. In passage 2, Aristotle names the god Zeus, but the passage simply explains why Homer calls him "father," since in the Homeric poems he is the paradigm of monarchy or paternal rule. Aristotle's commitment to thesis (3) is clear from the sources, but they also suggest nothing about why lawmakers ought to encourage traditional cult or with what

⁴² Aristotle makes greater use of traditional religion themes and narratives in his published dialogues, where the philosopher is wont to communicate his ideas in the manner of myth (Bos 1989, 106-9). For example, Proclus writes that Aristotle spoke φυσικῶς in his esoteric treatise *De Anima*, which contrasts with his published dialogue *Eudemus* (or *On the Soul*), in which the philosopher communicated a προηγουμένον λόγον reminiscent of Plato's mythological accounts in the *Phaedo*, the *Gorgias*, and the *Republic* (Proc., *In Pl. Tim.* 338C (= Arist. *Eudemus* fr. 4 Ross; see also Chroust 1966, 25-6).

expectation. And they do not commit Aristotle to a specific explanation of whether the logic of traditional cult requires participants to accept concepts of divine agency or intervention. (I address these questions in Chapter 7). In fact, theses (4) and (5) provide two reasons for laws to ensure traditional cult that do not rely on the gods at all, let alone interventionist gods: (4) demonstrates a psychological benefit to the performance of religious practice, and (5) gives a social one. Theses (1), (3), (4), and (5) are all supported by the texts in TABLE VI. 1 and others, but each of these passages is compatible with Aristotle's theological writings in *Metaphysics* Λ.

In formulating thesis (6), Bodéüs extrapolates a more substantive claim from passage 8 than is warranted by the text. The relevant passage says that “all things are not sacrificed to Zeus, and he does not have all honors, but some” (*NE* 7. 11, 1244^a14-15). The passage provides the second of two analogies meant to illustrate the proper rendering of goods among various parties. The chapter begins with the question of whether “we should serve and help [a good person] or one who is able to repay and is powerful. This contradicts Bodéüs' claim of non-hierarchy. Indeed, the first analogy explicitly states that while people ought to make efforts on behalf of both their father and their mother, the father is better (βελτίων, 1244^a14). The hierarchy is explicit in the first analogy, but is presupposed in the second.⁴³ The passage at issue does not deny that there is a hierarchy of gods, but rather uses the traditional hierarchy among the gods to illustrate the point of the chapter.

We can see, then, that theses (1) and (3) – (6) fail to demonstrate an inconsistency between Aristotle's theology at *Metaphysics* Λ and the passages that Bodéüs cites from other texts in the Aristotelian corpus. Bodéüs successfully argues that, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and

⁴³ Moreover, in *NE* 8. 9, 1160b24 (passage 2) Aristotle claims that in his epics, Homer modeled the hierarchy of the gods on the natural monarchy of the household, a constitution which requires a king (βασιλεύς) and subjects (οἱ ἀρχόμενοι).

the *Politics*, Aristotle incorporates traditional religious cult. In these works, Aristotle endorses traditional religious practice without qualifying his use of the traditional gods. As Mors Segev notes in his recent monograph, *Aristotle on Religion*, Aristotle allows traditional religion to be retained “as it is (unreformed) in a naturally existing polis, even in the *ideal city*.”⁴⁴ He does so despite his recognition in *Metaphysics* (at T2) that popular conceptions of the gods reflect inaccuracies that derive from their repeated and erroneous representation in the culture. In his work, he uses traditional representations that are constituted of ideas from both Aristotelian metaphysics and poetic embellishment, which is foreign to Aristotelian theorizing.

Reasons for Aristotle’s comfort in using traditional conceptions could be multiform, but, so far, we have seen no evidence of Aristotle’s endorsing views about the gods that contravene the principles that he has set out in *Metaphysics* Λ. Indeed, Aristotle’s *Politics*, rather than conflicting with the theology of the *Metaphysics*, incorporates it. For example, in *Politics* 3. 7 Aristotle defends his view that the active life need not entail action relative to others by making a comparison to the life of god: “If it were otherwise, the god and the cosmos, who have no external actions beyond their own affairs, would hardly fare well” (1325b28-30).⁴⁵ This example demonstrates that even a work that is hospitable to the traditional gods such as the *Politics* appears compatible with Aristotle’s theological arguments in the *Metaphysics*.

Thesis (2) is a bit more complicated. Bodéüs is correct that Aristotle understands that the gods are the benefactors of mortals. And so, thesis (2) functions in part as a justification for thesis (1) (i.e., humans ought to give the gods honor). But how Aristotle conceives of the gods as benefactors to humankind has significant implications for whether he endorses IG.

⁴⁴ Segev 2018, 300.

⁴⁵ σχολῆ γὰρ ἂν ὁ θεὸς ἔχοι καλῶς καὶ πᾶς ὁ κόσμος, οἷς οὐκ εἰσὶν ἐξωτερικαὶ πράξεις παρὰ τὰς οἰκείας τὰς αὐτῶν.

Bodéüs takes Aristotle’s statements about the “traditional” gods and cult to entail support for IG. He writes that *Metaphysics* Λ “assures us that one cannot establish the existence of divine providence, and [the writings outside of *Metaphysics* Λ] practically guarantees that there must be such a thing.”⁴⁶ But the initial passage cited in defense of thesis (2) supports a model of benefaction that does not require divine intervention in human affairs.⁴⁷ Indeed, the passage is compatible with the theology of *Metaphysics* Λ. In the passage Bodéüs cites, we learn that the gods are the “responsible” (αἵτιοι) for the existence, nourishment, and education of human beings:

ἔστι δ’ ἡ μὲν πρὸς γονεῖς φιλία τέκνοις, καὶ ἀνθρώποις πρὸς θεοῦς, ὡς πρὸς ἀγαθὸν καὶ ὑπερέχον· εὖ γὰρ πεποιήκασιν τὰ μέγιστα· τοῦ γὰρ εἶναι καὶ τραφεῖν αἵτιοι, καὶ γενομένοις τοῦ παιδευθῆναι·

[T3] But the friendship of children with parents, and of humans with the gods, is like a relationship with something good and outstanding. For they have conferred the greatest benefits [εὖ... πεποιήκασιν τὰ μέγιστα], since they are responsible for their existence, nourishment and education of those who have been born. (*NE* 8. 12, 1162a4-7)

The passage may be usefully read as providing a parallel between humans who receive honor as a “prize for noble things” (τὸ ἐπὶ τοῖς καλλίστοις ἄθλον, *NE* 4. 3, 1123^b19-20), and parents and gods, who deserve honor as a reward for the noble things that result from them: As a prize is awarded to human beings to honor their noble deeds, so humans are to honor their parents and the gods in virtue of the benefits that they have received from them. An adult’s friendship with their parents, and a human’s friendship with the gods, involves an unrequitable indebtedness of one party toward the other for past benefits conferred (cf. *NE* 8. 14, 1163b14-17). A similar

⁴⁶ Bodéüs 2000, 12. Cf. pp. 22-3, 133-5.

⁴⁷ Bodéüs concedes that “when Aristotle borrows opinions from the tradition (for example, about providence and the corporeal nature of the gods), no categorical proof can be advanced to show that he accorded any great weight to such opinions” (2000, 40).

image is evoked at *Pol.* 7. 16 (discussed in Chapter 7), where the relationship between children and parents is compared to the relationship of plants to mother earth, who benefits them.

In T3, Aristotle asserts that the gods “have treated well” (εὖ πεποιήκασι) human beings. On a surface level, this may suggest that the gods have taken some action to the benefit of humans. (My own translation may encourage this interpretation, since it renders the Greek into a phrase that calls to mind an active transmission of goods from the gods to humans: “they have conferred the greatest benefits” (εὖ γὰρ πεποιήκασι τὰ μέγιστα)). Aristotle’s Greek is reminiscent of the protasis from T1, which conveyed an assumption that, I argued, Aristotle did not endorse. In T1, Aristotle reports the common view that the gods “treat well in return” (ἀντευποιεῖν) those who honor and love intelligence. But these locutions differ in two important respects. First, in T3, the gods’ benevolence took place in the remote past, whereas the common view Aristotle expresses in T1 has the gods performing benevolent action towards mortals in the present tense. Second, the common view from T1 sees the gods as performing benevolent action *in response* to human action, whereas the gods in Aristotle’s account did not benefit humans in response to anything that humans have done. The gods have done well to humans, but not in the service of reciprocity.⁴⁸

Moreover, the gods’ causal responsibility for the existence, nourishment, and education of humans reflects their cosmic role. In T3, the adjective “responsible” (αἵτιοι) is predicated of both parents and the gods, who together function as the subject of the verb “treated well” (εὖ πεποιήκασι). The connection between parents and children does not do much to elucidate the

⁴⁸ Aristotle does not eliminate the popular conception of religious practice as reciprocity. Elsewhere, Aristotle notes that religious practice constitutes a “repayment” (ἀνταπόδοσις) for divine beneficence, and is a means for humans to “serve in response one who has shown grace” (ἀνθυπηρετῆσαι γὰρ δεῖ τῷ χαρισαμένῳ; *NE* 5. 5, 1133a3-5). Humans engage in religious practice in the service of fulfilling the duties of reciprocity.

connection between gods and humans, for the responsibilities of parents for their children are many and diverse. But the nature of the gods' responsibility becomes more clear in light of Aristotle's discussion of causality and the gods in *Metaphysics* Λ. There, we get a picture of gods that conforms to T3: the obligations of humans toward the gods derive from the latter's peculiar causal powers and not from their active involvement in human life.

In the *Physics*, Aristotle provides the tools that he later uses to articulate the role of the gods in effecting change in the cosmos. *Physics* 2. 3 and 2. 7 introduce Aristotle's so-called four-cause theory, whereby he distinguishes between material, formal, efficient, and final causes. It is helpful, in Aristotle's view, to inquire into the four causes of a given phenomenon in order to construct the fullest picture of why it occurred. These "causes" (αἰτία) exhaust the all the ways of answering the question "why" (διὰ τί). As Vlastos and Hocutt note, Aristotle's use of the term αἴτιον only loosely overlaps with modern conceptions of what it means to be a cause.⁴⁹ The modern, scientific definition of "cause," which describes the agent that actively produces an effect, is only captured by Aristotle's concept of "efficient cause."⁵⁰ Other types of Aristotelian cause call attention to additional factors that explain a given phenomenon, but which English speakers would not, except perhaps colloquially, regard as giving rise to it.

Aristotle does not hold that every event or phenomenon can be explained with recourse to each type of cause. For example, in *Metaphysics* 8. 4, Aristotle recognizes that there is probably not a final cause of an eclipse (1044b12). Therefore, the Unmoved Movers need not be a "cause" of movement in each of these senses. In the *Physics*, Aristotle does not venture an explanation as

⁴⁹ *Phys.* 2. 7, 198^a14-16. Concerning the asymmetry between the Greek and English terminology, see Vlastos 1969, 293-4, followed by Hocutt 1974.

⁵⁰ In *Physics* 2. 3, Aristotle picks out this category with the phrase "whence the primary source of change or rest" (ὅθεν ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς μεταβολῆς ἢ πρώτη ἢ τῆς ἡρεμύσεως, 194b29-30).

to how the Prime Mover first causes cosmic motion. While some early commentators attributed to Aristotle the view that the Prime Mover constituted both a final cause and an efficient cause, Aristotle himself never unambiguously argues in favor of understanding the Prime Mover as any specific type of cause. However, most interpreters who wish to attribute causation to the Prime Mover have argued that it acts as a final cause of cosmic movement.⁵¹ Much of the debate concerning the causal relationship between the Prime Mover and the physical world stems from a passage in *Metaphysics* Λ 7, where Aristotle argues that the Unmoved Mover causes motion as an object of desire, intellect, and *erōs*.

Following the assertion that the Prime Mover moves without being moved, Aristotle provides an analogy to clarify the kind of phenomenon he has in mind: “and thus does the object of wish and the object of intellect move.”⁵² Later, Aristotle restates the analogy in its most well known form, arguing that the Prime Mover produces motion “as an object of *erōs*” (ὡς ἐρώμενον, 1072^b3).⁵³ Aristotle’s invocation of desire, intellect, and *erōs* as a model by which to understand the causal force of the Prime Mover broadens the discussion beyond cosmic motion and towards human action. The analogy takes on additional significance soon after it is

⁵¹ Some commentators argue that the Prime Mover acts as an efficient cause (Judson 2019, Broadie 1993; Berti 2011, 2000, and 1997; and see Simplicius in his *Commentary on Physics VIII* in 1360. 24-1363. 24 and the book by Ammonius, cited within this passage at 1363. 8-12). This interpretation stems from a rejection of teleological readings that “psychologize” the heavens by attributing to them desire and intellect. While it seems sensible to reject the psychological reading, it is preferable to do so without supplementing Aristotle’s text by attributing efficient causality to the Unmoved Movers. For a recent defense of the teleological view, see Ross 2016. For his part, Simplicius recognizes that Aristotle himself never identifies the Unmoved Mover as efficient cause (1363. 12-14). As Daniel Graham notes in his commentary on *Physics* 2 (1999, 104-5), whether Aristotle can provide a persuasive account of first motion without positing an efficient cause remains an enduring puzzle for interpreters of Aristotle.

⁵² 1072^a26: κινεῖ δὲ ὧδε τὸ ὀρεκτὸν καὶ τὸ νοητόν.

⁵³ These objects are not Unmoved Movers, but *qua* objects of desire, intellect, or love they produce motion like Unmoved Movers.

introduced, when Aristotle describes the Prime Mover in moral terms as an object of desire. After describing the Prime Mover as “noble” (καλόν; Λ 7, 1072a27-36), he identifies the Prime Mover with god (Λ 7, 1072^b18-30). The Prime Mover’s way of life is the best possible and its activity is pleasurable. Each of these qualities of the Prime Mover is contrasted to human life: its kind of life is such that it can only last for a short while in us, and the pleasure of the Prime Mover springs from activity as ours does in the case of waking, perception, and thinking. Aristotle’s analogy explains how the Prime Mover operates to produce motion both in the cosmos but also in human beings.⁵⁴

Aristotle’s comments concerning the Prime Mover work simultaneously on two discrete discourse levels: one cosmological and the other ethical. On the one hand, the Prime Mover acts as the model of cosmic action. On the other hand, it acts as a god and sets an appropriate standard for human behavior. In this latter sense, it moves humans to model their lives accordingly. Human beings can attain the characteristics that Aristotle attributes to the Prime Mover through their action, as the physical world evidently moves to imitate the Prime Mover. The relationship between the physical world and the Prime Mover (and between humans and god) operates according to a notion of causality that may be foreign to modern conceptions. To be sure, it is nothing like the sort of direct intervention implied by divine providence. The Prime Mover merely offers a stable paradigm on which others may base their movements. It neither reaches into the physical world nor responds to human action. It is in this sense that Aristotle can hold the gods to be causally responsible for the existence, nourishment, and education of human beings.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ See Judson 2019, 222-3.

⁵⁵ Bradshaw 2002 (following Bodéüs 2000) cites *NE* 10. 9, 1179b21-23 as an example of the gods’ providence over human affairs. For Bodéüs, the passage substantiates the claim that for

In his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, C. D. C. Reeve shows how a proper understanding of the gods' causal powers can elucidate the relationship between humans and gods manifest in the *theophilestatos* argument from T1.

The gods in question live exclusively contemplative lives (X 8 1178b 8–23) and so whatever supervision they exercise over human affairs must be of a somewhat special sort. Aristotle does not tell us what it is, but his identification of these gods with the heavenly spheres (*Met.* XII 8 1074a 38–b 14) suggests an answer. For the orderly revolutions of these spheres govern the seasons as well as the cycles of fertility and infertility of land and animals (*GA* IV 10 778a 4–9). Hence they confer benefits on all beings, but especially on those wise people who, through astronomical contemplation of the heavens, learn about these cycles, and adjust their lives accordingly. (Reeve 2014, 350)

In his commentary here, Reeve explores a reading that understands Aristotle as both endorsing the common view that he expresses in T1, and also committed to the theology of *Metaphysics* Λ. At first, his interpretation appears to accept the type of divine intervention that Broadie and Bodéüs accept. Some of the language he uses encourages this reading. He speaks of the gods' "supervision" over human affairs and claims that they "confer benefits" on all, but particularly the contemplative. But the gods confer these benefits in a peculiar way. Because the gods are characterized as stable entities in the natural world (the heavenly spheres), they benefit everyone indiscriminately. Human action does not influence the gods' action, nor do the gods benefit human beings by reaching into their affairs. When Reeve claims that the gods benefit some more

successful reproduction, "what is also needed is the help of a supporting cause that directs embryonic life in the proper direction once conception has taken place" (144). This sounds similar to *Rep.* 5. 461A3-B1, noted in Chapter 3, where Plato attributes religious practice to the birth of children who succeed and excel over their elders. Bradshaw is less sure of the specifics of Bodéüs' interpretation, but concedes that "the gods must somehow be involved in the fortunes of birth" (432). The passage itself is not nearly so specific, and does not necessarily concern reproduction. Rather, it states that those who become good (the fortunate) do so by "some divine cause" (διὰ τινος θείας [αἰτίας], 1179b22). This is entirely consonant with the view that the gods function for Aristotle on two discourse levels. For a figurative reading of some select passages that imply providence in Aristotle, see Solmsen 1963, 485-95.

than others, this disparity is not dependent on the gods' response to human action: People benefit *themselves*, more or less, to the degree that they choose to learn about and from the gods. In this way, Reeve describes Aristotle's commitment to anthropogenic efficacy by invoking the language of theogenic efficacy.

At this juncture, it is important to restate the stakes of this argument. If Aristotle accepts IG, then he likewise endorses theogenic efficacy of religious practice. But if Aristotle rejects IG, then his theory precludes the possibility of theogenic efficacy. I have shown that Aristotle rejects IG, and so rejects theogenic efficacy. He does not endorse the view expressed at T1 in the *theophilestatos* argument that the gods reward humans for their intellectual activity. His statement in T3 that the gods, like parents, "have conferred the greatest benefits" is consistent with the view of causality that Aristotle attributes to the gods in *Metaphysics* Λ, which does not involve divine action, let alone divine involvement in human affairs. And the passages cited by Bōdēus to establish Aristotle's use of "traditional" gods do not demonstrate his endorsement of one specific traditional feature of the gods: IG.

But if IG were correct, the interpreter would still need to show that religious practice is an effective way to instigate the gods' action, and on this point Aristotle is silent. Although interventionist gods are a necessary condition for theogenic efficacy, their existence does not require that religious practice be an available means to influence the gods to interfere in human life. Unfortunately, Aristotle says little about how religious practice produces benefits to practitioners, and his explanations do not invoke theogenic efficacy or interventionist gods, nor do they explicate the specific relation between religious practice and the gods towards whom they are directed. The best argument that the interpreter can give involves proving the

compatibility of theogenic efficacy with Aristotle’s characterization of the gods, since the philosopher seems uninterested in the sorts of issues that concerned Plato (e.g., under what circumstances the gods respond to religious practice, and according to what criteria).

I hope to have shown that IG is untenable, based on its inconsistency with Aristotle’s theological theorizing in *Metaphysics* Λ. Aristotle’s understanding of religious practice must preclude all forms of theogenic efficacy, and confine itself instead, to forms of anthropogenic efficacy, as shown in TABLE VI. 2 below.

	Theogenic	Anthropogenic
Cosmological	X	N/A
Social	X	✓
Psychological	X	✓

Table VI. 2: The Aristotelian View of Efficacy

Chapter 7 explores how religious practice operates anthropogenically in Aristotle’s works. But first, let us briefly investigate a tension that the reader may have already registered. Aristotle’s comments regarding the gods in the *Politics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* do not contradict his views in the *Metaphysics*, but do embrace traditional religious cult and some traditional features of the gods, which Aristotle claims to be in error at T2. To what extent does Aristotle embrace these gods, which he claims are ill-represented in popular culture? And why?

2. Aristotle and the Traditional Gods

So far, my disagreement with Broadie and Bodéüs has been confined to the argument that the gods, in Aristotle's view, exercise providence over the human realm and so intervene in human affairs (i.e., their acceptance of IG). But their concern that scholars unduly confine Aristotelian theology to what they find in *Metaphysics* Λ is justified. Broadie is correct to note that there is no logical necessity for believing that the cosmological function that Aristotle ascribes to the gods in *Metaphysics* Λ is the gods' only function. Likewise, Bodéüs is correct to guard against the erasure of Aristotle's positive statements regarding conventional religious cult. In this regard, I agree with those scholars who praise Bodéüs' work as a "useful corrective" to those who "shrink Aristotle's account of God or gods to *Metaphysics* XII and a few related passages" or who "deny altogether the religious dimension from Aristotle's thought."⁵⁶ For it is against these scholars that I attempt to sketch Aristotle's positive view of traditional religious practice, with which the traditional gods were implicated. In Chapter 7, I provide this account and show that many interpreters go too far by dismissing these passages from the start as unserious or as merely figurative.

But I would now like to elucidate the extent to which Aristotle believed in the traditional gods, as Bodéüs in particular has so forcefully argued. In my view, Aristotle adopts a more complex understanding of the traditional gods than the word "belief" sometimes conveys. In teasing out the content of Aristotle's "belief" in the traditional gods, we clarify our

⁵⁶ Menn 2012, 423 n3. See also Gerbasi 2014, 27 n. 63 and Bradshaw 2002, 434.

understanding of what Aristotle understood to be the function of religious practice in the best regime of the *Politics*.

Let us return to T2 and sketch in greater detail the process by which Aristotle believed that the true conception of the gods, as described in *Metaphysics* Λ, evolved into the popular conceptions known from conventional religious narrative. This passage relies on Aristotle's cyclical view of history in order to explain the development of theology. According to this view, intellectual history alternately progresses and regresses in cycles with the passage of time. Because, over an infinite period, all possibilities are actualized (the so-called "Principle of Plenitude"), all knowledge has been achieved and lost repeatedly.⁵⁷ Indeed, it has done so "times without number" (ἀπειράκις).⁵⁸ It follows, then, that every domain of philosophical investigation has been previously brought to perfection, only to be lost again over the course of time. (Aristotle seems to view his own discoveries in the *Metaphysics* as reflecting philosophy in something near its perfected form.)⁵⁹ Like Plato before him, Aristotle attributes the loss of intellectual culture to periodic catastrophes including great floods, which destroy large parts of civilization.⁶⁰

In T2, Aristotle argues that earlier generations passed down a traditional story that accorded with Aristotle's discoveries concerning non-sensible substances: that such substances

⁵⁷ On the "Principle of Plenitude" in Aristotle, so named by Arthur O. Lovejoy (1936), see *DC* 1. 12, 281^b20-7; Hintikka 1973, 93-113.

⁵⁸ *Meteor.* 1. 2, 339^b30; *DC* 1. 3, 270^b20; *Pol.* 7. 10, 1329^b27. Chroust (1973, 1977a) argues that the doctrine of "cultural cycles or cultural recurrences" was treated in Aristotle's lost dialogue *On Philosophy*.

⁵⁹ Aristotle appears to have attributed the intellectual advances made between cataclysms to individual luminaries (see, for example, Jaeger 1923, 133-8 and *De Philosophia* F6 R³ (= Pliny *NH* 30. 3)).

⁶⁰ *Meteor.* 352^a28-352^b15; *Pol.* 2. 8, 1269^a3-11. See also Chroust 1973a for discussion of the doctrine.

exist, and that they are gods. That Aristotle believes this prior narrative to have been accurate is confirmed by his statement that one would think it to be “divinely spoken” were they to hear it today. This philosophically rigorous narrative was preserved as “remnants” (λείψανα) through a period of intellectual destruction. Aristotle accounts for the chasm between these remnants and contemporary conceptions by appealing to a process whereby the remnants of the primitive story had been gradually embellished upon. Taken together, the primitive remnants constitute a narrative (μῦθος), which accrued embellishments in the way that oral narratives do (μυθικῶς). The examples of narrative embellishment that Aristotle provides here are twofold: the gods became of human form and they also became similar to other animals. But this list is not exhaustive. Embellishments also include other mythic distortions that are “consequent on and similar to” these specified two. So Aristotle can explain other features of contemporary religious narrative that differ from his own theology by appealing to this process of embellishment. Aristotle’s account explains how many Greeks came to acquire the theological views that they did, and it also articulates the true nature of the traditional gods.⁶¹

But the fact that Aristotle understood mythical narratives to involve embellishment does not entail that he belittled them or viewed them as improper. The value of these narratives seem not to depend on their power to provide a literal and comprehensive descriptions of the gods’ nature. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle agrees with Xenophanes that traditional religious narrative is sometimes mistaken. There, he stipulates that poets who transmit conventional stories about the gods would be artistically justified in doing so even if those accounts, as Xenophanes argues, were “neither morally better to say nor true” (οὔτε βέλτιον οὔτω λέγειν οὔτ’ ἀληθῆ; 25,

⁶¹ For Aristotle’s programmatic commitment to upholding universal beliefs as basic truths in the context of his theological work, see Nussbaum 1978, 134-6. Seneca testifies to his theological modesty at *QN* 7. 30. 1 (= F14 R³; *ROT*).

1460b36). The poets are justified because they depict the stories as they are commonly told, even if there is a morally “better” way to articulate it. In the *Politics* also, Aristotle characterizes contemporary views about the gods as being able to accomplish good in the world: they are useful both for persuasion and the common benefit. Clearly, Aristotle’s view of the gods’ nature cannot be fully traditional, since they cannot, for example, intervene in human affairs as they do in traditional religious narratives. But he believes them to be useful and does not consider it necessary for poets or legislators to rectify erroneous narratives concerning them.

There may also be a sense in which Aristotle *believes* in the traditional gods. T2’s evolutionary account makes clear that the gods of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and the gods of popular Greek culture share a common referent. In this sense, Aristotle imagines that at a sacrificial meal, he and other participants honor the same god. Aristotle is not so credulous as to believe all the characteristics of the traditional narratives, but he believes in the existence of those gods, and that religious practice is a useful and proper way to honor them. The gods of the *Metaphysics* constitute a philosophically precise description of the gods, whereas the traditional gods merely represent the gods in blemished form. In a sense, they are the same entities.

In this regard, Aristotle’s views concerning traditional cult might usefully be compared to the iconophile’s use of icons in Byzantine Christianity. The main issues of the iconoclastic debates of the eighth and ninth centuries concerned whether it was appropriate for religious practitioners to direct their worship towards a representation or prototype of divine personages instead of towards the personage whom the prototype represented. One argument of the iconoclasts was that because icons are constituted of “dead matter,” they inevitably fail to capture accurately the true image of the personage represented. But iconophiles accepted that the icons were imperfect representations of the divine personage and used them and the rituals

surrounding them. Aristotle makes a move similar to that of the iconophiles: He accepts that the traditional gods are imperfect representations of the gods (which he describes in *Metaphysics* Λ), but finds it useful to employ them in cult practice nevertheless.⁶²

For both the iconophile and Aristotle, the question of belief is complicated, since in each case, popular representation is not taken to be as a verisimilitude of the divine. If these thinkers can be said to *believe* in the representations, it is because they believe them to represent something real and they believe in their ability to accomplish something for the practitioner. Certainly, the representations are a tool for expressing and enacting belief in a discrete and more intellectually satisfying way. Aristotle does not make this last point himself, but something like this account seems to operate in the background so that he can stand by the statements that he makes that indicate commitment to traditional gods and his argument in *Metaphysics* Λ. Regarding religious practice in particular, Aristotle could argue that the traditional gods are not the real object of these practices, but a tool for achieving the desired outcomes associated with them. The instrumental nature of the traditional gods, like that of the icons, does not diminish from their efficacy or their claim to represent something grounded in reality. And depending on the interpreter's conception of the epistemological terminology, it need not restrict the authenticity of Aristotle's *belief in* them or their *truth*.⁶³

Aristotle's dual conception of the gods, and the two corresponding discourse levels that he uses to address them, are functional and not merely a rhetorical tool. Thomas L. Pangle

⁶² The analogy, of course, should not be pushed too far. Some iconophiles understood their icons to facilitate communion between the human and the divine and were therefore efficacious in ways that Aristotle does not endorse.

⁶³ According to the pragmatism of William James, for example, the traditional gods in Aristotle's account appear to pass a pragmatic test for religious claims, since they add value to the practitioner's life and do not contradict existing evidence (James 1896; cf. 1902).

observes in Aristotle’s political writings what he calls a “multi-level rhetorical strategy,” which enables the philosopher to speak simultaneously to two distinct audiences. In the context of Greek religion, Pangle argues that perceived discontinuity in Aristotle’s message can be attributed to his speaking to both those who are “governed” by traditional notions and “pained by precise analysis,” and those who “demand scientific precision.”⁶⁴ This tells only part of the story. As we have seen, Aristotle’s use of traditional conceptions and traditional religious practice serves a need in society and so Aristotle is not bending to rhetorical necessity.

The evolutionary account of the traditional gods allows the reader to recognize that, although Aristotle accepts (or even believes in) the traditional gods, this acceptance comes with significant qualifications, since he did not accept the accuracy of their representation. One of the inaccurate embellishments, which the traditional gods manifest but which is absent from *Metaphysics* Λ, is the gods’ ability to intervene in human affairs. The ability to intervene in the human world is a feature of the gods that is both pervasive in society and consequent upon their being of corporeal form.⁶⁵ I have shown that the strongest arguments against this interpretation, and in favor of the IG view, are insufficient. And of course, Aristotle’s rejection of IG has profound effects on how the philosopher understands religious practice to operate in the lives of participants.

⁶⁴ Pangle 2011, 94-5.

⁶⁵ In the *Poetics*, Aristotle discusses at some length how the poet can best embellish narrative structures using the principles of probability and necessity, the proper application of which can turn traditional religious narratives into good accounts of historical fiction. Regardless of how they apply these principles, however, all Greek poets (of necessity) attribute to the gods corporeal form. This practice, therefore, is not a problem which Aristotle criticizes *per se*. For this reason, among others, I read both the noun μῦθος and the adverb μυθικῶς in T2 as non-pejorative (contra Judson 2019, 284). Segev 2017 provides a credible view of the efficacy of religious narratives in their embellished (or in Segev’s terms, “unreformed”) form.

My aim in the present chapter has been to determine whether Aristotle accepted the theogenic efficacy of religious practice. I have shown that he did not. His description of the Unmoved Movers in *Physics* 8 and *Metaphysics* Λ demonstrate that the gods do not take an active role in human affairs, but that they “act” in the world only as a final cause for human action. In denying Aristotle’s commitment to divine providence, I join some of the earliest interpreters of Aristotle. For these interpreters, Aristotle confined the gods’ providence to the supralunar realm, far from human life.

Aristotle identifies the Unmoved Movers of *Metaphysics* Λ with the gods and accounts for traditional religious conceptions of the gods by positing a series of poetic accretions that, over time, distort the true understanding of the gods. Thus, over time the poets create stories that involve a conception of the gods that resembles popular narrative form more than it does Aristotelian metaphysics. Aristotle, therefore, is comfortable speaking about the gods on two discrete discourse levels: he can speak of them according to the language of metaphysics (as non-sensible substances) or in the language of Greek religion (as mythical characters). We have seen that attempts to decouple these two ways of talking about the gods have been unsuccessful, since Aristotle’s discussions of the gods outside *Metaphysics* Λ are compatible with those that take place within it. Much of the skepticism of the prevalent view has been motivated by a desire to save Aristotle from the charge of insincerity.⁶⁶ But Aristotle can simultaneously use the traditional picture of gods that many of his peers accept and also believe that some features of

⁶⁶ On a similar charge, see my discussion of the “Noble Lie View” in Chapter 7.

the gods' representation in poetry are wrong, strictly speaking. Aristotle cannot, therefore, accept theogenic or cosmological forms of efficacy.

So far, philosophers have put several views of efficacy of religious practice on offer. In chapter 1, we saw that, according to the Traditional View, the gods intervene directly in human affairs, reacting well or badly as a result of religious practice. In chapters 2-4, we investigated several features of Plato's model of religious practice. Plato also endorses theogenic efficacy, but in this view, the gods react positively only in response to legitimate forms of religious practice, not to what might be pejoratively described as *mere* ritual. For Plato, the gods are not bound by transactional agreement, but their attitudes and future actions towards human beings are influenced by the religious practice of human beings. On each of these models of religious practice, the basic identity of the traditional gods is not questioned. In his dialogues, Plato reforms what he perceives to be unethical character of the gods, while retaining their other features.

On the other hand, in his discussion of theology, Aristotle expressly denies the features of the Greek gods that are conjured by the poetic imagination, including their ability to intervene in the lives of humans and hence respond to human religious practice. In the Aristotelian corpus, the gods do not involve themselves in the human realm as they do in, say, Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*. Instead, Aristotle must defend religious practice on the grounds that it benefits the practitioner's psychological and social lives, and that these benefits are produced entirely by humans themselves.

CHAPTER 7

Aristotle and the Necessary Functions of Religious Practice

I now turn to Aristotle's affirmative view of religious practice. Although the philosopher does not believe in theogenic efficacy, he nevertheless endorses religious practice and so must understand it to have anthropogenic benefits. For example, in his description of the best regime in *Politics* 7-8, Aristotle affords religious practice a prominent role. Because Aristotle endorses an anthropogenic model of religious practice, the effects that it produces must be social and psychological rather than cosmological. This puts him at odds with some of his predecessors, such as Plato. But we will see that Aristotle is able to account for many of the positive effects that Plato attributes to religious practice without appealing to the agency of the gods. He is, therefore, able to motivate his audience to participate in traditional forms of cult without relying upon their credulity. In this chapter, I outline the social and psychological benefits of religious practice, as Aristotle describes them, and elucidate how they are meant to operate in Aristotle's state.

Whatever its precise role in society, Aristotle believes that religious practice serves a necessary function. In *Politics* 6. 8 the philosopher enumerates the different offices that no state can exist without. He calls these "necessary offices" (ἀναγκαῖαι ἀρχαί or ἀναγκαῖαι ἐπιμέλειαι) and includes in his list officers who are concerned with "the care for the gods" (ἐπιμελείας ἢ περὶ τοὺς θεούς, 1322b18-9). In *Politics* 7. 8, the philosopher strikes a similar note, considering the necessary elements of the city, i.e., those without which the state could not exist as a self-

sufficient entity. It is perhaps unsurprising, given that religious officers hold a necessary place in a city's constitution, that among them he includes religion, at 1328b11-13. Here, Aristotle enumerates religion as a necessary part of the state. He uses the following, famously enigmatic, language: "fifthly, or rather first, the care for the divine, which they call priesthood" (πέμπτον δὲ καὶ πρῶτον τὴν περὶ τὸ θεῖον ἐπιμέλειαν, ἣν καλοῦσιν ἱερατεῖαν).

Why Aristotle thinks that the city cannot exist without religion or its practices is an enduring mystery. In his recent monograph, *Aristotle on Religion*, Mor Segev approaches this question, but his response focuses almost exclusively on the necessity of religious narrative or myth.¹ In my estimation, Segev rightly identifies one significant role that traditional myth plays in leading people to philosophy and a life of leisure and happiness (discussed in Section 3, below). But the problem Segev addresses is one that Aristotle does not introduce. Aristotle's language clearly indicates that he views religious practice, not religious narrative, as necessary to the state.

The aspects of religion that Aristotle picks out in these passages are institutional in nature. *Politics* 4. 8 identifies public offices, the responsibilities of which revolve around the public performance of religious acts of devotion (ἐπιμέλεια). Aristotle provides examples of the kinds of religious officials that he describes: priests and managers of sacred buildings fall under the banner of priesthood (ἱερωσύνη, 1322b19-25) and are necessary in all cities, regardless of size. But performers of temple rites (ἱεροποιοί), keepers of the temple shrine (ναοφύλακες), and treasurers (ταμίαι) of sacred revenues are also named as offices that may be necessary for the operation of larger cities (1322b24-25). Uniting all these officials is the fact that they provide oversight to religious practice or to the sites of religious practice. *Politics* 7. 8 uses again the

¹ Segev 2017, 49-139; see also Segev 2018, 295-314.

language of 4. 8 in its description of the “care for the divine” as priesthood, a civic institution established with the purpose of facilitating the performance of sacrifice and other religious practices.

Therefore, in order to explain adequately the necessary function of religion to the state, the interpreter must be able to demonstrate that the state could not exist as a self-sufficient entity without religious practice and their associated institutions. To this end, this chapter first identifies the social benefits that derive from religious practice and then examines why Aristotle understood them to exert an influence that was necessary for the proper functioning of the state. In Section 1, I explain the role that rest and leisure play in the construction of the choice-worthy way of life that Aristotle’s best regime in *Politics* 7-8 is meant to foster for its residents. I demonstrate that one role Aristotle assigns religious practice is to provide participants with rest and leisure, and I explore the possibility that the activity of leisure holds a role that is necessary to the functioning of the state.

In Section 2, I discuss several passages that reveal the importance of religious practice in obligating citizens to observe the laws of the state. This discussion of religious practice’s legal benefits centers on a passage from Aristotle’s *Politics* 7. 16, where the philosopher proposes using the laws of the city to encourage exercise during the months of a woman’s pregnancy. The proposed law would mandate that women take daily walks to the temple for the purpose of worshipping the god with power over childbirth. I examine the religious character of this legislative proposal and its necessity for securing obedience to the law. Crucial to the discussion is an important intertext with Plato’s *Laws*, an analysis of which suggests why Aristotle views religious practice as a necessary element of the ideal state that could not be achieved in any other way. I then discuss a broader benefit that arises from religious practice and that redounds to the

common good more broadly: the development of friendship, a necessary good for the state. In these sections, we discover how religious practice assists the political community in pursuit of the common good, as religious narrative is said to do in *Metaphysics* Λ 8, 1074^a38-^b14 (see Chapter 6). Religious practice is useful to the laws and the common good.

Finally, in Section 3, I absolve Aristotle of the common charge that the philosopher's use of traditional religious practice implicates him in deception. Here, I argue against what I call the Noble Lie View: that Aristotle advocates the use of religion to deceive the public into noble action. The benefits discussed in this chapter show that Aristotle understands religious practice to exert a positive influence on both the state and the individual psyche. It is a source of rest, leisure, and friendship to its practitioners. These psychological benefits in turn unify and otherwise advantage the state. Religious practice also fosters a culture of obedience to the laws, and so constitutes a tool for lawmakers as they attempt to construct the regime of their city. For these reasons, Aristotle both values religious institutions for the goods that they provide the city and its residents, and also conceives of their value as producing goods that are constitutive of and necessary to a properly functioning city.

1. Religious Practice, Play, and Rest in the *Politics*

In the *Laws*, Plato argues that to participate properly in some religious practice (i.e., festivals) involves “play” (παιδιά). He places a high value on this kind of activity, arguing that it serves a central role in securing the good life. Indeed, in that work, the Athenian claims that participating in a certain type of religious play is “a most effective way of securing the good life” (ἀνυσιμώτατον πρὸς τὸν εὐδαίμονα βίον, 4.716D6-E1).

Aristotle appears to take another tack in his characterization of play, which operates in teleological relation to other concepts such as “rest” (ἀνάπαυσις), “work” (ἀσχολία), and “leisure” (σχολή). In elucidating these concepts and the relationships between them, Aristotle provides a more detailed and complex treatment of the relation of play to the good life than Plato’s treatment in the *Laws*. From Aristotle’s discussion, the reader is able to see how the goods that religious practice produces map onto the concepts listed above, and therefore learn about the psychological role of religious practice in helping the individual practitioner achieve the good life.

Aristotle categorizes activities as “play” or “leisure” according to their relation to “work” and “rest” from work. Play constitutes a necessary break from work. Aristotle gives the examples of knucklebones, ball-games, dice, board games, and hunting (*Rh.* 1. 11, 1371a2-6), as well as sleep and drunkenness (*Pol.* 8. 5, 1339a16-17). In these examples, play provides humans with rest from the labor and strain of work, and thus play exists “for the sake of rest” (χάριν ἀναπαύσεως, *Pol.* 8. 3, 1337b39). Aristotle notes in the *Politics* that play is applied like medicine in order to alleviate the pain of work through the pleasure of rest:

εἰ δὲ τοῦτο ἀδύνατον, καὶ μᾶλλον ἐν ταῖς ἀσχολίαις χρηστέον ταῖς παιδιαῖς (ὁ γὰρ πονῶν δεῖται τῆς ἀναπαύσεως, ἡ δὲ παιδιὰ χάριν ἀναπαύσεώς ἐστιν· τὸ δ’ ἀσχολεῖν συμβαίνει μετὰ πόνου καὶ συντονίας), διὰ τοῦτο δεῖ παιδιὰς εἰσάγεσθαι καιροφυλακοῦντας τὴν χρῆσιν, ὡς προσάγοντας φαρμακείας χάριν. ἄνεσις γὰρ ἢ τοιαύτη κίνησις τῆς ψυχῆς, καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀνάπαυσις.

[T1] But if this is impossible, and rather we must use play in times of work (for the laborer needs rest, and play exists for the sake of rest; and working occurs with labor and strain), for this reason play must be introduced at the opportune time, because it is added for the sake of medicinal remedy. For such a movement of the soul is a relaxation, and because of its pleasure, it is a rest. (8. 5, 1339b15-17. Cf. 8. 3, 1337b35-1338a1)

Aristotle also argues that humans engage in play for the sake of work rather than as an end in itself. Happiness, Aristotle claims, does not consist in play, “for it would be strange that our end

should be play, that we should toil and suffer our whole lives for the sake of playing” (10. 6, 1176b27-30).² Indeed, play is too silly (ἡλίθιον) and childish (παιδικόν) to posit as the ultimate goal of our efforts. This theory, according to Aristotle, should be flipped on its head. Following Anacharsis, the (half-legendary) sixth century Scythian philosopher, Aristotle claims that one should recognize that humans play in order to work.

Because humans are unable to toil unremittingly, they require rest. As we saw in the *Politics*, Aristotle argues that play exists for the sake of rest (8. 3, 1337b38-9, cf. 8. 5, 1339b15-7). Therefore, play is a necessary activity in which humans participate for the sake of work.³ The activity of play provides rest, which in turn enables one to work, as sleep and other activities restores our bodies and minds and prepares them for future labor. But although we play for the sake of work, work is not understood to be the final objective of human life. Of work and leisure, Aristotle argues that the latter is “more desirable” and “an end.”⁴ When one attends to the relationships among these concepts in Aristotle’s works, the following teleological progression begins to appear: play exists for the sake of rest, rest exists for the sake of work (or toil), and work exists for the sake of leisure. Of these four concepts, three are activities (play, work, and leisure). Rest stands apart from the others as being a bodily state that is enjoyed as a result of play. The teleological progression offered by Aristotle is shown below, with activities appearing in bold print and with rest (the result of play), appearing in medium-weight typeface:

Play → Rest → **Work** → **Leisure**

² Aristotle does not explicitly contrast his view of play with that of Plato, though Kidd reads him as arguing with Plato when, at *NE* 10. 6, 1176b9-28 and *Pol.* 8. 5, 1339b31-40, he contrasts his view with those who view play as the goal of life. (2016).

³ *NE* 10. 6, 1176b34-1177a1; *Pol.* 8. 5, 1339b31-40.

⁴ εἰ γὰρ ἄμφω μὲν δεῖ, μᾶλλον δὲ αἰρετὸν τὸ σχολάζειν τῆς ἀσχολίας καὶ τέλος, ζητητέον τί ποιοῦντας δεῖ σχολάζειν (*Politics* 8. 3, 1337b33-5).

The end goal, therefore, of all play is rest, which is pursued for the sake of work and ultimately leisure, an intellectual activity that humans willingly pursue for its own sake. As Irwin notes, an activity denies one leisure, or is “unleisured,” insofar as it is engaged in “reluctantly, for the sake of some further end.”⁵ In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues that “the activity of the intellect, being contemplative” fulfills the requirements of leisure, and he therefore refers to it as a leisured activity (σχολαστικόν, 10. 7, 1177b22).⁶ In doing so, Aristotle places contemplation as an autotelic activity that imitates the activity of the gods.

In Aristotle’s *Politics*, religious practices appear as activities of both play and leisure. In both forms, they serve important roles for the resident in securing for themselves a fulfilling life. Let us first discuss Aristotle’s understanding of religious practice as play.

Like Plato, Aristotle seems to consider various kinds of religious practice as forms of play, since he characterizes them as means of producing rest, which is the essential function of play. The performance of religious practice is closely associated with the production of rest in Aristotle’s works. On three occasions, Aristotle discusses religious practice as an occasion for rest, with its accompanying pleasure and release from pain (and in *Rhetoric* 2. 3, he names festival activity alongside play, laughter, *joie de vivre*, and physical gratification as activities that make people calm, reduce pain, and increase pleasure (1380b2-5)). In *Nicomachean Ethics* 8. 9, Aristotle discusses *thiasoi* and *eranoi*, which he characterizes as parts of the political community that gather for the sake of sacrifice and companionship. The purpose of their gatherings, Aristotle notes, is “giving honor to the gods and providing rest for themselves with pleasure” (τιμάς <τε>

⁵ Irwin 1999, 309.

⁶ On the minor controversy over Aristotle’s univocal or polysemous use of “leisure” (σχολή), see Demont 1993 and Baumgarten 2016, 168-73.

ἀπονέμοντες τοῖς θεοῖς, καὶ αὐτοῖς ἀναπαύσεις πορίζοντες μεθ’ ἡδονῆς, 1160a24-25). In *Politics* 7. 9, the philosopher discusses priests as a political class in the state. He considers two facts, identified by bracketed numerals in the passage below, that inform his conclusion about who should appointed as priests.

ἐπεὶ δὲ διήρηται τὸ πολιτικὸν εἰς δύο μέρη, τοῦτ’ ἐστὶ τό τε ὀπλιτικὸν καὶ τὸ βουλευτικόν, πρέπει δὲ [1] τὴν τε θεραπείαν ἀποδιδόναι τοῖς θεοῖς καὶ [2] {τὴν} ἀνάπαυσιν ἔχειν {περὶ αὐτοῦς} τοὺς διὰ τὸν χρόνον ἀπειρηκότας, τούτοις ἂν εἴη τὰς <περὶ αὐτοῦς> ἱερωσύνας ἀποδοτέον.⁷

[T2] And since the political community is divided into two classes, that is the warrior class and the deliberative class, and it is fitting that [1] worship be given to the gods and [2] those who have become less active due to the passage of time have rest, we ought to give them the priesthoods <of the gods>. (1329^a28-33)

In this passage, the fact that elderly men require rest leads Aristotle to accept that the state should appoint elderly men to the priesthoods, a departure from the traditional Greek custom.⁸ The underlying assumption of the passage is that the worship of the gods provides rest to its practitioners, and therefore assignment of citizens to the priesthoods is a viable method of both [1] fulfilling general obligations to the worship the gods, and simultaneously [2] fulfilling the needs of a particular group by providing them with the rest that they require.

Finally, in *Politics* 8. 7, Aristotle compiles a list of the various benefits of music. Among them, music serves “for relaxation and for rest from tension” (πρὸς ἄνεσίν τε καὶ πρὸς τὴν τῆς συντονίας ἀνάπαυσιν, 1341b41), a benefit that Aristotle had also discussed earlier at *Pol.* 8. 5, 1339a11-1339b42. Further elaborating on the importance of public spectacles with musical

⁷ Richards convincingly moves the phrase περὶ αὐτοῦς from 1329^a33 to 1329^a34. Ross brackets τὴν at 1329^a32.

⁸ Pangle 2013, 247 n. 36. Aristotle must also imagine the role of priests in his best regime to exclude some of the arduous tasks that were conventionally assigned to them (e.g., the slaughter of sacrificial animals).

performance, the philosopher claims that the mode of music should differ based upon the intended audience of each site of performance. He describes the kinds of melodies appropriate for those who perform music at the theater, and then considers other musical occasions that address what he takes to be discrete audiences:

ἐπεὶ δ' ὁ θεατῆς διττός, ὁ μὲν ἐλεύθερος καὶ πεπαιδευμένος, ὁ δὲ φορτικός ἐκ βαναύσων καὶ θητῶν καὶ ἄλλων τοιούτων συγκείμενος, ἀποδοτέον ἀγῶνας καὶ θεωρίας καὶ τοῖς τοιούτοις πρὸς ἀνάπαυσιν·

[T3] And since the spectator is of two kinds, the free and educated, and the vulgar who are composed of artisans and hired laborers and other such people, we ought to provide games and spectacles to them also for the purpose of rest. (8. 7, 1342^a18-22)

In this passage, Aristotle singles out a group of people who are made weary by physical labor.

The class of people are called “vulgar” (φορτικός), which is more literally rendered as “burdened.” Although musical performance provides rest to the free and educated class, the physical exertion required by the work of the vulgar class makes the rest provided by games and spectacles particularly important. For this reason, the legislator believes the enactment of these events to be in the public interest.

In these three passages, we see that Aristotle views religious practice as a method of providing rest to residents and citizens of the state. In this sense, religious practice provides direct psychological and social benefits. For one, it produces rest for the individual spectator, which is a prerequisite to sustainable patterns of work. For Aristotle, play is an activity that produces the bodily condition of rest, as we saw above. Aristotle is like Plato, therefore, in understanding religious practice as a form of play. But for Aristotle, play fulfills a different role and fits within a different conceptual framework from that of Plato.

Aristotle further distinguished himself from Plato in arguing that religious practice is important for its role in helping residents enjoy leisure. In his discussion of education in *Politics* 8. 3 and 8. 5, Aristotle treats the field of music. In the Greek context, musical performance included poetry and song and, on the civic level, was enjoyed predominately in religious contexts.⁹ It is notable, therefore, that the philosopher describes music in these chapters as a subject that is taught so that it can be appreciated as a leisured activity. Aristotle draws connections between musical education and his discussion of tragedy and comedy in the *Poetics*, the enjoyment of which constitutes leisure.¹⁰

In his discussion of musical education, Aristotle emphasizes that musical performance affords its audience an occasion for leisure in addition to rest. In *Politics* 8. 3, Aristotle notes that humans are educated in music not because they need to work, but because they must also enjoy leisure and music enables humans to “use leisure well” (σχολλάζειν καλῶς, 1337^b31-2). Music, therefore, constitutes an integral part of the educational curriculum, since leisure is “the first principle of all [action]” (1337^b32) and “an end” (1337^b33-5). Humans use their knowledge of music not for money-making, household management, knowledge acquisition, politics, artistic judgement, or health and strength. Rather, music is taught with a view to, alternatively, “leisure spent in entertainment” (τὴν ἐν τῇ διαγωγῇ σχολῆν, 1338^a10) or “entertainment in leisure” (τὴν ἐν τῇ σχολῇ διαγωγήν, 1338^a 21-22).

Aristotle specifies two discrete functions of music at 8. 5, when he claims that the “innocent pleasures” arising from music are “in harmony with the end” (ἀρμόττει πρὸς τὸ τέλος) and rest (τὴν ἀνάπαυσιν, 1340^a26-7). To distinguish these two functions, the philosopher

⁹ See Lonsdale 1993, 30; Janko 2011, 375 with nn. 1-2; *contra* Ford 2004, 315.

¹⁰ See, e.g., 8. 7, 1341^b39-40.

describes two different types of encounters that a person may have with a given musical performance. He concedes that it is most common for people to enjoy music for rest rather than for leisure: “it rarely happen that humans attain the end, but they often rest and play games not only with a view to a further end, but also for the sake of pleasure.”¹¹ For these individuals, music does not help them attain leisure, nor is it undertaken for the sake of leisure. In Aristotle’s view, this is an acceptable result of public performance, but he notes that sometimes even those who attend musical performance for the sake of rest nevertheless attain some leisure. For “in seeking the one [i.e., rest through play], they find the other [i.e., leisure] by mistake” (ζητοῦντες δὲ ταύτην λαμβάνουσιν ὡς ταύτην ἐκείνην, 1340^a33-34). Play and leisure are both pleasurable, and the spectator engages in one activity over the other by virtue of what they seek to get out of it; whether they seek a nobler (τιμιωτέρα) pleasure of leisure, which is chosen for the sake of no future object (e.g., work) or a baser pleasure of play, which provides merely an alleviation from past toils. The spectator’s ability and desire to make one or the other choice will be influenced by the conditions of their labor (which exact a physical and emotional toll) and their intellectual interests, which vary over time.

A new schema connecting the related concepts of play, rest, work, and leisure begins to emerge. In it, play, rest, and work are parts of a cycle in which play and its accompanying rest are pursued for the sake of work, which in turn creates further need for play and rest. This cycle continues indefinitely. Yet as we saw earlier, Aristotle says that work is pursued for the sake of leisure, an activity that is pursued for its own sake. In Aristotle’s view, the activities of play and leisure can be the same, but it is how they are pursued that differentiates them. Music is one

¹¹ *Pol.* 8. 5, 1340a27-30: ἐν μὲν τῷ τέλει συμβαίνει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ὀλιγάκις γίνεσθαι, πολλάκις δὲ ἀναπαύονται καὶ χρῶνται ταῖς παιδιαῖς οὐχ ὅσον ἐπὶ πλέον ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡδονήν.

activity that can be engaged in as play (for the sake of rest) or as leisure (as an end in itself). In this latter mode, music (as with other forms of leisure) is an activity that helps the participant develop a virtuous soul. The following figure illustrates the cyclical nature of work, play, and rest as well as the autotelic nature of leisure:

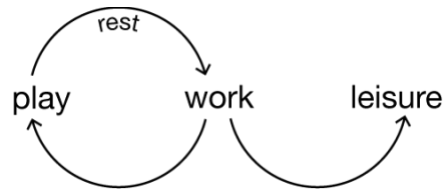


Figure VII. 1: The Interrelation of Play, Work, and Leisure

In the prelude to his discussion of music at *Politics* 8. 5, Aristotle lists three reasons why people should want a knowledge of music: for the sake of play and rest (παιδιᾶς ἕνεκα καὶ ἀναπαύσεως), because it “conduces to virtue” (πρὸς ἀρετὴν τι τείνειν, 1339^a16-17) by moulding our character and habituating us “to feel joy correctly” (χαίρειν ὀρθῶς, 1339^a22-25), and because it contributes something to entertainment and intelligence” (πρὸς διαγωγὴν τι συμβάλλετα καὶ πρὸς φρόνησιν, 1339^a35-36). These three functions of music are subsequently glossed, respectively, as “play” (παιδιά), “education” (παιδεία), and “entertainment” (διαγωγή, 1339^b13-14). At this juncture, “entertainment” appeared to pick out the kind of *leisured* entertainment that Aristotle named earlier at 1338^a10 and 1338^a21-22 and which contributes to intelligence as an end. Play and entertainment, in this taxonomy, refer to the different ways that the spectator might engage with a performance (as described above) and education refers to the use of music for the benefit of children. Curiously, at 8. 7, Aristotle enumerates again the functions of music, and does so as follows: (1) education, (2) *katharsis*, and (3) entertainment, relaxation, and rest from tension. In this list, “entertainment” (διαγωγή) has lost its association with leisure, as indicated

by its collocation with relaxation and rest, which result from play.¹² And leisured entertainment is newly described as *katharsis*, the process of purifying the emotions so that they are aroused to the appropriate degree and towards the appropriate ends.¹³

After the new taxonomy is introduced in 8. 7, Aristotle discusses those who consume music for education and catharsis. At T3, the philosopher turns his attention to the class of spectators for whom rest is a primary need, and acknowledges the need for games and spectacles to present music that will satisfy this group as well. For Aristotle, different classes of spectators correspond with the different functions of music, but these classes are nevertheless fuzzy, and a person's membership in either class is constantly subject to change. Because our conditions change, and because the pleasures attained via play and leisure are similar and the music is the same, humans may purify their emotions at a spectacle (and so attain leisure) when they are accustomed to merely enjoying music as rest.

Is the state's ability to provide its residents with rest what makes religious practice indispensable to the state itself? Although attaining rest is an essential part of the resident's life, and essential for the proper operation of the state, this seems unlikely. For the resident can attain rest from the everyday stresses of life by changing their bodily condition, such as in sleep and in

¹² Διαγωγή ("entertainment") is sometimes used to describe specifically the religious festival, as at 8. 5, where Aristotle notes that music is played "at social gatherings and festivals" (εἰς τὰς συνουσίας καὶ διαγωγὰς). Some translators render the term narrower than is warranted (e.g., Jowett translates "intellectual enjoyment"), presumably based on its close association with leisure and intelligence in 8. 3 and 8. 5. But as we see, for example, from Aristotle's changing taxonomy, διαγωγή can refer to entertainment of an intellectual (leisured entertainment or *katharsis*) or baser kind.

¹³ The relationship between "education" at 8. 5 and "*katharsis*" at 8. 7 is complex. Aristotle's description of the former in terms of habituating the spectator to feel emotions properly strikes the reader as similar to his theory of *katharsis* in the *Poetics*, *Politics* 8, and the fragments of the dialogue *On Poets* (Janko 1992). Janko argues that the distinction between education and *katharsis* is drawn on the basis of age, with *katharsis* being a kind of adult education (2011, 375).

drunkenness, as well as by participating in activities such as knucklebones and ball-games, all of which can be accomplished in non-religious settings. What about leisure? Aristotle associates leisure with the acquisition of intelligence (φρόνησις, 1339^a36) and virtue. His equation of leisured entertainment with *katharsis* makes the connection to virtue clear, for Aristotle understands *katharsis* as a means of attaining virtue. For example, he writes in the lost dialogue *On Poets* that “the art of poetry is useful with regard to virtue, since it purifies, as we said, the [irrational] part [of the soul].”¹⁴

The acquisition of virtue is essential to the operation of Aristotle’s best regime. In *Politics* 7. 1-3, Aristotle offers what he calls the “preface” to his discussion of the best regime. In it, he argues that the best regime is one that enables its residents to secure the “most choice-worthy way of life” (αἰρετώτατος βίος), which turns out to be a life of virtue. Aristotle notably seeks the most choice-worthy way of life in the active life and does not intend residents to pursue the best possible way of life or the contemplative or philosophical life.¹⁵ For the best regime is ordered so that “anyone may act best and live blessedly” (ὅστισοῦν ἄριστα πράττοι καὶ ζῶη μακαρίως, 1324^a24-25; cf. 4. 11, 1295b25-31). Instead, the prescribed way for residents to attain virtue in the *Politics* is through the enjoyment of leisure. For this reason, in order for residents to take advantage of the best regime and claim the most choice-worthy way of life, they must enjoy leisure. The centrality of leisure explains why Aristotle sees to it that his state affords sufficient physical space for residents “to live at leisure in the fashion of free men and at the same time in moderation” (7. 5, 1326b30-32). It also provides one possible explanation as to why the

¹⁴ F 46 [= *PHerc. 1581 fr. 1. 5-8* Janko]: ἔστιν ἡ ποιητικὴ χρήσιμον πρὸς [ἀρε]τήν, καθαίρουσα, ὡς ἔφαμεν, τὸ (ἄλογον) μόριον (τῆς ψυχῆς).

¹⁵ This may relate to Aristotle’s general separation of theoretical and practical arts. As A. P. Bos writes, “The activity of government was always classified by Aristotle as belonging to the sphere of *praxis* and was sharply distinguished from *theoretical* activity” (1989, 192).

philosopher views religious practice as a necessary part of the best regime. For music encompasses poetry and therefore theater, which would be very difficult for Aristotle or any Greek of the fourth century BCE to imagine as an activity separable from a religious context. Theater constitutes a means for the residents to attain virtue collectively, at a large scale, and under the direction of the state. And in its absence, residents' ability to do so would be severely impoverished.

This may also explain why Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* famously does not include an account of piety (as noted in Chapter 6), but the *Politics* does. For the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics* explore different ways of life. Of the moral virtues examined in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which are necessary to lead the best way of life, there is no mention of piety. Yet to secure the life that is most choice-worthy, pursued collectively in a political community, pious engagement with religious institutions is required.

I have examined two functions of religious practice in Aristotle's best regime: namely, to assist residents in the enjoyment of rest and leisure. These psychological benefits accrue to individual spectators and participants in the religious act. But the individual benefits of religious practice also have predictable knock-on benefits to the operation of the state. One must assume that it is for this reason that Aristotle includes discussion, in the *Politics*, of religious practices, as well as of the institutions and offices that uphold them. Aristotle's inclusion of religious practice in the state suggests that it contributes to the state's mission, which aims at "good in a greater degree than any other" (τοῦ κυριωτάτου πάντων, *Pol.* 1. 1, 1252a5). As such, religious practice belongs to the study of the political body and contributes to the common good.

In the *History of Animals*, Aristotle divides gregarious animals into those who work only towards individual ends, and political animals, who work towards common ends. As Yack writes: “Man, Aristotle suggests here, is peculiar among political animals, so defined, in that he uses his community for both common and individual ends (488a).”¹⁶ Religious practices that create meaning through their use in communities often function in both ways. We have seen how rest and leisure are essential to both the individual’s ability to live a good life, and the state’s ability to succeed. We will now turn to additional psychological and social benefits of religious practice, namely their ability to encourage obedience to the state’s laws and friendship among residents.

2. Religious Practice for Obligating Residents and Social Solidarity

As discussed in Chapter 6, Aristotle argues that traditional narratives about the gods were altered into their contemporary form in order to be useful (1) to the laws and (2) to the [common] advantage (*Met.* Λ 8, 1074^a38-^b14). It is unsurprising, then, that the traditional practices, which are associated with the gods of religious narrative and operate according to the same narrative logic, are also described as serving these functions. The passage concerning *thiasoi* and *eranoi*, cited above, states that these associations are organized “with a view to some advantage” (ἐπί τινι συμφέροντι), and are said to provide benefit “to life as a whole” (εἰς ἅπαντα τὸν βίον, *NE* 8. 9, 1160a10-23). Likewise, it is easy to see how providing a venue for elderly men to participate in society might provide a benefit to society at large.

¹⁶ Yack 1999, 276

Several passages also attest to the power of religious practice to encourage obedience to the laws of the state. For example, religious practice can be used by political authorities in order to coerce the city's population. In *Politics* 5, Aristotle recognizes this use, and notes that tyrants often succeed at maintaining their power by making a show of their earnestness in religious affairs (τὰ πρὸς τοὺς θεούς), so as to appear pious (δεισιδαίμων) to the city's inhabitants.¹⁷ It seems unlikely that Aristotle accepts the use of religious practice that he attributes to the tyrant, and more likely that he understands this behavior as a misuse of religious practice.¹⁸ Aristotle claims that the tyrant can, by appearing scrupulous in religious practice, produce a political environment favorable to their rule. The hypothetical is descriptive of the social efficacy of religious practice, but Aristotle does not pretend to derive from it a normative account of how religion ought to be used in the ideal city.

On one occasion Aristotle claims that, by prescribing daily visitations to the temple, the legislator can ensure that expectant women get sufficient exercise over the course of their pregnancy.¹⁹ Unlike the case of the tyrant, Aristotle presents this example of legislative behavior as normative. By investigating this example, I believe that the interpreter can begin to understand why Aristotle believed religious practice should hold a necessary place in the city, particularly in providing assistance to the laws. At *Politics* 7. 16, the philosopher discusses pregnant women and the conditions that ought to obtain in order to foster healthful embryonic development:

χρὴ δὲ καὶ τὰς ἐγκύους ἐπιμελεῖσθαι τῶν σωμάτων, μὴ ῥαθυμούσας μηδ' ἀραιᾶ τροφῆ
χρωμένας. τοῦτο δὲ ῥάδιον τῷ νομοθέτῃ ποιῆσαι προστάξαντι καθ' ἡμέραν τινὰ
ποιεῖσθαι πορείαν πρὸς θεῶν ἀποθεραπείαν τῶν εἰληχότων τὴν περὶ τῆς γενέσεως τιμῆν.
τὴν μέντοι διάνοιαν τούναντίον τῶν σωμάτων ῥαθυμοτέρως ἀρμόττει διάγειν·
ἀπολαύοντα γὰρ φαίνεται τὰ γεννώμενα τῆς ἐχούσης, ὥσπερ τὰ φυόμενα τῆς γῆς.

¹⁷ *Pol.* 5. 11, 1314^b38-1315^a4.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Bodéüs 2000, 9.

¹⁹ *Pol.* 7. 16, 1335^b12-9.

[T4] But pregnant women ought to take care of their bodies, neither being idle nor having a meager diet. The former is easy for the lawgiver to make happen, if he prescribes that some journey be made each day for the worship of the gods who are assigned over the childbirth. It is fitting that they keep their mind, unlike their bodies, without anxiety. For children benefit from the woman who bears them, just as plants obtain benefit from the earth. (*Pol.* 7. 16, 1335b12-9)

According to this passage, the lawgiver can ensure that pregnant women care for their bodies in the appropriate manner by legislating that they participate in a particular form of religious practice that requires walking (τινὰ πορείαν). The legislator uses their civic authority to prescribe action on the part of pregnant women by law.

But the legislated action has a curiously religious character. From the passage alone, it is unclear whether the social benefits of the legislation could have been achieved by non-religious action, and so whether the religious association with temple cult is necessary for achieving the legislation's desired result. Zingano argues that Aristotle's prescription is unnecessary in the sense that it is not the only way to achieve his desired goal. He writes that "a doctor might determine non-arbitrarily that pregnant women should exercise, but whether that exercise should be a daily walk to a designated temple or something else is an open question."²⁰ Likewise, the legislator could prescribe by law that all pregnant women exercise, but in whatever way they please. According to this interpretation, the religious valence of the legal prescription is incidental to it and has no necessary function that is exclusive only to itself.

Yet one begins to see the function of the religious association by comparing T4 to a passage from Plato's *Laws*. In the *Laws*, the Athenian offers several policy prescriptions that, if implemented, would foster healthful development in future residents. The policies, articulated in

²⁰ Zingano 2013, 221 n25.

the passage below, are offered hypothetically, since the Athenian doubts the feasibility of their implementation:

βούλεσθε ἅμα γέλωτι φράζωμεν, τιθέντες νόμους τὴν μὲν κύουσαν περιπατεῖν, τὸ γενόμενον δὲ πλάττειν τε οἷον κήρινον, ἕως ὑγρόν, καὶ μέχρι δυοῖν ἐτοῖν σπαργανᾶν; καὶ δὴ καὶ τὰς τροφούς ἀναγκάζωμεν νόμῳ ζημιοῦντες τὰ παιδιά ἢ πρὸς ἀγρούς ἢ πρὸς ἱερά ἢ πρὸς οἰκείους ἀεὶ πη φέρειν, μέχρι περ ἂν ἰκανῶς ἴστασθαι δυνατὰ γίγνηται, καὶ τότε, διευλαβουμένης ἔτι νέων ὄντων μή πη βία ἐπερειδομένων στρέφηται τὰ κῶλα, ἐπιπονεῖν φερούσας ἕως ἂν τριετὲς ἀποτελεσθῇ τὸ γενόμενον; εἰς δύναμιν δὲ ἰσχυρὰς αὐτὰς εἶναι χρεῶν καὶ μὴ μίαν; ἐπὶ δὲ τούτοις ἐκάστοις, ἂν μὴ γίγνηται, ζημίαν τοῖς μὴ ποιούσι γράφωμεν;

[T5] If you want, we could (provoking laughter) make mandates, establishing laws that the pregnant woman should go for walks, and mold the child like wax when it is born while it is still supple, and keep it wrapped up until it is two years old. We must compel nurses under legal penalty to carry the children to the country or to temples or to relatives, always and everywhere, until they are able to stand sufficiently, and even then, the nurses should continue carrying until the child completes its third year, lest its limbs become dislocated by the force of kids at horseplay. And the nurses need to be as strong as possible, and not just one. And for each of these laws, should we (if there isn't one) write a penalty for those who do not honor them? (*Laws* 7, 789D8-790A2)

The Athenian is beset by a persistent worry that if these policies were offered as a set of legally binding dictates, they would provoke ridicule from the residents. The worry is cited at the beginning of T4, but is also reflected in the text that immediately follows the passage. The Athenian also expresses concern that residents would simply not honor the laws, since the regulation of such small and everyday matters—such as what Saunders amusingly translates as “athletics of the embryo” (ἡ τῶν τηλικούτων γυμναστική)—would strike them as indecent and unseemly, since they come at the behest of the state (7.788B4-C1).

The Athenian, therefore, decides to offer these policies as non-legally binding pieces of advice, the violation of which would not come with the threat of punishment.²¹ Whether the

²¹ The Athenian opens *Laws* 7 by expressing his interest in the nurture (τροφή) and education (παιδεία) of children. He thinks that on many matters, it is best to only give teaching (διδασχῆ) and admonition (νουθέτησις) rather than providing laws. The reasons that he provides

lawgiver's advice is taken in the spirit of laughter or in earnest would, according to the Athenian, be dependent on the character of the individual citizen. When Clinias questions the usefulness of outlining rules at all (either as advice or as laws), the Athenian claims that while the character of, for example, nurses is "both effeminate and servile" (γυναικεῖά τε καὶ δούλεια) such that they would disobey these rules, the character of the masters and freedmen are such that they would adopt the lawgiver's advice as laws for themselves. As a result of heeding the lawgiver's advice, the latter would govern their households and their city well and achieve happiness in doing so. Plato's Athenian believes that some legislation is ill-advised owing to its inability to obligate certain types of people to fulfill their demands. His solution is to "legislate" through advice rather than through law, hence obligating those of good character, and curbing the ridicule of those of worse character.

Aristotle's use of religion in T4 becomes clearer in light of Plato's remarks at T5 because the former passage clearly responds to the latter. When Aristotle announces the topic of *Pol.* 7. 16 in its incipit, he declares the importance of "considering how the bodies of the children whom he is rearing may be as good as possible" (1334b29-32). This echoes the language of Plato's Athenian, whose legislative suggestions were aimed at showing how training "is capable of making bodies and souls as fine and good as possible" (*Laws* 7. 788C6-8). Aristotle takes up the challenge of getting pregnant women to exercise, which Plato's Athenian addresses in his first legislative hypothetical (τὴν μὲν κούουσιν περιπατεῖν). When Aristotle likewise encourages

for this claim are that the laws, were they to be imposed, would be ignored, on account of the trivial nature of the activities, and their stimulation of feelings, on which people and laws make conflicting claims. The Athenian does, however, believe that by flouting the lawgiver's hypothetical laws, the citizen develops a poor character. This is "an evil for cities" (κακὸν ταῖς πόλεσι), since it inures their citizens to breaking laws in small matters, thus corrupting law in general.

pregnant women to go on walks in T4, he takes an interest in the bodily motions of the young during their formative years, and in particular on the proper development of their limbs. Here, Aristotle again revisits a concern expressed by Plato's Athenian in the first two lines of T5. If the reader were not primed beforehand to see in T4 a reaction to the parallel passage in T5, the singularity of the problem and legislative solution would suggest that it is such. Indeed, that pregnant women ought to exercise did not reflect an imperative of the medical community in the fourth century. Hippocrates, for example, writes only of the potential harms involved in pre-natal exercise.²² The imperative for pregnant women to walk seems to be advocated by a limited group of philosophers who were operating in conversation with one another.

The interaction between these two passages should come as no surprise. Throughout the *Politics*, Aristotle demonstrates a careful attention to Plato's *Laws*.²³ In particular, Aristotle's discussion of the best regime in *Politics* 7-8 has been viewed by modern commentators as especially dependent on the *Laws*. For example, Schofield writes that "Books 7 and 8 of the *Politics* read at times like nothing so much as Aristotle's own abbreviated version of the *Laws*' prescription for an ideal political community."²⁴ This description of the influence of the *Laws* on the *Politics* characterizes Aristotle as (more or less) summarizing Plato's work without changing its substance. This view is also promoted by Ernest Barker, who writes: "If Aristotle wrote the *Politics*, and arranged the content under the categories and in the schemes of his own philosophy, Plato [in the *Laws*] supplied a great part of the content. There is little absolutely new in the *Politics*, as there is (let us say) in the Magna Carta. Neither is meant to be new: both are meant to

²² Hippoc. *Mul.* 1.25, 32. For Aristotle, as presumably for Xenophon and Plato, there were medical advantages to exercise during pregnancy. On the significance of exercise in lowering the risk of complications during childbirth, for example, see *Gen An.* 775^a27-775^b2.

²³ For an incomplete catalogue of the similarities, see Barker 1918, 380-2.

²⁴ Schofield 2010, 14.

codify previous developments.”²⁵ Yet, the similarity between *Politics* 7-8 and Plato’s *Laws* in both in structure and content, should not blind the reader to important differences. Rather, the similarities should sharpen the reader’s focus on the differences and what motivates them.

Although Aristotle responds to the *Laws* in *Politics* 7. 16, this passage could not properly be described as a summary or codification of philosophical precedent. In fact, Aristotle takes an altogether different route to achieving the shared goal of encouraging pregnant women to exercise. Rather than advancing his solution as a non-legally binding suggestion, Aristotle proposes a legislative solution to the problem.

Aristotle’s interest in legislating the issue rather than offering advice on the topic finds its justification in *Nicomachean Ethics* 9. 9, where the philosopher opines on the deficiency of argument and the virtues of legal prescription.²⁶ There, Aristotle divides humans into the two camps that Plato later used at T5 when describing his fear of ridicule: (i) those with virtuous characters and (ii) “the many.” Members of the latter group, Aristotle claims, abstain from acting poorly not by nature, but rather because they fear punishment.²⁷ Unlike Plato, who believed that the lack of virtue of “the many” justifies downgrading legal prescriptions to advice, Aristotle uses the character of the many as reason to invoke legal punishment.

What, then, does Aristotle get from importing religion into the legal prescription of T4? Aristotle’s response to Plato’s *Laws* provides some indication of the peculiar benefit that religion can impart to the law. Unlike Plato, Aristotle expresses no concern over the possibility that his

²⁵ Barker 1918, 392.

²⁶ Aristotle’s comments on the inadequacies of arguments (οἱ λόγοι) responds to Plato’s non-legislative advocacy of walks for pregnant women, which the Athenian sums up as “a persuasive argument” (τῆς λόγος πιθανός, *Laws* 7. 791B2).

²⁷ *NE* 9. 9, 1179^a33-1180^a5. Chapter 9, which explicitly contends with making people good by means of teaching (διδασχῆ), is framed as a response to Plato’s preference for encouraging women to talk by teaching in the *Laws* (see n. 9 above).

legal prescriptions would be ridiculed by the citizens. Aristotle's lack of concern here may result from his introduction of religion into the legal account. He attempts to achieve his goal of convincing pregnant women to go on walks by producing for them a religious obligation. To do so, the philosopher appropriates the Athenian's suggestion for nurses of young children and applies it specifically to the case of pregnant women.

In T5, the Athenian argues that the legislator should "compel nurses under legal penalty to carry the children to the country or to temples or to relatives, always and everywhere." In a world where the transport of children would have been physically taxing for caretakers, the Athenian is concerned that they not require children to transport themselves and therefore risk injury. When he lists the variety of destinations to which a caregiver might carry the child, he mentions the temple as one example. Aristotle seizes upon this example, turning the Athenian's example into a specific command. In his legislative proposal, Aristotle specifies that pregnant women ought to walk to the temple with the purpose of worshiping the gods (*πρὸς θεῶν ἀποθεραπείαν*). Of the several example destinations that the Athenian uses to demonstrate that children should be carried "always and everywhere," Aristotle uses the temple in his text and creates a story about why the pregnant woman should regularly travel there. It seems that Aristotle purposefully characterizes the legislation as religious in nature, and it is likely that he believes the religious association will curb the mockery that the Athenian feared. By introducing religious obligation into his account, Aristotle preserves the salutary benefit of the legal prescription, and also secures a greater level of compliance from the target group.

Using religion allows Aristotle to legislate with greater effectiveness. The sense of obligation that the religious element introduces creates non-legal reasons to fulfill the legal prescription. Aristotle speaks to the significance of using non-legal forms of obligation as

opposed to compulsion in the *Rhetoric*. At *Rhetoric* 1. 11, the philosopher juxtaposes action resulting from habit, which is pleasant, from action resulting from force or necessity, which is painful. Indeed, even acts that may be painful otherwise become pleasant when they are accomplished as a result of habit. Included among the activities that habit can make pleasant is “care” (ἐπιμέλεια) and “exertion” (συντονία), which are involved in activities such as walking and temple cult.²⁸ The pleasure that the resident experiences in performing such activities would do much to soften the sharp edges of the legal prescription and, in turn, make it easier for the resident to abide.

It is worth highlighting some differences between Aristotle’s use of religion and that found in the so-called Sisyphus fragment discussed in Chapter 2. Both likewise indicate that the fear of punishment motivates humans to behave well. But in the Sisyphus fragment, we read that this fear is produced by the laws of the state and also by religion. The former influences the behavior of residents in public, and the latter influences behavior of residents in private, where their activity escapes the view of the state. Aristotle, however, argues only for the usefulness of law in benefiting the many, with its threat of force backed by the state. Threats of force for bad actions and praise for good actions function “to encourage the latter and prevent the former” (ὡς τοὺς μὲν προτρέποντες τοὺς δὲ κωλύσοντες, *NE* 3. 5, 1113^b25-6). In T4, Aristotle uses religion in the development of legislation in order to increase compliance to existing legal prescriptions. His goals differ from Sisyphus’ in that Aristotle does not appear to be concerned with encouraging appropriate private behavior, but public behavior. Aristotle also refrains from using religion as a means to threaten disobedient residents with punishment. The Sisyphus fragment understands the efficacy of religion to depend upon positing divine beings who punish poor

²⁸ *Rh.* 1. 11, 1370a3-11.

behavior. Aristotle's use of religion depends, rather, on how religion operates non-violently to obligate the resident to act in a particular way.

In the case of T4, the primary benefit of religion seems to be persuasive in nature, but other goals seem present as well. Aristotle's goal, articulated in T4, for pregnant women to hold their minds "without anxiety" (ῥαθυμοτέρως) suggests that temple cult may produce a type of rest for the law-abiding resident, as religious practice is said to do elsewhere (discussed in Section 1, above). But in other passages, it seems that Aristotle recognizes the role of religious practice not only for securing obedience to the laws, but also for providing for the "common advantage" more broadly. For example, Aristotle demonstrates the usefulness of religious practice for developing social bonds among members of the state.

Aristotle opens his discussion of friendship in *Nicomachean Ethics* 8 with the statement that "friendship is most necessary for life" (ἀναγκαιότατον εἰς τὸν βίον, 8. 1, 1155a4-5). To substantiate this assertion, the philosopher lists its various functions: it is a refuge from poverty, it keeps the young from error, it fulfills the needs of older generations and supplements for the activities they are unable to perform in old age, it stimulates the middle-aged to noble action, it binds generations together in mutual care, and it promotes group solidarity. The list of benefits that Aristotle provides strikes the reader as helpful to the successful operation of the larger body of residents, since they promote caretaking among people and inspire them to provide material and emotional support for each other. At the conclusion of his list, Aristotle closes the section on the necessity of friendship, highlighting its socio-political function. He states that "friendship seems to hold states together," and that lawgivers attend to promoting friendship more than they

attend to justice, since it is antipathetic to faction and is necessary even for humans who have no need of justice.²⁹

Aristotle explores this latter claim in greater detail at *Nicomachean Ethics* 8. 9. Here, the philosopher notes that “friendship depends on community” (ἐν κοινωνίᾳ γὰρ ἡ φιλία), and so can only exist in the context of a community. For this reason, the various communities that make up the state are essential for providing opportunities to develop and enjoy friendships with other residents. Each state, therefore, comprises many smaller communities where residents interact around common interests and where bonds can form. Aristotle lists several examples of communities that are subsidiary to the state, including two peculiar types of religious associations, the θίασος and the ἔρανος:

<ἔνια δὲ τῶν κοινωνιῶν δι’ ἡδονὴν δοκοῦσι γίνεσθαι, θιασωτῶν καὶ ἐρανιστῶν· αὐταὶ γὰρ θυσίας ἔνεκα καὶ συνουσίας.>³⁰ πᾶσαι δ’ αὐταὶ ὑπὸ τὴν πολιτικὴν εἰκόσιν εἶναι· οὐ γὰρ τοῦ παρόντος συμφέροντος ἢ πολιτικὴ ἐφίεται, ἀλλ’ εἰς ἅπαντα τὸν βίον θυσίας τε ποιῶντες καὶ περὶ ταύτας συνόδους, τιμὰς <τε> ἀπονέμοντες τοῖς θεοῖς, καὶ αὐτοῖς ἀναπαύσεις πορίζοντες μεθ’ ἡδονῆς. αἱ γὰρ ἀρχαῖαι θυσίαι καὶ σύνοδοι φαίνονται γίνεσθαι μετὰ τὰς τῶν καρπῶν συγκομιδὰς οἷον ἀπαρχαί· μάλιστα γὰρ ἐν τούτοις ἐσχόλαζον τοῖς καιροῖς. πᾶσαι δὲ φαίνονται αἱ κοινωνίαι μόρια τῆς πολιτικῆς εἶναι· ἀκολουθήσουσι δὲ αἱ τοιαῦται φιλίαι ταῖς τοιαύταις κοινωνίαις.

[T6] Some communities, *thiasoi* and *eranoi*, seem to arise through pleasure. For these exist for the sake of sacrifice and companionship. And all these seem to fall under the political community. For the political community does not aim at the present advantage, but at what is advantageous for life as a whole, both [in the case of *thiasoi* and *eranoi*] making sacrifices and planning gatherings for them, both giving honors to the gods and providing rest for themselves with pleasure. For the ancient sacrifices and gatherings seem to arise after the crop harvests, such as first fruits. For at these times there was the most leisure. All communities, then, seem part of the political community. And such friendships follow such communities. (*NE* 8. 9, 1160a19-30)

²⁹ ἔοικε δὲ καὶ τὰς πόλεις συνέχειν ἢ φιλία, καὶ οἱ νομοθέται μᾶλλον περὶ αὐτὴν σπουδάζειν ἢ τὴν δικαιοσύνην (1155a22-24).

³⁰ I follow the text of Bywater, who moves the bracketed text to its current location from its place at 1160a23 between βίον and θυσίας. The error appears to have occurred by haplography of ΣΥΝΟΥΣΙΑΣ ~ ΘΥΣΙΑΣ. However, my interpretation of the passage does not hinge on this editorial revision.

These groups flourished in the Hellenistic Period, and their widespread activity is documented throughout the Mediterranean. Our sources on *thiasoi* and *eranoi* in the pre-Hellenistic Period are limited, but we know that they were voluntary private religious associations whose members would gather for the worship of a particular god or in connection with an individual religious rite.³¹ In the passage above, Aristotle identifies four functions of the *thiasoi* and *eranoi* that benefit life as a whole and so qualify them as parts of the political community. He lists these functions in two groups of two, each of which provides a theological and social justification for the associations. The first pair describe the activity, and the second provide the resulting benefit. Theologically, these associations are organized for making sacrifices, which give honors to the gods. Socially, they are organized for planning gatherings, which provide members “rest with pleasure.” The social benefits enumerated demonstrate how *thiasoi* and *eranoi* produce friendship within the political community as a whole.

Aristotle claims that *thiasoi* and *eranoi* constituted a part of the political community, despite being private associations. He seems to have in mind a similarity between the features of the political community and those of its constituent parts: both come together to benefit their members. The political community is distinctive in that it sees to the common advantage (τὸ κοινῆ συμφέρον) of all members, whereas subsidiary communities aim to provide a particular advantage for which they are constituted, i.e., Aristotle argues that the latter are established “with a view to some advantage” (ἐπί τινι συμφέροντι). The specific advantage of subsidiary communities like *eranoi* and *thiasoi* is identified as the promotion of friendship, which Aristotle

³¹ On the role of *thiasoi* and *eranoi*, see Foucart 1873; Poland 1909, esp. 173-270. Cf. for the Roman context, Kloppenborg 1997. On the interesting connections between the *thiasos* and the philosophical “school,” see Dorandi 1999 and Harland 2019.

names as a necessary feature of the political community writ large. Clearly Aristotle recognized that state-run religious organizations required a high level of organization and civic engagement, which also brought members of the political community into association with one another. In *Politics* 3. 9, Aristotle identifies sacrifices as a general institution that brings people together, as he does in T6. There, the philosopher explains that the “the purpose of the city is to live well, and these things exist for the sake of its purpose” (τέλος μὲν οὖν πόλεως τὸ εὖ ζῆν, ταῦτα δὲ τοῦ τέλους χάριν, 1280b39-40). Physical gathering is an essential function of the city, and religious associations indispensably help to fulfill that function.

T6 differs from T4, however, in an important respect. In T4, we learn about the necessary function of religious practice itself in obligating residents to adhere to the laws of the state. In T6, religious gatherings provide a necessary function to the state, but this function can be performed by non-religious groups as well. This alone does not mean that religious associations are not necessary, strictly speaking. Each subsidiary community within the state can only serve a subset of the population. Other communities that Aristotle names are professional (sailors who aim at safe voyage or turning a profit), military (soldiers who aim at victory or the extension of empire), and political units (tribes and demes). Membership in these communities would comprise a fraction of the overall population of any Greek polis in the fourth century. Most conspicuously, these would admit no women into their ranks, the group that Aristotle specifically targets with his legal prescription to worship the gods. In addition to the purported health benefits, Aristotle’s legislation for pregnant women would serve as a social mechanism for this constituency to gather regularly. The near-universal relevance of religion to members of the state and the widespread interest of the larger community makes religious associations like *eranoi* and

thiasoi well suited to promote friendship on a larger scale, and among constituencies that may be underserved by other subsidiary communities.³²

In T6, Aristotle does not attempt explicitly to use religion as a tool to obligate residents to pursue social goods, as he does in T4. Although there is no reason to attribute this motivation to Aristotle in T6, something of this nature could operate in this passage as well. Indeed, it would be consistent for Aristotle to view the religious associations of *thiasoi* and *eranoi* as providing their constituent members with an obligation to gather together and participate in the functions of the community. Thus, the religious valence of the association could obligate members to gather where they might develop the friendships that participation engenders and which are necessary for life and for the stability of the state. Still, Aristotle does not make this connection explicit, and there is no way to determine Aristotle's intentions, as there was above, in T4. Instead, we can say that Aristotle uses religious associations in order to produce one benefit that is essential to the proper functioning of the city: friendship.

Aristotle is clear in his view that religious practice is socially beneficial to the city, and that the legislator can use it for this end. We have seen how religious practice functions in Aristotle's political philosophy as a form of play (which produces rest) and leisure (which produces virtue). We have also found that religious practice assists the legislator in obligating residents to obey laws that may otherwise be ignored, and in bringing residents into association with one another for the purpose of friendship formation. In T4, we see Aristotle, *qua* legislator, using a religious practice, and the obligations that accompany it, in order to benefit pregnant women and foster healthy future generations of offspring for the city. The Platonic intertext for

³² In *Isae*. 8. 20, we read of women who participated in a religious association consisting of women from the same deme. The association elected members to offices and afforded one another organizational and honorific roles in relation to festivals.

T4 helps the reader evaluate Aristotle's view of the necessary role that religious practice plays per se in creating these beneficial effects. In T4, he shows one way in which religious practice benefits society, regardless of the lawmaker's intention. Here, religious associations (*thiasoi* and *eranoi*) provide a venue for the formation and development of friendships among members of the state. Because friendship requires community to flourish, and also exerts a stabilizing force on the state, institutions that promote friendship in this way perform a necessary function. Because friendship benefits human life and, in Aristotle's terms, is "most necessary for life," these institutions also confer a psychological benefit on their members.

But now that we have examined the benefits of religious practice, a new problem presents itself. Religious practice may be necessary to the state, as Aristotle conceives of it, but does Aristotle's use of religion implicate him in deception?

3. Is Aristotle's Use of Religion Deceptive?

Some interpreters answer this question in the affirmative. In his *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes lists various superstitions that are motivated by religious belief and undermine obedience to civil law. He concludes his list by writing that "this shall suffice for an example of the errors which are brought into the church from the *entities* and *essences* of Aristotle: which it may be he knew to be false philosophy but writ it as a thing consonant to and corroborative of their religion, and fearing the fate of Socrates."³³ Hobbes contests that Aristotle's philosophy was, in general, too deferential to popular religious sentiments and that this deference, motivated by the desire to avoid the opprobrium and legal punishment to which Socrates was subjected, led to the willful deception of his followers. In her essay *Truth and Politics*, Hannah Arendt rejects this view of

³³ *Leviathan* 4. 46. 18. 691.

Aristotle as teaching what he knew to be “false philosophy.” She writes that “unlike this figment of Hobbes’s logical fantasy, the real Aristotle was of course sensible enough to leave Athens when he came to fear the fate of Socrates; he was not wicked enough to write what he knew to be false, nor was he stupid enough to solve his problem of survival by destroying everything he stood for.”³⁴

Despite Arendt’s objections, the view that Aristotle deceived his followers, for reasons justified or not, has been widely adopted. The criticism of Aristotle’s treatment of religion has focused specifically on his endorsement of traditional religious practice within the state generally, and in the best regime specifically. Gauthier writes that Aristotle does not take seriously the “dons des dieux,” about which he writes positively in *NE* 1. 9, but rather disingenuously delays the discussion “avec un sourire.”³⁵ Gauthier makes a sharp distinction between the gods of the *Metaphysics* and the gods of the crowd, the former of whom Aristotle believes in and the latter of whom he does not. This conception ignores discussion of the two discourse levels that Aristotle is careful to make in *Metaphysics* Λ 8, 1074a38-b14 (as discussed in Chapter 6).³⁶ Defourny likewise attributes to Aristotle the view that popular religion is “a lie” (*mensonge*), and “a clever calculation” (*habile calcul*) intended “to restrain the masses” and “to serve political interests.”³⁷

³⁴ Arendt 2006 [1961], 980-1 n. 3. For more on this exchange, see Wright 2005, 211-50.

³⁵ Gauthier 1959, 2. 1. 73; who follows Souilhé 1929, Burnet 1900, and Ramasauer 1878 ad loc.

³⁶ Gauthier 1959, 2. 2. 898: “Mais Aristote ne parle pas ici du Dieu de la *Métaphysique*, auquel il croit, il parle des dieux de la foule, auxquels il ne croit pas, et il se contente de faire appel aux croyances populaires pour faire devant la foule l’apologie du philosophe.” At issue, of course, is the exact meaning of the verb *to believe* (“croire”) in this context.

³⁷ “C’est pour brider les masses, c’est pour server des intérêts politiques...” (Defourny 1932, 351-2).

More recently, Segev characterizes Aristotle's remarks in T4 as a proposal to "make use of the false content of traditional religion in order to deceive the masses, thereby controlling their behavior and securing social stability."³⁸ Segev is right to argue that Aristotle uses the practices of traditional religion to influence human behavior, and he is correct to claim that the upshot of his legislation is to secure a kind of social stability. It is also true that Aristotle believes the "content of traditional religion" to be false, as I showed in Chapter 6.³⁹ But Segev, like the others, goes further to claim that because Aristotle does not believe in the content of traditional religion, the legislation requiring temple cult amounts to deception. I contest this latter, widely shared, presumption.

Segev's statement well represents a view that I call the "Noble Lie View" (NL). According to NL, Aristotle deceives residents of his state into participating in religious practice in order to secure the social gains that they produce. He therefore appears to believe that the social benefits of religious practice are great enough to justify the intellectual deceit involved in perpetuating and reinforcing a cultural fiction. This interpretation could be summarized as follows:

Noble Lie View (NL): Aristotle advocates religious practice deceitfully in order to manipulate people into taking action that benefits society.⁴⁰

³⁸ Segev 2017, 51.

³⁹ Segev defends this claim in chapter 1 of his monograph (see also Segev 2018).

⁴⁰ In the service of being provocative, I risk misrepresenting my own views on Plato. While the view of Plato's Noble Lie as a tool of manipulation, as advocated by Karl Popper, is both standard and aligns with the views ascribed to Aristotle in the *Politics*, I favor the alternative interpretation of the Noble Lie given by Rowett 2016 (cf. Arendt 2006 [1961] n. 5] and see Chapter 3, p. 146, above). It does seem likely to me, however, that interpreters have been quick to ascribe NL to Aristotle due to their reading of his mentor.

Principally, what characterizes proponents of NL is their contention that Aristotle’s advocacy for religious practice is deceitful.⁴¹ They are committed to the theses that (1) Aristotle’s public statements in defense of religious practice *contradict* his theology, and therefore that (2) there is something about the former that Aristotle does not actually endorse. On this view, Aristotle’s argument in favor of temple cult in T4 is that it leads to better health outcomes, but he *disingenuously* advocates it publicly on the grounds that one should visit the temples in order to worship the gods.

Such an interpretation of Aristotle would contradict his principled opposition to lying. In his discussion of boastfulness in *NE* 4. 6, Aristotle lays down the general principle that “falsehood in itself is base and blameworthy, but the truth is noble and praiseworthy.”⁴² As Jane Zembaty has shown, Aristotle’s opposition to lying is not unconditional, yet the exceptions that Aristotle countenances do not allow for the type of deception proposed by advocates of NL.⁴³

Interestingly, in his treatment of lying, Aristotle implicates some religious people in deceit, but as we might imagine, he does not seem to allow his criticism of these specific individuals to color his view of all religious officials. Particularly shameful to Aristotle are those

⁴¹ This is similar to the view Mayhew attributes to Plato in the *Laws*. The author argues that for Plato, prayer could provide benefits “only if the citizens of Magnesia were unaware that the gods did not answer their prayers. For otherwise, what motivation would citizens have for making the requests of the gods that they do? No one (or no one rational) would go through the motions of asking the gods to save one’s crops or to lead one’s son down the path to virtue if one did not believe there was some chance that the gods would grant these requests. And this is important, as it touches on a broader and controversial issue involving how to interpret the *Laws* generally, namely, whether the Laws condones lying and other forms of deception, as the *Republic* did” (Mayhew 2008, 61). I argue against this view in Chapters 3-5.

⁴² *NE* 4. 7, 1127^a28-30: καθ’ αὐτὸ δὲ τὸ μὲν ψεῦδος φαῦλον καὶ ψεκτόν, τὸ δ’ ἀληθὲς καλὸν καὶ ἐπαινετόν.

⁴³ Zembaty 1993, 17-29.

lies that result in harm to individuals or groups of individuals, or lies that are told for the sake of (or which result in) unmerited financial benefit.⁴⁴ Aristotle explicitly recognizes “lies of religion” that are promulgated for financial gain. Like Plato, Aristotle identifies the seer (μάντις) as one example of an individual who lies for gain.⁴⁵ But while Aristotle, like his predecessor, recognizes some religious practitioners as capable of lying, his criticism here does not extend to other areas of religious life. For one, it is not apparent how individuals in the city stand to benefit financially from the religious practices that operate in Aristotle’s state.

One might rightly be suspicious of NL on the grounds that it requires that the philosopher say much that he does not believe. In fact, it is the uncharitable character of NL that motivates the skepticism of interpreters like Bodéüs towards the prevalent view of Aristotelian theology. As we saw in Chapter 6, Bodéüs denies the theological character of the *Metaphysics* in order to retain Aristotle’s honest commitment to popular Greek religion. In a similar vein, Verdenius accepts the theological implications of the *Metaphysics*, but writes that an “unconscious conflict” exists between *Metaphysics* Λ and the traditional depiction of the gods in Aristotle’s corpus.⁴⁶ The former, as we have already seen, is an unsatisfactory view. The latter, while possible, is less preferable than an account that can integrate Aristotle’s thought into a coherent system. Both of these interpretations, however, assume that Aristotle’s real or supposed theology in the *Metaphysics* is in conflict with his views on traditional religion.

In part, this is true. As we have seen, Aristotle often assumes that the character of the gods is a point of shared understanding, and at times describes god as a model for human action. For example, at *Eudemian Ethics* 7. 10, the philosopher argues that each member of a moral

⁴⁴ *NE* 4. 7, 1127^b11-15. Cf. *Soph. el.* 165^a20-31.

⁴⁵ *NE* 4. 6, 1127^b20.

⁴⁶ Verdenius 1960, 60.

friendship ought to operate in way that parallels human-divine interaction, and talks about gods' accepting sacrifices of certain sizes (1243b11-12). But Aristotle views the popular characterization of the gods as productive of philosophical insight. He explains the origin of their contemporary character in *Metaphysics* Λ, and as Segev rightly notes, he is content to allow this false characterization to flourish because it is "necessary for initiating philosophical inquiry into the nature of divinity in the polis—a function that does not require its content to be true."⁴⁷ This explains Aristotle's comfort describing the gods and their activity using the language of traditional religion and why he neither makes an active attempt to endorse or to moderate religious narrative (except as an artistic artifact in the *Poetics*), nor to endorse their inherent characterization of the gods. But Verdenius' describes Aristotle's supposed conflict as a contradiction between the traditional representation of the gods and his endorsement of religious practice. He writes: "Aristotle takes it to be self-evident that the traditional gods should be worshipped, although the common representations of these gods flatly contradicted his most fundamental convictions."⁴⁸ This is unquestionably true, but do Aristotle's theological convictions conflict with his stated endorsement of religious practice or piety? Let us first consider the examples that I have already introduced.

In order to establish such a conflict, one would need to demonstrate that the religious practice that Aristotle endorses entails a view of the gods that contradicts his theological views in the *Metaphysics*, namely that the gods intervene in human affairs as a result of human action. But no such claim is ever made. T4 states that pregnant women should walk to the temple each day "for the worship of the gods who are in charge of childbirth." The reasons for this legislation are

⁴⁷ Segev 2018, 299.

⁴⁸ Verdenius 1960, 60.

twofold. The first is its physical benefit, which makes no intellectual requirement upon the practitioner to secure. The second is a psychological benefit. Aristotle specifies that pregnant women should worship the gods with power over childbirth, presumably because a practice that targets these gods in particular will be better able to ease the minds of this specific demographic. Directing pregnant women to worship gods that preside over childbirth might ease the minds of women who believe that their worship will secure their (and their child's) health through the gods' intermediacy. Aristotle does nothing to discourage this motivation, nor does he do anything to encourage it, since the belief that the gods will intervene in this way not necessary for the women's worship to ease their mind.

The specificity of Aristotle's legislative proposal also relates to a third social benefit that, while not explicitly cited by Aristotle, converges with the view expressed in other passages, which suggest that religious practice has the ability to promote social solidarity. For the outcome of the legislation described in T4 would influence social solidarity of the women involved in virtue of its specificity. By specifying that pregnant women should worship the gods assigned over childbirth in particular, the legislator directs pregnant women of the city to a specific destination(s). In effect, the legislation designates a regular meeting place for the pregnant women of the best regime (i.e., a "third place") where they can meet one another on a daily basis for a singular and shared purpose.⁴⁹ Consequently, these women would have regular opportunity to enjoy the inherent benefits of social interaction, which include providing a distraction from daily concerns and the discomforts of pregnancy.

⁴⁹ A "third place" is a modern designation for a common meeting place, separate from their most common social environments (the home and the workplace), that fosters social solidarity and individual feelings of belonging. See Oldenburg 1989 and Putnam 2000.

In T5, Aristotle shows that he believed that religious associations provide opportunities for making sacrifice to the gods and for planning social gatherings. Sacrifice is not described as a method of securing the gods' favor or benevolent action or of altering the social relations between mortal and divine. Rather, in this instance, sacrifice is glossed as a method of "giving honors to the gods." This seems to be the main function of sacrifice for Aristotle, as demonstrated elsewhere in the corpus. In *Rhetoric* 1. 5, the philosopher lists sacrifice first among other "constituents of honor" (μέρη τιμῆς, 1361a34). And elsewhere, Aristotle notes that we owe to the gods honor, which he describes as "the greatest of external goods" (*NE* 4. 3, 1123b18), and claims that those who are confused about whether they ought to honor the gods are in need of punishment (*Top.* 1. 11, 105a5-7). The bestowal of honor is also the function that Aristotle targets when he draws an analogy between sacrifice and human actions towards other mortals. In his *Elegiacs to Eudemus*, preserved in Olympiodorus' commentary on the *Gorgias*, Aristotle explains that Eudemus piously (εὐσεβέως) established an altar (βωμόν) to the holy friendship of Plato.⁵⁰ By this, the philosopher highlights the honor that Eudemus had paid to Plato in the days since his passing.

I argued in Chapter 6 that Aristotle provides a way to understand both the gods of the *Metaphysics* and the gods of popular religion as referring to common objects, and that the philosopher speaks about the gods on two discrete discourse levels that are complementary rather than contradictory. In this sense, when the practitioner worships the gods of popular religion they are also worshipping the gods of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, albeit perhaps with mistaken ideas about who they are and the nature of their involvement in human life. But importantly, practitioners'

⁵⁰ For a study of the text and a detailed discussion of some of its interpretive curiosities, see Renehan 1991; also Ford 2011, 160-5.

piety is a means of providing to the gods what Aristotle genuinely believes that humans owe them. The worship in the best regime that is directed towards providing honor allows for practitioners to hold multiple conceptions of the gods and to change in their conceptions over time without contradicting the nature of the practice or its function. In this sense, worship of the gods can act as a propaedeutic to philosophy, provoking a wonder of the supernatural that can, with thoughtful examination, lead to a refined understanding of the cosmos. A community cannot engage in contemplation, and Aristotle indicates that his goal in the best regime is not to create a society in which the life of the philosopher is paradigmatic. But its institutions such as sacrifice make allowance for the individual to pursue and develop towards the contemplative life.

We can see now that Aristotle's two levels of discourse principally applied to how humans speak about the gods. For while the religious practice that Aristotle encouraged conformed with popular religious customs, he did not advocate for them on principles that, albeit well known, conflicted with his own view of the gods. And the practices themselves neither endorse nor militate against any particular interpretation concerning their efficacy. Aristotle avoids language that might implicate his own message with contradictory popular beliefs, as in the case of prayer. As Mayhew demonstrates, Aristotle never uses the noun "prayer" (εὐχή) or the verbal form "to pray" (εὐχεσθαι) to denote prayer or the act of praying, respectively. The most likely reason for this, as Mayhew notes, is that "he did not believe in gods who resembled those of traditional ancient Greek religion—gods who can hear our individual prayers, and respond to them."⁵¹ In sum, Aristotle could not endorse without deception a practice whose activity undermined his theological views, and so he does not address the practice in most of his works.

⁵¹ Mayhew 2007, 305-6.

It is true, however, that Aristotle makes no attempt to undermine the traditional religious beliefs and practices that contradict his theology. For example, Aristotle never argues *against* prayer as a religious practice worthy of performance, but neither does he endorse it or provide evidence that he recognizes that it has a positive function. Aristotle disagrees with the dominant religious ideology, which asserts that anthropomorphic and interventionist gods respond to religious practice. This disagreement becomes apparent in his writings on *Metaphysics*, but it does not surface in Aristotle's political writings. One still might charge Aristotle with a slighter form of deception, since the philosopher allows residents to persist in their mistaken religious beliefs without contestation. The charge would be that to engage in a debate on the erroneous terms is to imply that the terms of the debate are, in some way, acceptable.

The question ultimately comes down to whether it is deceptive to engage in a discourse without disputing the false beliefs on which the discourse is premised. But this sets an unusually high bar for honesty, and seems to require interlocutors to adopt a specific rhetorical disposition in order to meet its criteria. The Traditional View from Chapter 2 constituted the dominant or hegemonic religious ideology of fourth century Athens. Although Aristotle considered it to be faulty, to refrain from contesting a hegemonic discourse does not obviously constitute deception, since it involves no contradiction of what he has said. It is simply a rhetorical choice. Indeed, Aristotle seems to have had good reason not to participate in an overt religious discourse in the *Politics*. He did not lack an interest in persuasion, but rather he had an alternative and indirect path to pursue in his struggle for ideological hegemony.⁵² Indeed, Aristotle believed that the

⁵² My use of the terminology of discourse theory is meant to suggest neither that the dominance and "common sense" character of the Traditional View resulted from coercion by the state or the ruling class, nor that the Traditional View functioned to benefit or maintain the dominance of the latter, according to Antonio Gramsci's Marxist analysis.

hegemonic ideology of traditional religion evolved from his own ideology, and would lead back in its direction through the provocation of wonder, since wonder leads the inquirer towards first philosophy. This, in turn, would lead the residents to correct their mistaken theological views and, most importantly, would lead to the abandonment of false conceptions of what religious practice is and what it does.

In the *Politics*, Aristotle describes a state that maintains religious institutions, while adopting a laissez-faire attitude towards the maintenance or censorship of religious narratives about the gods and the practices connected with them. Aristotle's lack of concern for ideological conformity in his city reflects not a lack of interest in theology, but his confidence that traditional religion will lead the resident toward true philosophy. The institutions that the state maintains seem to be neutral with regard to religious ideology: they do not encourage any particular beliefs about the gods or about the efficacy of the practices that these institutions support. The institutions established in the *Politics*, therefore, do not contradict Aristotle's writings in the *Metaphysics*, but Aristotle's theology is just one ideology with which the resident may approach these institutions. The lack of contradiction between Aristotle's proposed institutions and beliefs belies the charge of deception that is often levied at the philosopher, and allows participants to develop theologically over the course of their lives without assuming any distrust towards the state apparatus. It also suggests that, in Aristotle's system, all residents of the city participate in religious practice, since neither the benefits nor the obligations accrue to the individual based upon their ignorance or ability to be deceived. Even the philosopher is duty-bound to honor the gods, and even the sage will benefit from the friendships forged in the context of religious association.

In this chapter, we have examined the grounds on which Aristotle endorses the use of religious practice: he believes that it produces benefits to the psyche and to the state of practitioners, and that it does so anthropogenically. I have shown that Aristotle understands religious practice to provide practitioners with rest and opportunities for friendship, two goods that are productive of the good life on the one hand, and of a stable and well-functioning state on the other. I argued that religious associations are a necessary element of the city because they provide a necessary good to several otherwise excluded political constituencies. I have also shown that the lawmaker is able to use religious practice to secure greater compliance with the state's laws. In this connection, religion is seen as a necessary element of the law, since it is uniquely able to obligate residents to obey the laws. By providing residents with rest and opportunities for friendship, and by motivating obedience to the laws, religious practice proves itself to be useful to the common good of the city. Finally, in this chapter we have seen that Aristotle does not use religion to deceive his followers, since nowhere does the implementation of religious practice in the city contradict his theological views, and in fact the philosopher articulates a process whereby traditional religion *assists* those who erroneously subscribe to the Traditional View in adopting a more philosophically rigorous theology.

Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, I have shown some of the ways in which Plato and Aristotle integrated traditional religious practice into their philosophical systems, despite their idiosyncratic and unconventional theologies. The collective upshot of the individual studies I have presented is that Plato and Aristotle engaged with the question of the efficacy of traditional religious practice as a topic of philosophical significance in its own right and defined the limitations and affordances of conventional religious activity as they relate to the cosmos, the state, and the individual psyche. Their engagement with the “question of efficacy,” as I have defined it, was not a perfunctory or subordinate consideration of one who simply seeks to avoid the opprobrium of the crowd. These philosophers at times excoriated the naïveté (or fraudulence) of contemporary and past religious thinkers, but also endorsed participation in traditional religious practice on their own terms, as a means for individuals and societies to flourish.

At this point, it may be useful to summarize some general trends that the reader will have observed in the foregoing chapters.

The first is a conservative tendency on the part of both Plato and Aristotle (and some of their predecessors) to preserve the prominent role of traditional religious practice in traditional Greek life. When confronted with the revolutionary theological ideas of some pre-Socratics and Sophists, which prompted subsequent thinkers to re-evaluate radically the nature and the possibility of humankind’s relationship with the gods, Plato and Aristotle appear to have resisted the inclination to alter the physical expressions of piety, if they ever felt one. Crucially, they

retained the importance of the religious activities that had traditionally been performed to mediate a relationship that their predecessors had sought to revise.

The second theme that emerges from the studies in this dissertation exists in tension with the first. It is a reformist tendency, and the general trend is to limit the efficacy of traditional religious practice beyond the bounds set upon it by previous thinkers. Poets in the archaic period formulated principles, including but not limited to the related concepts of deferred punishment and inherited guilt, that both explain instances of infelicitous religious practice and absolve the gods of wrongdoing associated with failing to reward or punish practitioners in strict accordance with their ritual participation. These principles set limits on which token practices could reasonably be expected to cause their intended effects by excluding, for example, those practices that are executed by an unjust person or by a scion of one. The limitations that these thinkers impose are ethical and seek, in part, to exculpate the gods from immoral action. However, they do not, nor do they seek to, limit the ability of religious practice to effect change in any particular sphere of life.

Plato continues in this tradition, elaborating on the ethical principles upon which the gods choose whether to respond to religious practice, but retaining their ability to exert their influences in all spheres of life. He places narrower limits on the types of behaviors to which the gods respond and the types of expectations that the gods will reliably fulfill. Of particular interest to Plato, in this context, is the connection between the power of religious practice to persuade the gods and the gods' ethical immunity from being misled or coerced. In the process of thinking through these issues, the philosopher formulates a novel method for understanding the relationship between religious activity and divine response, moving away from conceptions based on strict *do ut des* reciprocity, which he characterizes as akin to a commercial transaction.

Plato views the “commercial model” of religious practice as fostering unethical relationships with the gods, based on bribery, and in turn encouraging unethical behavior towards others, since religious practice can be viewed as a reliable method for avoiding the consequences of poor behavior. In its place, Plato moves towards a novel conception of religious practice. This model conceives of religious practice as a means through which the practitioner secures a benefit for themselves not as a party to a commercial transaction, but rather as a member of a more intimate relationship. As in many personal relationships between mortals, according to this model, benefits and favors are not exchanged between gods and humans in strict correspondence to their relative value. Plato emphasizes the role of pleasure in religious practice, characterizing it in the *Laws* as a form of play whereby gods and humans experience mutual pleasure and mortals are able to predispose the gods to grant their legitimate requests.

Although Plato’s account of the efficacy of religious practice is novel, he does not limit efficacy in terms of the spheres of life that it may influence: the gods fulfill requests that require divine intervention in all spheres of life. In the dialogues, Plato tends to focus on the psychological and social benefits that accrue from religious practice, but he also recognizes the cosmological benefits of religious practice. In fact, rather than limiting efficacy, Plato expands it by emphasizing the anthropogenic benefits of religious practice. Whereas adherents of the Traditional View of religious practice limited themselves to a view of religious practice that worked exclusively through the instrumentality of the gods, Plato accounted also for benefits that result from humans’ psychological and physical engagement with religious activities and their associated ideologies.

Plato’s focus on the psychological and social advantages of religious practice and his recognition of anthropogenic forms of efficacy paved the way for Aristotle’s treatment of the

issue, since neither of these forms of efficacy requires the agency of the gods. Aristotle, dismissing the possibility of theogenic efficacy, limits efficacy to its anthropogenic forms. Because he rejects divine providence in human affairs, he denies that religious practice can influence them to cause an effect in the human realm. For this reason, he rejects the ability of religious practice to cause an effect in the cosmos through any means.

The theoretical limitations that Aristotle placed upon on the efficacy of religious practice require that the philosopher examine the psychological and social experience of Greek participants. He emphasizes the political uses of religious practice in his works, and in the *Politics* we discover the philosopher's views on social efficacy. Here, Aristotle theorizes about how the legislator can craft legislation that leverages religious practice to direct the social body to make positive and socially advantageous decisions. We also see that Aristotle recognizes the psychological effect of religious practice. Indeed, the political uses that he advocates assume its psychological potency. For example, the philosopher assumes that, by associating a legal requirement with the physical worship of the gods, legislators can obligate citizens to perform tasks, obedience to which legal prescription alone would not be able to secure.

As already noted above, Plato and some of the poets before him placed limitations on the types of religious performance that the gods honored with a response, and introduced principles that explained apparently infelicitous religious practice. Subsequently, the spheres of life which religious practice were seen to affect diminished: adherents of the Traditional View and Plato recognized religious practice's ability to influence the cosmos, the city, and the individual psyche; while Aristotle only recognized its ability to influence the city and the soul. The means by which religious practice caused its effects underwent both an expansion and contraction: Plato introduced discussion of anthropogenic forms of efficacy in addition to theogenic forms, and

Aristotle dismissed the possibility of theogenic forms, which were formerly central to conversations about efficacy. Aristotle’s dismissal of the theogenic mode of efficacy is not universally accepted, but other philosophers such as Epicurus continue to deny its possibility and the view receives traction in subsequent periods. No simple figure can fully reflect the development of this question. But, generally speaking, the range of effects that religious practice could have in the lives of religious participants developed as follows, where T stands for theogenic efficacy and A for anthropogenic efficacy:

	Traditional View		Plato		Aristotle	
	T	A	T	A	T	A
Cosmos	✓	X	✓	✓	X	X
Society	✓	X	✓	✓	X	✓
Psyche	✓	X	✓	✓	X	✓

Table C. 1: The Efficacy of Plato, Aristotle, and the Traditional View Compared

In the individual chapters of this work, readers have discovered how Plato and Aristotle defended their views on the question of efficacy, and how they integrated these views into other domains of their philosophical thought. In this way, we have seen how these philosophers’ handling of the question of efficacy interacted with the long-standing philosophical tendency to collapse the domains of religion and philosophy, bringing the two into a productive harmony. In the *Apology*, Socrates characterizes his philosophical activity in religious terms as a “service to the god” (ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ λατρεία, 23C1), Plato characterizes prayer as an aid to philosophical

enquiry, and Aristotle uses religious practice as a tool for establishing the ideal city and meeting human needs.

These individual studies contain the specific case studies from which the general schema is formed. In them, I hope to have introduced the reader to genuinely new aspects of Platonic and Aristotelian thought, presented new problems, and stimulated new questions for further study. But in broad strokes, I hope that it shows that continued scholarship on the treatment and recharacterization of traditional religious practice as a philosophical activity (and vice versa) is a significant *desideratum*. For example, the first century Epicurean poet Lucretius is one of the most forceful critics of conventional religious practices (e.g., he criticizes animal sacrifice, a practice which even Epicurus endorses), but in some cases he seems to promote philosophy as an alternative to conventional religion (*DRN* 1. 80-83) and simultaneously describes his philosophical project using the language of religious ritual.¹ The work of this dissertation could be carried forward to later periods, and the central question examined in it can likewise be asked of later authors, including Epicureans, Stoics, and Neo-Platonists whose ideas engage with distinctively Jewish and Christian conceptions of religious practice in addition to Greco-Roman ideas.

It will be noted that much of this dissertation concerns these philosophers' political works. Its political discussions have chiefly concentrated on Plato's *Laws* and the best regime of Aristotle's *Politics*, two utopian works, the second written with in part as a response to the first, which act as guides to direct practical political deliberation and legislation. The practice of religion—including, though not limited to, its prominent public role—is where theology meets

¹ On the neutral or beneficial effects of religion in Lucretius, which philosophy need not supplant, see, e.g., Colman 2009.

politics and therefore political philosophy. The theological innovations that Plato and Aristotle produced are well documented, yet I have sought to examine this crucial nexus of intellectual thought between changing theological beliefs and accompanying changes in how philosophers approach the politics of religious practice. In doing so, I have demonstrated some of the ways that Plato and Aristotle renegotiated the conventions of religious practice to accommodate shifting beliefs and leveraged conventional forms of religious practice to fulfill unmet human social and psychological needs. Plato did this by underscoring the intimate relationship of humans and gods and their ability to experience mutual pleasure and intellectual insight. Aristotle, for his part, did this by prioritizing the needs of humans over the needs of the gods, who impose no religious obligations on mortals at all.

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