INTRODUCTION

What to do with a world full of diverse, unpredictable and con-
flicting gods? Take two points in the history of philosophy and
compare their respective strategies. First, at the very dawn of
Greek philosophy we find the Presocratics exploring a variety of
ways in which to handle the deeply intertwining, but sometimes
inconsistent, aspects of the Greek pantheon. According to them,
one can either appropriate and modify the traditional gods, or
accommodate and subordinate them to one's own theological
projects, or disprove them and re-conceptualise the divine, or
just ignore the whole matter.[1] Still the traditional gods are largely
present in the surviving fragments of their works, and there is no
consensus between the early philosophers as to what kind of deity
is to replace the traditional gods. Now jump a few hundred years
later and one will find that there is little room left for these gods.
The largest Hellenistic philosophical schools approached the div-
ine in one way or another as a cosmological being, whose nature
may be interpreted through mythological lenses, but it does not
exhaust the cosmic god, because there are independent philosoph-
ical means to confirm its existence.[2] For instance, Stoicism offered
a full cosmological re-interpretation of religion by using the names
of traditional gods to refer to different facets of nature, of which
the greatest is a fiery breath that pervades the universe and which is

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[1] For these strategies and their respective proponents, see Tor (forthcoming). By the
'traditional gods' I mean the Olympian gods, the Titans and their progenitors. By the
'cosmic gods' I refer to the universe, the sun, the earth, the planets and the stars. Although
the cosmic gods are referred as 'the heavenly class of gods' in Plato's *Timaeus* (οὐράνιον
θεῶν γένος, 39e10), I shall not use this category for differentiation between the two
groups, because the same title is applied to the traditional gods in Plato's *Laws* (θεοὺς
οὐρανίους, 10.828c7). In Chapter 1, I shall add an additional category of the 'younger
gods' (cf. τοῖς νέοις θεοῖς, *Ti.* 42d6), which encompasses both the traditional and cosmic
gods created by the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*.

[2] For a statistical analysis of the size of various Hellenistic schools, see Goulet (2013).

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conveniently titled by the name of the king of gods 'Zeus', even if the Stoic 'Zeus' has little to do with the original namesake.[3]

This profound transformation of the Greek theological discourse and its enduring effects on religious thinking were developed by Plato and his students in the Academy. That Plato criticised conventional modes of piety in the *Euthyphro*, purified mythical stories in the *Republic* and explored the divinity of planets and stars in the *Timaeus* is widely known. What is less clear is how he initiated the transition from the traditional gods to the cosmic gods and how it was completed by the Early Academy (alternatively, the Old Academy). What is even more obscure is why Plato and his school pursued this project and what the fundamental meaning of it is. So, the philosophical fate of the traditional gods and the question concerning their relation to the cosmic gods may seem a small matter at first, but it eventually opens a number of contentious issues in the philosophy of Plato and the Platonists, promises to show the intricate paths of development of Greek theological thinking in this crucial period and widens the overall perspective on the complex patterns of interaction between Greek philosophy and religion. All of this requires a better understanding of what is actually said about the traditional and cosmic gods by Plato himself.

'The other divinities' is the title given to the traditional gods in Plato's *Timaeus* (40d6). What defines the otherness of these gods is a contrast or perhaps even a deficiency: they are the kind of beings who lack the cosmological qualities characteristic of the cosmic gods, such as regular motion and spherical body. The peculiar status of traditional gods is also emphasised by Plato's choice of the noun *daimones*, which evokes associations with the supernatural powers and lower divine beings of Greek theological thought.[4] Plato's apparent preference for the cosmic gods is not surprising. In the later dialogues, he proposed to view the gods as primarily non-anthropomorphic beings remarkable for their intelligence, harmony, uniformity and capacity for self-motion. Both the *Timaeus* and Book 10 of the *Laws* indicate Plato's resolution to

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[3] See a useful overview in Brennan (2014) 107–13.
[4] For the philosophical as well as religious meaning of this term, see Sfameni Gasparro (2015).

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prove that cosmological entities, such as the world-soul and Intellect, are the finest instances of these qualities. Although Plato increasingly formulated theological reflections on cosmological grounds, he never rejected the traditional gods. In fact, these very dialogues testify to Plato's enduring aspiration to improve Greek religious beliefs and to preserve Greek cult practices with their objects of worship.[5] Thus, a reader of the later dialogues finds Plato in a peculiar position: he engages with the old gods, even though his primary theological commitments seem to lie elsewhere.

0.1 Religion and Gods

Central to this investigation is Plato's relationship with Greek religion, a category that evades a concise definition. Cultural historians regularly remind us that Greek religion was not a religion of a Church: it did not have a trained body of clergy, an authoritative revelation, a sacred scripture, a fixed set of doctrines or a mandatory formula of belief. It does not mean, however, that Greek religion lacked any structure whatsoever. In an influential paper, Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood (1990) argued that it was a polis religion in a sense that polis was the basic organising unit and the underlying framework of religious activities.[6] The polis regulated the public sacrifices and the celebration of festivals, supervised the institution of new cults and sometimes the appointment of priests, had the authority to issue decisions concerning, among other things, the religious calendar, funds and transgressions. The polis was also a medium between its citizens and the Panhellenic sanctuaries, for the delegates came to the Delphic oracle and the participants joined the games at Olympia as members of a specific political community.[7] Thus, religion seems to be

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[5] Plato was not alone in this quest. Most (2003) 307–8 and Betegh (2006) suggest that the Greek philosophers generally tended to reinforce religion rather than deny it. Boys-Stones (2014) 2–6 argues that philosophy may have arisen as an extension of religious discourse.

[6] A similar polis-centred approach to Greek religion is taken by Burkert (1990); Bruit Zaidman and Schmitt Pantel (1992); Parker (1996).

[7] These international and domestic aspects of religious mediation are amply attested in the case of classical Athens, for which see Parker (2005) 79–115.

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'embedded' in the civic life and institutions of the polis.[8] Given the absence of an established creed, the polis-centred approach also downplays the importance of beliefs and the state of mind of the worshippers. It shifts the perspective towards religious agency and the performance of ritual acts, thus the public aspect of religion.

More recently, scholars have questioned whether we can position Greek religion exclusively within the political institutions. Julia Kindt (2012 and 2015) argued that although the polis was the 'paradigmatic worshipping group', its framework did not cover the whole range of Greek religious discourses. The polis religion coexisted with a variety of non-civic articulations of the supernatural, such as magic, mystery cults, personal dedications and experiences. In line with this turn to personal religion is Harrison's (2015) contention that we cannot dispense with the notion of 'belief' in studying Greek religion, since cult practices were 'enactments of meaning' that mobilised certain personal as well as wider cultural beliefs in particular circumstances.[9] A growing number of studies, moreover, suggests that there was no unchanging, coherent and thus ideal version of official Greek religion. Religion had conspicuous inconsistencies stemming from multiple frames of reference, but also competing and complementing theological narratives.[10] Equally important is the fact that Greek religion was particularly open to creative fusion and innovation. As Kearns (2015) accurately summarises it, there was always 'room for new gods, new identifications of old gods, and new associations between gods, and alongside these we can also often detect changes in cult practice and patterns of religious thought'.[11]

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[8] The notion of 'embedded religion' was originally coined by Parker (1986). For a critical examination of this category and its proximity to 'polis religion', see Eidinow (2016) 207–14; Kindt (2012) 16–19.

[9] See Osborne's (2016) study of the religious calendars from Cos and Mykonos, which shows that the specific regulations of these calendars are based on the belief that the gods have an internal hierarchy, enjoy regularity of rituals and have different tastes and preferences for the sacrificial objects. For an overview of the more general religious beliefs shared among the Greeks, see Kearns (2007).

[10] Parker (1997); Versnel (2011); Osborne (2015); Eidinow (2016).

[11] For a comprehensive exploration of new cults and the adaptation of the old ones in Athens of the fifth and fourth century BC, see Parker (1996) 152–98, 227–42.

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Multidimensionality is also observable with respect to the nature of gods. The Greek gods are no longer studied as personalities with a determined essence and one core activity, as if Athena was merely the goddess of wisdom or Aphrodite was simply the goddess of love. A single great divinity like Athena had many spheres of activity, such as political life, crafts, war, but also, for example, health as Athena Hygieia and horses as Athena Hippia.[12] These specific areas were not controlled by particular gods. In fact, they were shared among the gods, who worked in groups in every domain of human life. For instance, the Athenians sought civic help from and political approval of Athena, Zeus, Hestia, Apollo, Aphrodite and even Artemis, quite an unexpected team of political advisors. The picture is particularly complicated by the fact that it was not just 'Athena', who was worshipped by the Athenians as a group of citizens, but 'a goddess' with different epithets in different places by different officers. So, for a citizen, a plethora of Athenas mattered in politics: Athena Polias was honoured as the patron goddess and protectress of the city on the acropolis; Athena Phratria sanctioned the admission to *phratries*, the main route to citizenship, in the north-western part of the agora; the council-members worshipped Athena Boulaia upon entering the chambers in order to secure a good advice. A similar pattern is replicated by the cult practices of other major Athenian gods as well.[13]

One could try to salvage the unity of each god by arguing that although the gods had overlapping activities and domains of life, they contributed their own special function in the shared area, which was peculiar only to them.[14] It would amount to saying that one can distinguish Athena and Aphrodite by the mode of activity rather than activity itself: the principal feature of Athena is *mētis*, her sharp

[12] See Deacy (2008) 45–58.

[13] For instance, Apollo the exegete was honoured as a cult advisor in the Prytaneum, the heart of the city; Apollo Patroos sanctioned the audit of potential officers at the edge of agora; the *prytaneis* held sacrifices to Apollo Prostaterios before the assemblies; and Apollo Lykeios was a god of the citizens serving in the army, since his precinct was employed for training by the cavalry and hoplites. For a discussion of these epithets and, more generally, the 'political gods' in Athens, see Parker (2005) 395–7, 403–8. See also Cole (1995) 301–5.

[14] This is the central tenet of the structuralist approach to the traditional gods, for which see the pioneering works of the members of the *École de Paris*, originally published in the seventies: Detienne and Vernant (1991); Vernant (1980) 92–110 and (2006) 157–96.

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intelligence and expert knowledge, while the speciality of Aphrodite relates to sexual allure and erotic bonds. Hence, Athena may promote political unity by wise council, while Aphrodite by civic affection. Robert Parker (2011) rightly objects that despite the virtue of this model in keeping 'the great gods from spilling over into one another', it re-introduces re-essentialisation of the divine, which was characteristic of the earlier works on the Greek gods. It also has a weak explanatory power in determining the logic of functional extension that would predict the new areas, in which the speciality of the god is to be applied, and explain what builds the cohesion across distinct spheres of activity. Again, a good example is provided by Parker: Aphrodite Euploia was honoured by the Athenian sailors to calm the sea and avert disasters, but the goddess did not have the same function in other types of storms.[15] Therefore, we have to admit that the identities and competences of the gods were marked by their plurality, heterogeneity and sometimes discrepancy. If we want not to water down these theological challenges, it is crucial to abstain from a simple definition and conclude that functional speciality is not the only denominator of Greek gods – it has to be accompanied with the cult context, the topological position, the political discourse and sometimes even information on the personal relationship with a specific god.[16] The traditional gods are dynamic networks of power, whereby a specific sanctuary or narrative can evoke only some components of this cluster without, however, absorbing it completely.[17]

These nuances and complexities are to some extent present in Plato's account of Greek religion. For Plato, religion is primarily a service to the gods (θεραπεία τῶν θεῶν, *Lg.* 4.716d7; cf. 11.930e5), the inventory of which is composed of sacrifices, prayers, dedications and celebration of festivals.[18] Its recipients are not only the Olympians, but also the chthonian gods, the daemons, the heroes and the family divinities, and even the living parents and the dead ancestors (7.717a–e).[19] The belief behind

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[15] Parker (2011) 96. [16] Versnel (2011) 142–9.

[17] Pirenne-Delforge and Pironti (2015).

[18] For theme of the 'service to the gods' in Plato's dialogues, see Mikalson (2010) 29–32; Van Riel (2013) 12–14.

[19] For 'chthonian' as a problematic religious category, see Parker (2011) 80–4.

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these practices is that rituals allow one to summon and keep the gods in the company of the worshippers (7.803e). Plato understands religion as an unequal combination of beliefs and practices, for the moral value of cult practices is dependent on the agent's inner disposition towards the gods. The service to the gods must be accompanied with the right kind of mindset in order to make the outward ritual actions count as proper piety. The minimal threshold here is the belief in the existence of gods (νομίζειν τοὺς θεούς, 10.885b–c), after which we find increasing layers of religious correctness.[20] The most important among them are undoubtedly a moderate and cautious attitude to religious questions, the recognition of one's ignorance of divine matters, the belief in and, if possible, the philosophical understanding of the goodness, uniformity, providential care of the gods.[21] Plato never gave a complete list of the required religious beliefs, nor did he conceive these beliefs as forming a fixed doctrine, but it is clear that they have a substantially stronger normative influence over the cult practices than anything we can find in Greek religion. Plato's stance on religious beliefs is well documented in Van Riel (2013), while his take on cult practice has not received much attention. My aim is to look further into this rather neglected area of Plato's theology and examine his philosophical justification for the need of ritual activity.

Scholars occasionally present Plato as the exponent of the polis religion.[22] It is an accurate characterisation in so far as Plato's considers the polis as the primary domain of religious activity and outlaws any kind of private practice performed in the household environment (10.909d–910d). It is also true that the legislators of the fictional Magnesia in Plato's *Laws* feel free to draft various regulations concerning the religious calendar, sacrifices and festivals (8.828a–b) and impose legal penalties on a religious

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[20] For the legitimacy of construing θεοὺς νομίζειν and θεοὺς ἡγεῖσθαι as 'to believe (in the existence of) gods', see Versnel (2011) 538–59. Cf. Mikalson (2010) 11, who opts for 'to recognize the gods'.

[21] Moderation: *Lg*. 4.716c–d. Cautiousness: *Phrd*. 246d; *Phlb*. 12c; *Ti*. 28b. Ignorance: *Cra*. 400d; *Ti*. 40d–e; *Criti*. 107a–d. Goodness: *R*. 2.380a–c; *Lg*. 10.900d. Uniformity: *R*. 2.382e–383a. Providential care: *Ti*. 41c–d; *Lg*. 10.902e–903a, 10.904a–c.

[22] The *locus classicus* is Burkert (1990) 332–7. The more recent studies belong to Lewis (2010); Abolafia (2015).

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misconduct (9.854 c–d, 10.909d–e, 10.910c–d). This interpretation, however, tends to miss not only Plato's concern with the personal beliefs and their improvement, but also the fact that the political community does not have the ultimate authority over religious matters. From the institutional point of view, the Delphic sanctuary is repeatedly construed as the most legitimate body to sanction or give instructions and laws on any religious question (5.738b–c, 6.759c–d; *R.* 4.427b–c). The other source of authority is tradition. It is an umbrella concept, which encompasses such terms as the 'ancestral laws' (ἀρχαῖοι νόμοι, 11.930e7; also πάτριος νόμος, 12.959b5), the Orphic 'ancient account' (παλαιὸς λόγος, *Lg.* 4.715e8, 5.738c2) or simply 'convention' (νόμος, *Cra.* 400e2; *Ti.* 40e3).[23] Plato's characters usually introduce the concept of tradition due to uncertainty over religious matters and hope that the customary ways of speaking about the gods can please them. The truthfulness of the tradition is sometimes founded on prophecy, visions and inspiration (*Lg.* 5.738c) or, alternatively, on the assumption that the ancients were in a closer proximity to the gods and thus had a better grasp of them (*Ti.* 40d–e). In the latter cases, the legends are clouded in obscurity and come from an anonymous group of people, such as the 'children of gods' (ἔκγονοι τῶν θεῶν, *Ti.* 40d8). Needless to say, Plato is well known for his usual hostility to these stories and authors (*R.* 2.364b–365a), so their epistemic value is rather controversial – a topic, which will be revisited in this book.

As a result, it is necessary to differentiate Plato's understanding of religion, which is internal to his text, from a cultural-historical account of Greek religion, which can be reconstructed by religious historians by independent means. It is crucial not to submit to the idea that Plato can convey the experiences of an average Greek, even if he explicitly presents something as typical to them, or pretends to give an objective picture of the Greek religious landscape. For it is evident that there is, in fact, nothing ordinary, standard and perhaps nothing traditional about Plato's views of the religious tradition. Once we take a closer look at his points of

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[23] These terms can also refer to non-religious topics, for which see e.g. *Lg.* 1.636b, 2.656e, 3.677a, 6.757a.

reference, our perception of the uniformity of Plato's account of the old tales concerning the gods may shatter. Plato's 'conventional' myths can be traced back not only to Homer and Hesiod (*Lg*. 10.886b–c), but also to the Orphics (*Lg*. 4.715e–716a) and the Pythagoreans (*Phlb*. 16c–d), whose approach to religion was neither conventional on the cultural level, nor institutionalised on the political level. For these reasons, I shall analyse Plato's engagement with the traditional gods, whilst simultaneously trying to uncover the broader religious horizon behind it. My aim is to determine which aspects pertaining to the gods, beliefs and practices Plato considers as 'traditional' and whether the available cultural examples can reinforce or undermine his understanding. This is also the reason why this book gives merely a selective overview of religion in Plato. I shall follow and unravel those religious themes, which dominate in Plato's later dialogues, namely theogony, anthropogony and cult practices, and examine those gods, such as Ouranos, Helios, Athena, Apollo and Dionysus, who play the most significant part in these discourses. Although I shall consider the individual identities of gods, my aim is to follow contemporary religious studies by focusing on the way in which traditional gods function within the broader networks of divine power – the gods as a group of created divinities, makers of humans, polis founders, moral exemplars.

0.2 Cosmology and Gods

An additional complicating factor is Plato's repeated attempts to dissolve the amalgam of religious inconsistencies in overly neat definitions, rigid distinctions and normative judgements. This is particularly conspicuous in Plato's cosmological investigations into the nature of world and gods. It is not an exaggeration to say that he generally treats the gods as bundles of the right kind of cosmological characteristics (e.g. order, uniformity, intelligence). The important outcome of this move is that it tends to unify various gods by vaporising their internal differences. It is especially true of the cosmic gods, namely the planets and stars, who are distinguished from one another only by their corporeal and spatial aspects, such as size, orbits, visibility and position in the

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universe. We saw a moment ago that the contrary is the case with the traditional gods, who have complex individual identities in Greek religion. It raises the broader question of whether Plato is ready to preserve and give cosmological support to the complex nature of traditional gods.

At first, it seems that the answer should be negative, because Plato is routinely understood as a natural theologian.[24] This category is part of the famous tripartition of Greek religion – natural theology of the philosophers, mythical theology of the poets and civic theology of the polis – which is meant to separate these discourses as well as to unite Greek philosophers in terms of how they conceptualise the divine.[25] In particular, natural theology is understood as an enterprise that postulates the god as a hypothetical first principle, whose causation and existence can be reconstructed from its effects in nature. The fact that theology is woven into natural philosophy seems to give it a more scientific flavour that can do away with inconsistencies of Greek religion. Accordingly, natural theology appears to be a rival explanatory framework to mythical theology, independent of its religious ideas and substituting for it a more solid discourse.[26] Recent discussions, however, challenge the idea that we can draw firm discursive boundaries such as the tripartition: the civic, philosophical and poetic discourses are not mutually exclusive theological options, because the poetic representations of the gods deploy the values, sentiments and ideologies of the polis, while the early cosmological critique of poetic theologies constitutes an internal modification of religion rather than an external alternative to it.[27] In addition, Shaul Tor shows that only a handful of philosophers, among whom Anaxagoras is the best example, can meet the rigorous criteria necessary for the austere role of natural theologian. Most of the others approach Greek religion without displacing it: some use a hierarchical model, in which the religious

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[24] See for example Gerson (1990) 33; Dombrowski (2005) 84.
[25] The early version of this classification is found in the Stoic Posidonius (*Plac.* 1.6.33–37 MR), later adopted by a Roman scholar Varro and discussed in Augustine (*De civ. D.* 6.5), and still defended by some contemporary scholars, for example Mikalson (2010) 16–19.
[26] Gerson (1990) 1–14.
[27] See Kindt (2015) 29–32 and Tor (2017) 36–48 respectively.

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level of the traditional gods is subordinated to the level of higher cosmological principles, others deploy a connective model, which singles out those aspects of the philosophical gods that can re-integrate them to the religious tradition, there are also those whose consolidating model merges the identities of the traditional gods with the new cosmic beings, and many more.[28] Plato is no exception here. For instance, the *Timaeus* introduces the new supreme god 'the Demiurge' in a way consistent with the tenets of natural theology, but the notable presence of traditional gods in the later dialogues, their striking significance in political and ethical matters, their complicated relation with the cosmic gods point to issues that the category of natural theology is too narrow to capture.

The recognition of the plurality of interpretative models inherent to cosmology gives us a more precise way to understand how this discourse can affect the gods. On the face of it, cosmologisation of gods is a general procedure that turns them into divine world-structuring and constitutive principles by means of arguments and philosophical myths concerning the nature of the universe. When one applies cosmological findings to something that the previous authors did not necessarily recognise as gods – for example the stars – cosmology contrives the new theological significance of these beings. But when cosmology works with the traditional gods, it has to engage with the pre-established theological notions of their identities, characteristics and areas of activity. It can retain them and find some correspondence to the philosophical principles, or it can modify, purify and even eliminate them by narrowing some and expanding other features, thus upgrading or downgrading the previous theological status of a certain god. By making any of these moves, it simultaneously modifies the religious perception of the traditional gods. Cosmologisation can make the existence of the traditional gods and their religious characteristics compatible with the philosophically confirmed nature of the universe. In some of the most ambitious projects, it can perform double identification, which applies the same religious name for different kinds of gods, say

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[28] See Tor (forthcoming).

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an anthropomorphic traditional being 'Zeus' and a planet 'Zeus', or complete identification, which deliberately merges what the Greeks know about the traditional gods with the cosmic entities. Even if cosmologisation simply distributes the names of the traditional gods to the philosophical principles and beings without merging or doubling their identities, it inevitably introduces the central puzzle of any cosmological discourse: are these the old gods dressed in a new form or the new gods with recognisable conventional names? However we choose to answer such a deceptively simple question, the important aspect of cosmologisation of the traditional gods is that its interaction with religion is a two-way street – it shapes the cosmological discourse as much as the latter re-interprets and remakes the religious tradition.[29]

A case in point is Empedocles, who stands out among the early Greek philosophers with perhaps the most elaborate scheme.[30] His universe has two main principles, Love, which harmonises everything, and Strife, which makes things hostile to one other. Love is conveniently called by the names of Aphrodite, Cypris, Harmony (DK31 B17, B22, B69, B70). It is certainly a clever move to apply an old religious name, such as Aphrodite, to something new that has a similar area of activity, thus making the philosophical innovation more relatable to the non-philosophical audience. At the same time, it also re-characterises Aphrodite and expands our understanding of her. By becoming a cosmological principle, the

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[29] Cosmologisation of gods is also different from allegorisation and rationalisation of myths, both of which tend to see the traditional gods as metaphors of various and not essentially cosmological entities. For example, Prodicus, DK84 B5 treats the gods there as metaphors of what is beneficial to human beings: bread is connected with Demeter, wine with Dionysus, water with Poseidon, fire with Hephaestus. Cf. Metrodorus, DK61 A6. Morgan (2000) 62–7, 98–105 makes a distinction between allegorisation and (primarily sophistic) rationalisation in terms of how they affect myths: the former aims to re-interpret the myth by unearthing the concealed layers of textual meaning, while the latter removes 'the incredible elements from myth in order to recover the historical event that lay behind it'.

[30] The range of associations between cosmological principles and traditional gods is quite limited in the other surviving testimonies of the early philosophers. For instance, Philolaus identifies the central cosmic fire with Hestia (DK44 B7) and places it under the protection of Zeus (A16). Huffman (1993) 385–91 also dismisses the other associations of traditional gods with mathematical entities in A14 as spurious. Cf. Heraclitus, DK22 B32, who may be seen as criticising analogous efforts at giving religious names to the first principles: 'the one wise does not want and wants to be called by the name of Zeus'.

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Olympian goddess receives responsibilities that are close to her religious identity, and yet they are highly distinctive and novel: for instance, to bond together animate and inanimate entities, to increase homogeneity in the universe, to originate living beings, to take care of particular cosmic cycles etc.[31] In a similar vein, Strife has a group of competitive male gods. Empedocles mentions Ares, Kydoimos (personified uproar), Zeus, Kronos and Poseidon in relation to it (B128). These varying religious names of Strife play well with its function to increase variety and difference in the universe. On a lower theological level, there are four physical elements, each of which receives a name of a god, whose area of influence can find some connection with the respective element: Zeus refers to aether/air, Hera to earth, Aidoneus/Hades to fire, Nestis/Persephone to water (B6, A33).[32] Afterwards, Empedocles does not give corresponding cosmological qualities to every remaining deity, which could have led to a wholesale re-interpretation of religion. So his account has a more limited objective, namely to charge the main aspects of cosmological discourse with the religious language in such a way as to map some of the heterogeneous Greek gods onto the diverse principles of his universe. The important result is that these reformed traditional gods become an integral part of the philosophical system, and if someone becomes persuaded by Empedocles, their perception of who is truly important in Greek religion will surely be altered.

We are about to see that Plato's initial attempts at cosmologising the traditional gods in the earlier works have a similarly ambitious scale. The key text is the *Phaedrus*, a dialogue that proposes three transformative steps in this regard. The first step defines the cosmological status and function, and the moral qualities of the gods (245c–246e). The gods are identified with souls, because the latter are the only beings that can be

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[31] For the role of Love in Empedocles' cosmogony and zoogony, see Sedley (2007) 31–74.
[32] I follow the interpretation of this problematic material suggested in Rowett (2016) 84–93. According to her, the unexpected association of Persephone and Hades with water and fire means that 'what we experience as elemental fire and water are chthonic gods, which would doubtless seem plausible for someone living in Sicily, where the mountains are liable to spill out fire, as well as water'.

reasonably credited with immortality and eternity (245c–e), and immortality is a conventional religious attribute of gods.[33] In particular, souls are defined as self-movers, whose job is to initiate and cause motions, hence they cannot be either destroyed or created by something else. In addition, their particular motion is to 'circle around the whole celestial region' eternally (πάντα δὲ οὐρανὸν περιπολεῖ, 246b6–7), which may strike us as implying that the divine souls actually belong to the planets and the stars.[34] But the connection with astral bodies is effectively dismissed by noting that the immortal gods cannot have bodies that are by nature perishable objects (246d). The supremacy of psychic motions also gives the gods a function to 'manage the entire universe' (πάντα τὸν κόσμον διοικεῖ, 246c1–2) and this is done in a morally perfect manner consistent with goodness, beauty and wisdom stemming from their purely intelligent souls (246a, 246d–e).

The second step connects these observations with Greek religion and the theory of Forms (246e–247e). We learn that the divine souls have established names, internal hierarchy and a specific number of leaders that fully correspond to what we know about the Olympian pantheon. The gods are organised into twelve sectors with a presiding position given to no one other than Zeus and each of the remaining sectors being allocated to the rest of the Olympian gods, except for Hestia who serves as the fixed point of the universe (246e–247a). Their celestial motions are also restated in religious and political terms by likening them to the march of an army (πορεύεται, 246e5; στρατιὰ θεῶν, 246e6; τεταγμένοι, 247a3), to the dance in a chorus (θείου χοροῦ, 247a7) and to the feast at a banquet (πρὸς δαῖτα καὶ ἐπὶ θοίνην, 247a8). Now the purpose of these movements is to reach the extreme circumference of the universe, the fixed stars at the edge of the sensible world, in an orderly and regular manner and to circle around it by looking beyond the heavens (τὸν δὲ ὑπερουράνιον τόπον, 247c3) at the transcendent region of Forms. We find a special emphasis placed on the observation of

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[33] See, for example, Homer, *Il*. 1.503 and *Od*. 1.31; Hesiod, *Th*. 21, 43.

[34] For the speech of the *Phaedrus* as the precursor to the Hellenistic astral religion, see Boyancé (1952).

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the Forms of Justice, Self-Control and Beauty, but Daniel Werner is right to point out that the gods achieve a synoptic vision of the Forms, because they see 'all the other beings' too (τἆλλα ὡσαύτως τὰ ὄντα, 247e2–3).[35] In other words, the lives of the reformed gods are no longer concerned with the everyday worries, plots and battles that are so typical of the divinities in the epic stories, but with a tranquil, collective contemplation of the ontological foundations of reality, the Forms, that gives firm knowledge and great intelligence to the traditional gods. The cosmic journey, however, has a certain timetable, since it lasts as long as the gods move in the circular motion at the extreme circumference, after which they return to the inner celestial region (247d–e).[36]

The final step enacts this theological conception as an ethical ideal for human beings and specifies how they can follow the gods (248a–257a). The possibility for such a transition was already secured in the previous steps by assuming that human beings have a soul (246a–c), thus linking the gods and humans by common nature, and that the Olympians are benevolent enough to lead whoever chooses to follow them in their own sector towards the transcendent region of Forms (247a). Human beings can reach similar heights of intellectual achievement by assimilating to one of these gods (248a), but different Olympians have different character traits and they encourage us to emulate their preferred qualities: Zeus values philosophical and commanding nature similar to the god himself (Διὸς δῖόν τινα εἶναι ζητοῦσι τὴν ψυχὴν . . . φιλόσοφός τε καὶ ἡγεμονικὸς τὴν φύσιν, 252e1–3), Hera appreciates royal conduct (βασιλικὸν, 253b2), while Ares prizes violence (τι οἰηθῶσιν ἀδικεῖσθαι ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐρωμένου, φονικοὶ καὶ ἕτοιμοι καθιερεύειν αὑτούς τε καὶ τὰ παιδικά, 252c6–7). What unifies this diversity is the Form of Beauty and the way in which this Form draws people to itself through its diverse corporeal representations. Whichever god and lifestyle are chosen, the agents tend to see the beauty of and to fall in love with someone following the same god and leading the same lifestyle, that is, the followers of Ares will find beauty in warlike people. Beautiful objects of love

[35] Werner (2012) 93.
[36] For a more detailed overview of the religious motifs in the *Phaedrus*, consult Werner (2012) 108–16.

stimulate the recollection of the Form of Beauty (251a–e), which was seen by those human souls that travelled to the boundaries of the heavens with the gods in the prenatal state.[37] And the more lovers emulate the particular god in themselves and their objects of love, the more they approximate to the divine condition and thus gain a share in the transcendent vision.[38] A failure to comply with these regulations results in eschatological punishments, which initiates reincarnations into progressively worse lifestyles that start with kingship and generalship and end with tyranny (248c–e).

Let us now gather the results. Both Empedocles and Plato's *Phaedrus* share the idea that there must be some loose correspondence between a certain cosmological entity and its equivalent in the religious tradition in terms of activity, functions or areas of influence: the harmonising principle of Love conjures the conventional area of Aphrodite's activities, while the leader of the souls has to be of course Zeus, the king of the Olympians.[39] The key difference between them is that the *Phaedrus* re-interprets the traditional gods as intelligent cosmic souls that contemplate the first principles of the universe rather than the foundational principles themselves. However, there are some tensions in the *Phaedrus*, which emerge when we look at the conceptual relation between the three transformative steps. First, the religious heterogeneity of gods (the second and third steps) cannot be derived from the cosmological homogeneity of gods (the first step). There is nothing in the uniform psychic qualities of the gods, such as self-motion, regularity or goodness, to suggest that they must have different character patterns and preferences. Second, the singular philosophical objective to contemplate the Form of Beauty (the third step) is in tension with the multiple character profiles of traditional gods and their preferred lifestyles (the second and

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[37] For the role of recollection, see Morgan (2000) 218–25.

[38] Nightingale (2021) 203–12 argues that this vision gives an epiphanic experience to the lovers. See also Werner (2012) 122–7, who argues that the myth insists on combining intellectual activity with emotional attachment when approaching the Forms.

[39] Empedocles' method of functional correspondence, however, is somewhat arbitrary, for there are many good religious alternatives to each of the given name. Perhaps Empedocles himself saw this problem too. For instance, DK31 B98 refers to Hephaestus as fire, while A23 mixes the roles of Zeus, Hera and Hades by associating them with fire, air and earth respectively.

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third steps). So there is a dilemma here: one can either perform a full integration of the traditional gods to cosmology at the expense of their individual identities or retain those religious identities by having a somewhat incoherent account. The myth of the *Phaedrus* is stuck in the second option.

Plato's later dialogues, the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* in particular, indicate a renewed attempt to escape this deadlock.[40] The impressive, but ultimately inconclusive, results of the *Phaedrus*, however, did not force the later dialogues to merge all traditional gods with various cosmological entities. Cosmology is primarily deployed to defend the divinity of stars and planets against the intellectuals, whose atheism and materialism forces us to regard these celestial beings as inanimate entities.[41] The manner of defence is familiar – to prove the presence of soul in the gods with the arguments concerning the nature of the universe – but the explanatory framework is significantly expanded and applied to the cosmic gods only, thus giving them the cosmological qualities mentioned above (e.g. self-motion, regularity, uniformity, intelligence). The traditional gods do not seem to be reformed along these lines, in fact we will discuss several philosophical issues that seem to distance them from the cosmological discourse, which seems to suggest that cosmology does not guarantee the traditional gods a theological status comparable to the one in the *Phaedrus*. The problem now is to give the traditional gods a new foundation and function that would somehow reattach them to the philosophical system, if not on equal terms with the cosmic gods, then at least on something parallel to it.

This enigma of traditional gods received various, at times conflicting, explanations in the secondary literature. Early in the twentieth century P. E. More (1921) argued that Plato was

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[40] For the dating of these dialogues and the *Phaedrus*, see an elaborate discussion in Thesleff (2009) 51–81, 118–21, 125–8, 135–41, 165–247, 317–26, 331–9, 348–9, 381–2. More importantly, Thesleff (2009) 153–63 shows that there is a broad scholarly consensus about considering the *Timaeus-Critias* and the *Laws* as 'the late dialogues'. For the incoherencies of terminology, content and philosophical doctrines in the *Laws* that bear the mark of the editorial influence of Philip of Opus, Plato's secretary in the Academy, see Nails and Thesleff (2003).

[41] See e.g. Anaxagoras, DK59 A1, A35, A42; Archelaus, DK60 A12–15; Diogenes of Apollonia, DK64 A12–A14; Leucippus, DK67 B1; Democritus, DK68 A87; Critias, DK88 B25. For an illuminating study of Greek atheism, see Whitmarsh (2015).

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a religious conformist, who simply accepted the customary modes of piety and envisaged the traditional gods as personifications of morally purified and yet nebulous divine powers. A more nuanced reading was offered by Friedrich Solmsen (1942) and Victor Goldschmidt (1949). Both classicists shared the assumption that Plato was eager to defend religion against multiple subversive threads in Greek philosophy, such as agnosticism and atheism, but it brought them to radically different positions. On Goldschmidt's view, Plato carried out a conservative restoration, which renewed the alliance between polis and religion by using the theological arguments of *Laws* 10 to support the existence, goodness and justice of the traditional gods. By contrast, Solmsen claimed that these arguments could only confirm the existence of the cosmic gods and a set of natural laws programmed to ensure the providential care for human beings. Solmsen concluded that the conservative sentiments of Plato lead to a revolutionary proposal to rejuvenate the old cult practices by transforming them into astral religion. A middle way between these two extremities was adopted by Olivier Reverdin (1945), who argued that Plato retained both families of gods, albeit on an unequal footing: the traditional gods were preserved in their purified and corrected form, but as an ancillary to the cosmic beings, the truest gods in the philosophical sense.[42]

Contemporary authors are equally tangled in the conservative and reformist strands of Plato's thought. Gerd Van Riel's *Plato's Gods* (2013) explores Plato's overall hesitation to hold a firm position on the traditional gods, their identities and wishes. Van Riel's study is devoted to demonstrating Plato's suspension of judgement on the divine matters, which is construed not as a version of agnosticism, but rather as a pious acknowledgement of the human epistemic limits. Certain aspects of traditional gods, however, are accessible to human knowledge. Van Riel agrees with previous authors that the traditional gods are virtuous beings, who are incapable of producing anything chaotic or malicious in this world. But he argues that Plato's real theological innovation

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[42] A comparable interpretation was adopted by Des Places (1969) 245–59, though he also argued that Plato believed that the cosmic gods were to replace the traditional gods eventually. Cf. Festugière (1983) 209 and Annas (2017) 129–40.

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lies in his unique conception of traditional gods as immortal and intelligent souls, whose corporeal manifestation is a matter of their choice. According to this account, the *Phaedrus* and the later dialogues demonstrate significant unity of Plato's thought. In this way, the traditional gods regain a philosophical status comparable to the one held by the cosmic gods. Aikaterini Lefka's *Tout est plein de dieux* (2013), on the other hand, argues that the novel theological ideas do not overshadow the conventional identity and function of traditional gods. She provides an extensive catalogue of divinities appearing in the Platonic corpus, which shows that the earlier interpretations overlooked the abundance of conventional religious elements in the dialogues. The traditional gods not only retain their personal names and titles, but also diverse domains of activity: they are regarded as the originators of humanity and its political life, the givers of laws and festivals, the teachers of arts and expertise. In her reading, the novelty here is that Plato's gods are reformed in such a way as to express goodness, benevolence, knowledge and guidance in a slightly limited, but still their own conventional, area of activity.[43] However, there are sceptical voices as well. For instance, Mark L. McPherran suggests that Plato uses the names of the traditional gods to indicate various divine powers permeating the universe, but they are actually little more than noble lies, a concession to the ordinary people, who need religion for educational purposes.[44] As we can see, scholars sometimes acknowledge the discrepancy between the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus*, sometimes deny it and sometimes ignore this question altogether.

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[43] See also Lefka (2003) 99–104.

[44] See especially McPherran (2006) 247–55 and (2014) 67–75, whose scepticism is also shared by Dodds (1951) 220 and allegorical reading by Mayhew (2010) 213. A similar position on the moral value of religion is adopted by Morgan (1992) 242–4; Fraenkel (2012) 38–40, 58–82. Other studies on Plato and religion, which do not formulate a definite position on the overall philosophical status of the traditional gods, include Guthrie (1950) 333–53; Feibleman (1959) 21–84; Despland (1985); Burkert (1990) 332–7; Morgan (1990); Schofield (2006) 309–25; Mikalson (2010) 208–41; Klostergaard Petersen (2017); Babut (2019) 87–120. The neglect of Plato's contribution to this subject represents a broader tendency to equate Plato's theology with the study of the cosmic gods and the ontological principles. Some examples of this trend are Gerson (1990) 33–81; Menn (1995); Dombrowski (2005); Mohr (2005); Bordt (2006); Drozdek (2007) 151–67.

0.3 The Aims and Scope of This Book

In light of these observations, there emerge three areas for further analysis and clarification: the contrast of the traditional and cosmic gods, the broader relation between religion and cosmology, and the value of cult practice in practical philosophy (ethics and politics) as well as its relation to cosmology. The first problem arises from the fact that the cosmogony of the *Timaeus* and the theology of *Laws* 10 have little to say about the traditional gods in comparison to the cosmic gods. Hence, how does Plato position the traditional gods within these cosmological systems? What does he have to say about the nature of these gods? Does the textual evidence confirm Van Riel's thesis that the traditional gods are immortal souls? And what is their precise relation to the cosmic gods? These questions lead to the second challenge concerning the purpose of the traditional gods in the universe. If the traditional gods are not conflated with the cosmic gods, then how different are their functions? Are Greek religion and Plato in agreement about these roles? And what is the philosophical value of the conventional religious identities unearthed by Lefka's study? The final problem related to the purpose of worshipping the gods: does cult practice have any bearing on good life and happiness? If so, what resources does performative religiosity have that can lead to moral improvement? And what is the general role of religion in the life of the polis? Is Solmsen right to claim that Plato is a proponent of astral piety, which replaces the conventional ways of ritual honouring? Has philosophical cosmology become the primary source of morality in Plato's later works?

The present book is a study of these questions in Plato's later dialogues (specifically, the *Timaeus*, the *Critias* and the *Laws*) and the Early Academy. It examines the ways in which Plato approaches the traditional gods, considers how this differs from his approach to the cosmic gods and conceptualises the two families of gods in cosmological, political and ethical discourses. It also explores how these theories were received by his students. My aim is not only to uncover Plato's philosophical resources and strategies for rethinking religion, but also to give a fresh perspective on how Greek religiosity influenced his own intellectual

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projects. Standard scholarship tends to offer reductionist readings of the Platonic theology by presenting Plato as merely a pioneer in theological argumentation or a guardian of the Greek notions of the divine. Hopefully, my research will address this imbalance by opening up Plato's complex patterns of critical engagement with, and appropriation of, religion, as well as the interaction between the innovative, conservative, polemical and sceptical elements in his works. What unifies this investigation is the thesis that the traditional and cosmic gods are in unmistakable, dynamic, yet productive tension in Plato's later dialogues. This tension is neither dissolved by proposing an independent theological discourse for the traditional gods, nor circumvented by fully integrating them to cosmology, but which instead is maintained by slightly adjusting the characteristics of the traditional gods to the conception of the cosmic gods and by retaining those religiously charged aspects of their identity that can illuminate some areas of human world, which cannot be explained by the providential activity of the cosmic gods. So the tension between the traditional and cosmic gods results in a discourse, which harmonises some parts of the Greek cultural horizon with Plato's cosmological proposals, but does not lead to a global, systematic and coherent strategy for the traditional gods, which would amount to something like 'Plato's philosophy of religion'.[45]

My argument consists of four parts, which correspond to the questions I mentioned above. I submit that: (1) Plato's cosmology follows the Greek theogonic tradition to a certain degree and accommodates both the traditional and cosmic gods via a shared pair of the first gods, but adopts different explanatory frameworks for the two types of gods; (2) Plato unifies the two divine families in terms of their common function to originate human beings, but

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[45] As these preliminary remarks already indicate, I deliberately try to avoid drawing firm boundaries between religion, theology and philosophy in Plato. The differentiation of these discourses according to polarities between the irrational and the rational, the unsystematic and the systemic, the deifying and the naturalising presents an overly idealised version of each discourse and misses what is in common between them, namely that philosophical and theological modifications are entangled in the Greek religious horizon. It is my hope that this approach can do more justice to Plato's understanding of the traditional gods with all of its theoretical complications and cultural embeddedness.

differentiates the traditional gods from the cosmic gods in terms of their political role – Plato regards only the traditional gods as the makers of the political communities, which indicates his mild support for the Greek foundation myths and civic stories and may be the key to the puzzle of why the two families were kept apart in the first place; (3) Plato finds in religion the institutional environment for achieving moral improvement as much as leading a good civic life, provided that the ordinary citizens will imitate the character traits of the traditional gods, but the highest level of moral achievement lies in the assimilation to the cosmic gods via cosmological understanding. Over the course of this book, we will also see that several epistemic, explanatory and conceptual challenges remain unresolved. It means that Plato leaves some room for theological uncertainties and religious idiosyncrasies, which prevents him from establishing full compatibility between his philosophy and Greek religion. Finally, our investigation will close with the reception of these issues in some of the members of the Early Academy. We will see that the religious thought of such Academics as Xenocrates and Philip of Opus was far more original than is usually appreciated. In particular, I argue that (4) Plato's students gave precedence to the cosmic gods and developed different strategies that incorporated cosmological functions, religious identities and ethical roles of the traditional gods into the theology of the cosmic gods, thus completing the fusion of the two families of gods.

Following the logic of my claims, the book falls into four chapters. Chapter 1 ('Plato's Theogony') is devoted to the complex interaction of Plato's cosmology with the Greek theogonic tradition in the *Timaeus*. Famously, Plato advanced a theogonic theory, according to which the primary god, called the Demiurge, created the younger gods by fashioning their bodies and souls in the manner of a craftsman. In Greek mythology, however, a very different set of factors shaped the origins of gods: they came to be through sexual reproduction and established their positions by means of power. A further complication arises from Plato's assertion that the genealogies of the traditional gods have low epistemic value (*Ti*. 40d–e), which has led some scholars to believe that Plato treats the Greek religious tradition ironically. The purpose of

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Chapter 1 is to determine, more generally, the extent to which religious thinking persists in the *Timaeus* and, more specifically, the place of the traditional gods in Plato's cosmology. I propose a new reading of the *Timaeus* as a theogony of Ouranos, a traditional god notoriously left at the margins of popular religion. To substantiate my claim, we will need to explore the historical-theoretical background of the *Timaeus*. Accordingly, we will also need to take a closer look at the ways in which Plato merges the conventional and novel characteristics of Ouranos. Finally, we will have to compare Plato's theogony with the genealogical trees preserved in the poetic sources. This analysis serves as a springboard to explain the relation between the cosmic and traditional gods. For Plato, Ouranos is a traditional god *and* an astral being, and as such he is the most senior deity of both families. However, I contend that Plato maintains the separation between the two families of gods. To confirm this, I conclude the chapter with a more general overview of the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*, which will show that out of all traditional gods, only Gaia receives a re-characterisation similar to that of Ouranos, while other identifications, such as Apollo-Helios and the planet of Hermes, raise new conceptual problems. The result is that Plato tries to integrate the traditional gods to his broader cosmological framework via the theogony of Ouranos, but his attempt is a modest one, for he never clarifies the cosmological status of these gods.

Chapter 2 ('Plato's Anthropogony and Politogony') revisits the question about the nature of the traditional gods by considering their role within the created universe. We will continue with the investigation of the *Timaeus*, but our special focus will be anthropogony, the cosmogonic phase coming after the origins of gods. I argue that Plato encourages us to think of these gods as the creators of human beings, but this function does not differentiate the traditional gods from the cosmic gods, for the latter participate in the origins of humanity as well. Hence, the more specific goal of this chapter is to clarify whether the traditional gods have a distinctive role in the present world. Since the *Timaeus* does not offer further material for this dilemma, we turn to the Athens-Atlantis story of the *Critias*, a dialogue set as a follow-up to the

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Timaeus. Thus far, the *Critias* has received virtually no attention for its theological content. I aim to rectify this by uncovering the ways in which the dialogue conceptualises the traditional gods as the polis-founders and the makers of political communities within the political thought of Plato. I will also compare my findings with the evidence from the *Laws* and its myth of Kronos. Once again, my aim is not to argue for a full consistency of these dialogues, but to explore their thematic continuity. Ultimately, my intention is to show that Plato is deeply committed to the idea that the Olympian gods are the founders of various cities – a religious belief widespread in the Greek civic imagination. Plato amplifies this idea by conferring a function to generate all human beings and to establish the first cities on all traditional gods. By contrast, Greek myths do not present these gods as a group of beings collectively responsible for anthropogony, nor do they extend the foundational role to all traditional gods. At the same time, I argue that Plato's politogony is not immediately derivable from his cosmogony, which means that the political nature of the traditional gods does not have a full cosmological support.

Chapter 3 ('Plato on Divinity and Morality') shifts the perspective from the activities of the traditional gods to the activities of human beings with respect to these gods. In particular, the focus of this chapter is Plato's conception of religious practice and the relation between religion, cosmology and ethics in the *Laws*. These themes are rarely taken together: the predominant assumption is that the ethics of the *Laws* works on psychological premises without recourse to theology, while the religious life is introduced merely for the sake of strengthening the political bonds in the colonial project of Magnesia. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to re-evaluate the degree to which the standard ways of worshiping the traditional gods can contribute towards moral development. For this purpose, I explore the theme of 'assimilation to god' in the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*, and argue that the ideal of godlikeness is the overarching ethical principle of both dialogues. In the *Timaeus*, moral progress is understood as an intellectual assimilation to the cosmic god by means of cosmology. In contrast to it, I argue that the *Laws* establishes a two-tier system. We will see that the ordinary citizens of Magnesia begin their ethical life in a religious

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environment, which is re-imagined as the space where people carry out their lifelong quest for virtue. A closer look at the Magnesian festivals and religious institutions, such as the symposia and the choral performances, shows that they contain the required psychological objectives, ethical practices and resources to improve the participants' character. What is even more significant is the idea that ordinary people are required to imitate the patron gods of these festivals as if these divinities could be the role models for the Magnesians. The traditional gods are re-imagined as virtuous beings, whose character and stories exemplify the moral goals and ideals of Magnesia. Therefore, I claim that cult practice is complementary to the ethics of the *Laws*: it provides recognisable cultural practices, which serve as the framework for implementing Plato's later ethics. That being said, some citizens will be able to perfect their moral virtues and from then on they will continue their ethical life by developing the intellectual virtues and imitating the cosmic god. In this way, the *Laws* thematically reconnects to the *Timaeus*.

Chapter 4 ('Cosmic Religion in the Early Academy') explores the so-called thirteenth book of the *Laws*, namely the Pseudo-Platonic *Epinomis*, which I take to be the work of Philip of Opus. This chapter also compares the *Epinomis* with the works of Xenocrates and Aristotle. Thus, the monograph closes with a brief glance at what lies ahead of Plato. It is uncontroversial that Plato's students mainly devoted their efforts to studying the cosmic gods and other philosophical divinities, which resulted in radical demands to institute an astral cult as well as a more doctrinal theology than the master's. The question as to how they dealt with Plato's ambivalent stance on the traditional gods is rather intriguing in light of these marked and deliberate theoretical preferences. The purpose of Chapter 4 is to examine the fate of the traditional gods in the Early Academy and to assess the influence of Plato's later dialogues on Philip of Opus, Xenocrates and Aristotle. My aim is to show that beneath the foundations of the new astral theology we find a salient engagement with Plato's religious legacy. I argue that three broad trends are noticeable with respect to the traditional gods. First, the Academics continued to develop the theology of Ouranos, who

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remained the primary cosmic god in their cosmological systems, whilst updating its ontological status in a way that would enable them to respond to Aristotle's critique of Plato's cosmology. Second, they moved towards a tighter union of the two families of gods. Philip used the identities of the traditional gods to uncover the divinity in planets and stars, while Xenocrates extended the procedure of religious naming to all ontological and cosmological principles, thus fully assimilating the traditional gods with the philosophical gods. Third, their moral systems adopted a strongly intellectualist version of the ideal of godlikeness, according to which only the cosmological beings can be the ethical role models. Therefore, my claim is that the two Academics carried out Plato's re-characterisation of gods to such an extent that they lost the delicate balance between religion and philosophy of Plato's later dialogues.

As the synopsis indicates, the present study is not designed to offer an exhaustive assessment of the Greek religious ideas in Plato's works. Instead, I aim to give a more sustained analysis of three later dialogues, especially of those parts that had a significant impact on Plato's students. My focus on these works is determined by the fact that they form a coherent thematic whole: the *Timaeus* explores cosmogony and anthropogony; the *Critias* transfers us from anthropogony to politogony and the foundation of the first political communities; the *Laws* discusses a particular colonial project and its utopian social institutions. However, the *Timaeus-Critias* and the *Laws* are certainly autonomous projects with their own dramatic setting, discursive qualifications and theoretical aims. For these reasons, my investigation will work on two levels. On the one hand, I will have a close reading of each dialogue separately while reconstructing the broader conceptual map. This approach amounts to collecting the key passages on the proposed topic, investigating their contexts and arguments, providing potential solutions and tying them to the main thread of this book. This technique stands in contrast to those studies with a synthesising approach, that is, a way of collecting passages from across Plato's corpus without considering their backgrounds. The purpose of my method is to avoid making bold juxtapositions, hasty homogenisations and

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unqualified generalisations.[46] On the other hand, I will use a comparative analysis whenever we will reach either clarity or deadlock in relation to those very passages. In those stages of my work, I will try not only to uncover the thematic continuity of the later dialogues, but also to determine whether the specific arguments or ideas have predecessors in other dialogues. What I hope to achieve with this approach is to show that the topic of this book – the traditional and cosmic gods – can serve as a useful angle both to illuminate the specific problems pertaining to these dialogues and to bring out the philosophical unity of Plato's later works.[47]

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[46] A synthesising approach is adopted in perhaps the most significant contemporary works on Plato and religion: Mikalson (2010); Van Riel (2013); Lefka (2013). See also Tor (2012), who has criticised Mikalson's work precisely for these reasons. It also means that I will generally tend to avoid referring to the author 'Plato', whilst exploring the dialogues. Except for the introduction, I typically refer to Plato's voice in the concluding sections, which gather the entirety of the views of his characters and make cross-dialogue comparisons. This method is based on the assumption that Plato's position can be uncovered once we determine the cohesion of the views of his characters.

[47] In the past couple of decades, the thematic readings of Plato's later philosophy have been gaining some ground, for which see, for example, Prauscello (2014). Instead of being an alternative to either developmentalism or unitarianism, the thematic approach, I believe, can complement these broader interpretative outlooks by giving a highly contextual reading of Plato. When compared to the *Phaedrus*, my final conclusions may seem to support a developmentalist perspective, according to which Plato changed his views, but at the same time the continuity between the later dialogues and the *Phaedrus* in terms of philosophical concerns and interests may indicate a mere revision, which is consistent with the unitarian approach. Given this ambiguity, I prefer to avoid aligning with any of these interpretative schools.

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