

CHAPTER 3

PLATO ON DIVINITY AND MORALITY

Thus far we have examined the place and function of the traditional and cosmic gods in Plato's accounts of origins. With the genesis of human beings as political animals we arrive at the present world-order and its everyday concerns. From political assemblies to civic festivals to all sorts of private incidents, everyday Greek life is filled with various occasions in which humans can encounter the gods, consult with them, worship and celebrate them. Plato's *Laws* accepts the importance of these conventional activities for ordinary people, includes them in the social structures of Magnesia, his last utopian city, and arguably makes religious life even more intensive than daily life in contemporary Athens. But is it anything more than a conservative sentiment? It is quite reasonable to have some reservations here because the main paradigm of Plato's later ethics is the ideal of godlikeness. According to the *Timaeus*, human beings have to stabilise their souls and regain their psychic unity by assimilating themselves to the cosmic god. In particular, the orderly thought-process as exemplified by its everyday regular, harmonious motion give humans a model to improve their own movements and thinking and to ascend to this unworldly lifestyle. If morality is orientated towards the cosmic divinity, does it mean then that the traditional gods are completely excluded from the later ethics? It would be a truly odd outcome, given our findings in Chapters 1–2. We saw that the traditional gods have some theological space in the cosmogony and anthropogony of the *Timaeus* and that their role progressively increases the further we get to the politogony of the *Critias* and the *Laws*. In addition, such a position would look like a shrewd political attempt at keeping the masses in line with the means of religious sanction rather than a sincere commitment to the need for religious practice. So is there any special philosophical reason to recommend worshipping the traditional gods?

3.1 The Elitist Ideal of Godlikeness in the *Timaeus*

Does cult practice have any value in the ethical development of human beings? And what is the relation between the traditional and cosmic gods in the later ethics? This chapter explores the triangulation between religion, ethics and politics in the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*. It investigates whether, and if so to what extent, the traditional gods and cult practice have a role in the ideal of godlikeness and its practical implementation in Plato's last political utopia.

3.1 The Elitist Ideal of Godlikeness in the *Timaeus*

In the previous chapters, we mentioned two levels of assimilation that marked the creation story of the *Timaeus*. The first level was found in cosmogony (Chapter 1), where the origins of the universe became a process of assimilation to the Demiurge, since guided by his goodness, the creator god 'wanted everything to become as much like himself as was possible' (πάντα ὅτι μάλιστα ἐβουλήθη γενέσθαι παραπλήσια ἑαυτῷ, *Ti.* 29e3). As a result, the Demiurge created the universe as a living intelligent divinity (30a), whose activity imitates the paradigm and the Demiurge *qua* Intellect. The second level was located in anthropogony (Chapter 2): the younger gods were requested to imitate the Demiurge in their handling of the generation of human beings and so they assimilated themselves to his creative work, thus becoming demiurgic auxiliaries (41c).¹ Anthropogony was crucial to the design of the universe. The creation of humans as ensouled corporeal beings was teleologically oriented to make the universe complete, which means that the realisation of the universe depended on creating all the genera of living beings that are included in the paradigm of Animal (cf. 39e–40a). What the higher living beings – the Ouranian god, the younger gods and the humans – have in common is their immortal part, the rational soul. Their souls were crafted from the same material and for the same purpose: to be capable of reasoning and movement, which are the factors that make them alive.² Hence, human beings were made in the likeness

¹ On the assimilative levels, see further Pradeau (2003) 45–9.

² See further Sedley (1999) 316–17.

of the same model that hitherto was used in creating the younger gods, though realised in different ways, and so the gods and humans have to some extent a common nature.

For some time, human beings lived as incorporeal intelligent souls sowed in their native stars (41d–e). During this period, humans learned about the nature of the universe (τὴν τοῦ παντὸς φύσιν, 41e2) and the laws of destiny (νόμους τε τοὺς εἰμαρμένους, 41e2–3).³ These laws concern the providential plan, according to which the purely rational souls of humans have to be embodied in order to fill the universe with living species different from the gods, and the eschatological plan specifying what each individual needs to do in order to regain their godlike status and to return to the stars. The event of incarnation then distorted and unbalanced the psychic motions, which were supposed to rotate in perfect circularity. From the very first moments of their physical existence human beings were affected by multiple motions and overwhelmed by various perceptions, thus losing their regular movement (43a–e). The inborn affinity to gods, therefore, did not automatically translate into perfect godlikeness. Human maturation is about regaining the control of our own psychic revolutions, stimulating stable motions, increasing our capacity to have the right kind of intellectual judgements and thus restoring psychic regularity (44b). If humans are to recover their original psychic condition, they have to follow and imitate the beings who are the exemplars of the required condition, namely the cosmic god. Finally, we reach the third level of assimilation (47c, 90a–d): human beings are given the ideal of godlikeness, which is a regulative idea of how to participate in the assimilation to god (*homoiōsis theōi*) and the key ethical paradigm in Plato's later dialogues.

What are the specific instruments to fix this flawed existence? The following text gives a teleological account of vision explaining how it empowered humans to discover philosophy by

³ The phrase νόμους τε τοὺς εἰμαρμένους could be understood as either the 'laws that give destiny' or the 'destined laws'. My rendering follows Cornford (1937) 143n1, who compares this phrase with a parallel eschatological passage from *Lg.* 10.904c8–9: 'And as they change they move, in obedience to the decree and law of destiny' (κατὰ τὴν τῆς εἰμαρμένης τάξιν καὶ νόμον).

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observing the heavens and enquiring into their nature. It is also a story that allows us to discern the key moments in human psychic improvement.

T19 As it is, however, our ability to see the periods of day-and-night, of months and of years, of equinoxes and solstices, has led to the invention of number, and has given us the idea of time and opened the path to enquiry into the nature of the universe. These pursuits have given us philosophy, a gift from the gods to the mortal race whose value neither has been nor ever will be surpassed. . . . Let us rather declare that the cause and purpose of this supreme good is this: the god invented sight and gave it to us so that we might observe the orbits of intelligence in the *ouranos* and apply them to the revolutions of our own understanding. For there is a kinship between them, even though our revolutions are disturbed, whereas they are undisturbed. So once we have come to know them and to share in the ability to make correct calculations according to nature, we should stabilise the wandering revolutions within ourselves by imitating the completely unwandering revolutions of the god. (*Ti.* 47a4–c4, mod.)

νῦν δ' ἡμέρα τε καὶ νύξ ὀφθεῖσαι μῆνες τε καὶ ἐνιαυτῶν περίοδοι καὶ ἰσημερία καὶ τροπαὶ μεμηχάνηται μὲν ἀριθμὸν, χρόνου δὲ ἔννοιαν περὶ τε τῆς τοῦ παντὸς φύσεως ζήτησιν ἔδοσαν· ἐξ ὧν ἐπιπορισάμεθα φιλοσοφίας γένος, οὐ μείζον ἀγαθὸν οὔτ' ἦλθεν οὔτε ἦξει ποτὲ τῷ θνητῷ γένει δωρηθὲν ἐκ θεῶν . . . ἀλλὰ τοῦτου λεγέσθω παρ' ἡμῶν ἀύτη ἐπὶ ταῦτα αἰτία, θεὸν ἡμῖν ἀνευρεῖν δωρήσασθαι τε ὄψιν, ἵνα τὰς ἐν οὐρανῷ τοῦ νοῦ κατιδόντες περιόδους χρῆσάμεθα ἐπὶ τὰς περιφορὰς τὰς τῆς παρ' ἡμῖν διανοήσεως, συγγενεῖς ἐκείναις οὐσας, ἀταράκτοις τεταραγμένας, ἐκμαθόντες δὲ καὶ λογισμῶν κατὰ φύσιν ὀρθότητος μετασχόντες, μιμούμενοι τὰς τοῦ θεοῦ πάντως ἀπλανεῖς οὐσας, τὰς ἐν ἡμῖν πεπλανημένας καταστησάμεθα.

Let us mark each step in human intellectual progress that makes up the programme of T19. It starts with the planets and the stars, who are the first entities encountered by human beings on their way towards godlikeness, for their ‘wanderings’ in the sky are the source of curiosity that triggers philosophical enquiry. The initial step is simply to observe the heavenly phenomena, namely the movements of astral bodies over time, and thus to comprehend the role of numbers in the organisation of the universe. Such research leads towards the foundations of mathematical sciences. The next task is to use the tools of mathematics to examine the regularity of the celestial revolutions and to discover its cause. Due to recurring harmonious and orderly patterns, one has to postulate the presence

of intelligence and psychic causation, namely the world-soul. In this way, the cosmologist comes to realise that the activity of the world-soul was made visible by making the cosmic gods visible.

T19 shows that the full correction of human thoughts is achieved by contemplating the Ouranian god. Now the benefit of these studies is that human beings not only learn some new exciting subjects, but they are also gradually transformed by this experience on the cognitive level. The studies of the universe have resources for moral progress thanks to their ability to stabilise the human soul. T19 emphasises the need to leave behind ‘the wandering revolutions in us’ (τὰς ἐν ἡμῖν πεπλανημένους, 47c3–4) – that is, our unstable and disorderly thinking – and to approximate to ‘the unwandering revolutions of the god’ (τὰς τοῦ θεοῦ . . . ἀπλανεῖς, 47c3), that is, the uniform divine thinking. Timaeus makes a pun here on the Greek term ‘wanderers’ for astral bodies (cf. ἐπικλήν ἔχοντα πλανητά, 38c5–6) – it turns out that the wandering beings are the humans, not the gods, for the real problem is in the human misperception of the universe. But what can provide us with the guarantee that cosmological education automatically brings about the desired cognitive improvement? The following text can give us the answer to this question.

T20 Now there is but one way to care for anything, and that is to provide for it the nourishment and the motions that are proper to it. And the motions that have an affinity to the divine part within us are the thoughts and revolutions of the universe. These, surely, are the ones which each of us should follow. We should redirect the revolutions in our heads that were thrown off course at our birth, by coming to learn the harmonies and revolutions of the universe, and so bring into conformity with its objects our faculty of understanding, as it was in its original condition. And when this conformity is complete, we shall have achieved our goal: that most excellent life offered to humankind by the gods, both now and forevermore. (*Ti.* 90c6–d7)

θεραπεία δὲ δὴ παντὶ παντὸς μία, τὰς οἰκείας ἐκάστω τροφὰς καὶ κινήσεις ἀποδιδόναι. τῷ δ' ἐν ἡμῖν θεῷ συγγενεῖς εἰσὶν κινήσεις αἱ τοῦ παντὸς διανοήσεις καὶ περιφοραὶ ταύταις δὴ συνεπόμενον ἕκαστον δεῖ, τὰς περὶ τὴν γένεσιν⁴ ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ διεφθαρμένας ἡμῶν περιόδους ἐξορθοῦντα διὰ τὸ

⁴ Much ink has been spilled over whether the redirection of revolutions περὶ τὴν γένεσιν (90d1–2) should be translated as ‘concerned with becoming’ (Sedley’s translation) or ‘at the time of birth’ (Mahoney’s translation). Sedley (1999) 323 argues that ‘by focusing our thought on *becoming*, rather than on being, that we have distorted our intellect’s naturally circular motion . . . the text strongly suggests that our assimilation to the

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καταμανθάνειν τὰς τοῦ παντὸς ἀρμονίας τε καὶ περιφοράς, τῷ κατανοουμένῳ τὸ κατανοοῦν ἕξομοιωσαι κατὰ τὴν ἀρχαίαν φύσιν, ὁμοιωσάντα δὲ τέλος ἔχειν τοῦ προτεθέντος ἀνθρώποις ὑπὸ θεῶν ἀρίστου βίου πρὸς τε τὸν παρόντα καὶ τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον.

The key idea is that internalisation of the object of knowledge makes the knowing subject similar to the known object. So, by learning about the rational cosmic structures and processes human beings internalise those very qualities. In addition, there is a bond of kinship (συγγενεῖς, 90c8; cf. 47b8 = T19) between the cosmic god and humans in terms of their psychic constitution, which smoothens the overall path of development.⁵ Human beings are not requested to radically alter and reinvent their nature, but to reclaim the original condition (κατὰ τὴν ἀρχαίαν φύσιν, 90d5) and to seek for the kind of intellectual nourishment that is *oikeios* to them (τὰς οἰκείας ἐκάστῳ τροφάς, 90c7). In this way, humans reclaim the happy life they had before their embodied existence (42b = T21 below).

Both T19 and T20 make an unambiguous prescription to regard the Ouranian god as the object of assimilation. The revolutions (περιφοραί, 47b8, 90d1, 90d4) belong to the universe as a whole, which is referred to in the text as *ouranos* and *to pan* (47a7, 47b7, 90c8, 90d3). Does it mean that the less important cosmic gods are not relevant to the assimilative process? If this is the case, then it breaks the promise of the Demiurge to the younger gods, who were told that all of them will become moral examples to human beings (see Section 2.2). Let us revisit the key moment in the speech:

T15 And to the extent that it is fitting for them to possess something that shares our name of ‘immortal’, something described as divine and ruling within those of them who always consent to follow after justice and after you, I shall begin by sowing that seed, and then hand it over to you. (*Ti.* 41c6–d1)

revolutions of the world-soul is meant to get us away from thoughts about becoming’. The main reason for an alternative interpretation, according to Mahoney (2005) 84–5, is that ‘we cannot make any general rule about the precise time at which human revolutions begin to be disrupted, so the most accurate way to describe the time at which these disruptions begin is with a suitably approximate expression such as *περὶ τὴν γένεσιν*, “around the time of birth”, the exact phrase Plato uses’. For a response, see Sedley (2017) 326–7.

⁵ *Sungeneia* is an important ontological characteristic repeatedly featured to explain the relation between the discourse and its object (29b), the paradigm and its instantiations (30d, 33b), the elements (57b) etc.

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καὶ καθ' ὅσον μὲν αὐτῶν ἀθανάτοις ὁμώνυμον εἶναι προσήκει, θεῖον λεγόμενον ἡγεμονοῦν τε ἐν αὐτοῖς τῶν ἀεὶ δίκη καὶ ὑμῖν ἐθελόντων ἔπεσθαι, σπείρας καὶ ὑπαρξάμενος ἐγὼ παραδώσω.

Admittedly, T15 does not refer directly to the ideal of godlikeness. But we can still flesh out some ethical implications of the passage. The Demiurge claims that the divine status will be guaranteed only to those human beings who will obey the rational soul and lead a just and pious ethical life. In order to achieve this, human beings will have to follow the addressees of T15, namely the younger gods. The younger gods, therefore, are presented as the right ethical examples for human beings.

It is somewhat confusing that the ethical paradigm switches from the plural 'younger gods' (T15) to a singular 'god' *qua* the universe (T19, T20) and then to the plural 'gods' towards the end of T20 (90d6). Some candidates have to be eliminated at the outset, since unfortunately Timaeus never explains how the traditional gods can give us any ethical guidance. But what about the remaining cosmic gods? Throughout the text we find a repeated emphasis on the necessity to imitate the universe in its entirety (88c7–d1, 90c6–d4), that is including all cosmic gods. Moreover, the programme of T19 shows that the intellectual development clearly begins with the curiosity awakened by the cosmic gods and culminates with the full awareness of the Ouranian god. There is a religious layer to this transformative experience. Andrea Nightingale acutely observes that the cosmic gods, who are 'the shiniest and most beautiful [beings] to observe' (λαμπρότατον ἰδεῖν τε κάλλιστον, 40a3–4), move in the heavens as if they participate in a choric dance (χορείας, 40c3). They make 'astonishingly variegated' (πεποικιλμένους θαυμαστῶς, 39d2) movements that produce a sparkling and epiphanic effect on the observers, which is precisely the way in which the dances at religious festivals are usually depicted.⁶ Timaeus seems to convey the idea that the dance of planets and stars initiates the observers into the religious followers of the ideal of godlikeness by exemplifying the movement of the world-soul, which is why the cosmic gods are inseparable from the process of assimilation.

⁶ Nightingale (2021) 255–9. Cf. *Phdr.* 250b–c, where the assimilation to gods is likened to an initiation to the mystery cults, the communion of human souls with the souls of the

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We need to slightly qualify the way in which the cosmic gods should be imitated: they are not objects of imitation individually, but as a collective in relation to the Ouranian god. One may reasonably ask why the planets and stars are so important, if the proper and final assimilative target is the universe as a whole. I believe that there is a dual lesson to be learnt here. Surely, the primary teacher is the Ouranian god. By approximating to its intelligence, human beings are empowered to become autonomous thinkers and stable moral agents, who are in an excellent command of their own cognition. But this is only part of the story. The general purpose of Timaeus' ethics is to internalise the order and harmony of the universe (T20), which means that one has to understand not only the workings of the world-soul, but also the various sorts of relations that structure the universe. And here comes some more teachers, the planets and stars. By approximating to them, we learn similar lessons about the value of the unwandering self-motion. But more importantly, new lessons emerge as we come to understand the ways in which these particular motions (i.e. the axial rotations) can be in agreement with the larger cosmic processes (i.e. the astral revolutions). In other words, these gods teach that the ideal of self-mastery (or autonomy) is not in conflict with the ideal of belonging to and depending on a larger whole and its providential plan. But of course, these separate lessons are separate only conceptually. In reality, they are part and parcel of a single journey that begins with the observation of the astral bodies. After all, such intricate discovery as the axial rotations become available after we learn about the world-soul and the source of all celestial revolutions. For only by building upon this information, can we then explain what makes the remaining cosmic entities divine (i.e. their own self-motion exemplified by their axial rotation). Thus, we are back to our qualification – human beings imitate the whole universe with all its cosmic gods rather than particular planets and stars.

Some scholars would like to go with the ideal of godlikeness even further and find the ultimate object of assimilation in the

traditional gods is likened to a choral dance, and the ensuing contemplation of the Forms is likened to an observation of the sacred secret objects.

Demiurge. It is true that Timaeus mentions a few times the assimilation to the Demiurge, but it always relates to the younger gods, never to the humans: first, the Demiurge himself urged the younger gods to imitate his activity (41c), and then these gods successfully followed this request (42e, 69c). One could hardly argue that humans can imitate the demiurgic activities as such even without the specific permission of the Demiurge, for we are dealing here not with the construction of furniture or artisan work in general, but with the specific way in which the human body was fused with soul, and this is precisely what only the younger gods have the power to do (e.g. 43a).⁷ Given that the dialogue does not provide direct textual support for considering the Demiurge as the imitative ideal for human beings, what is the basis of this interpretation? Gabriela Roxana Carone and Allan Silverman arrive at it by way of arguing that we should not treat the Demiurge, Intellect and the world-soul as separate beings. Such a reading has its roots in a non-creationist approach, where the various stages in Timaeus' cosmogony are taken as a figurative way to explain the structure of the universe. On this reading then, the world-soul, which is the source of motion and cognition, and the Demiurge, its main organising principle, are viewed as the same entity.⁸ Although it is a possible way to interpret the *Timaeus* as a whole, it is still not sufficient for radically reinterpreting the passages above, as if they suggested modelling oneself on the Demiurge. Even on a non-creationist reading, when humans imitate the Ouranian god, they imitate him *qua* the world-soul rather than *qua* the Demiurge, which is to say that they imitate some specific aspect of this god.⁹ Another way is to argue that by imitating Ouranos, humans *de facto* approximate the Demiurge in as much as the nature of the universe reflects the intentions and activity of the Demiurge. It also means that human beings gradually increase their share in immortality, which is the element

⁷ Pace Armstrong (2004) 174.

⁸ See Carone (2005) 58; Silverman (2010a) 76n1 and (2010b) 55.

⁹ To be even more precise, the alternative reading could only stand if these scholars argued that the regular motions of the world-soul express the nature of the Demiurge. On this reading, the motions of sameness would stand for the cognitive aspect of the Demiurge. But there is no textual evidence for this argument either.

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common to all divinities – the Demiurge, Ouranos, the cosmic and traditional gods – and which means that on some level we indeed become like the Demiurge. However, it is important to emphasise that the two gods provide different paradigms: the world-soul gives a paradigm of the way in which we have to formulate true thoughts, while the Demiurge gives a paradigm of the way in which practical reasoning works in accordance with the good. Nevertheless, I am still moderately sceptical about the place of the Demiurge in the ideal of godlikeness, because if Timaeus wanted to claim that the Demiurge is the object of imitation, he could have explicitly stated it just the way he did in above-mentioned passages on the relationship between the Demiurge and the younger gods.

The emerging model of *homoiōsis theōi* is highly intellectualist and elitist.¹⁰ The model is intellectualist, because it gives a vision of moral life, which requires us to repair our cognitive deficiencies by nurturing intellectual virtues, such as wisdom (σοφία, φρόνησις), knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), proper activity of intellect (νοῦς). My reconstruction of T19 gave a minimalist reading of the necessary sciences and the expected intellectual achievements. Some think that its further limits depend on what the human souls perceived before their embodied existence (41–42d) and how extensive was the content of ‘the nature of the universe’ (τὴν τοῦ παντὸς φύσιν, 41e2) they learned. Nightingale interprets it as including five sets of objects: the paradigm of Animal with its subgenera; the qualities of the cosmic god such as order and beauty; some related categories without which the cosmic god

¹⁰ For similar findings, see Sedley (1997) and (1999); Betegh (2003) 278–83, 296–8; Jorgenson (2018) 76–87. Pace Armstrong (2004); Mahoney (2005); Carone (2005) 54–7, 68–76. The latter authors share a common aim to show the significance of practical virtues in the *Timaeus* as well as to uncover egalitarian strands in its ethics. Some of these interpretations heavily rely on the material coming from other dialogues, especially the *Laws*. In Sections 3.2–3.4, I propose a similar reading of the *Laws*, but it will be based on completely different reconstruction of the object of assimilation and the means to it. Part of my claim is that the two projects are different, but compatible. I shall demonstrate that there is a significant continuity between the two dialogues and that the *Laws* should be read as unpacking, and expanding on, the elitist aspect of the ethics of the *Timaeus*. My goal is to show that the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* are intended for two kinds of audience, approached from different conceptual and argumentative angles. However, we should not treat these differences in terms of change in Plato’s philosophical views.

would be incomprehensible (like intellect, divine causality); some categories derived from the creation of the universe (like time and space); and the overall relation between soul and body.¹¹ By contrast, Johansen would have here the revelation of the planetary motions only, the kind of information that does not overstep the departmental limits of astronomy.¹² However, humans have to imitate Ouranos rather than the prenatal human life in the stars, so the real question concerns the daily intellectual life of the cosmic god (see further Sections 1.3–1.4). The content of its thoughts is composed of both the eternal and changing objects of the universe. By using the categories of sameness, difference and being the cosmic god seeks define the identity, relation, qualities, place, time of each object (37a–b). This makes the more ambitious interpretation quite attractive, something similar to what Nightingale proposes. For instance, perhaps the eternal objects can include more paradigms than the paradigm of Animal, but our limited textual evidence cannot settle the puzzle.¹³ Whichever direction we take, the serious intellectual challenges that these studies pose to any moral agent means that the immediate audience of the ideal of godlikeness is the intellectual elite. To insist that the cosmological programme of the *Timaeus* can become ‘popular therapy’ (cf. θεραπεία, 90c6 = T20) is to grossly overestimate the average capacities of ordinary people.¹⁴ It is true that T20 presents the ideal of godlikeness as available to every human being. But instead of being a *popular* science, a life devoted to cosmology is a *general* ideal applicable to everyone. There is nothing in the text to suggest that everyone will actually be able to partake of such studies and reach this ideal.

The extremely unworldly character of this model may prompt some worries as to its relevance to the more commonplace human ethical challenges. It is just hard to see how some intellectual understanding of the cosmic order can produce moral virtues,

¹¹ Nightingale (2021) 247. ¹² Johansen (2004) 174. ¹³ Carone (2005) 74–6.

¹⁴ The assimilative ideal of the *Phaedrus* is equally ambiguous about the scope of the Forms that the successful imitator will learn: for example, the prenatal vision of the Forms along with the ensuing recommendation to imitate the gods seems to include all Forms with the priority given to the Forms of moral virtues, Justice and Self-control (*Phdr.* 247c–248b), but the later, more detailed, account of the imitative journey singles out the Form of Beauty (250d–253c).

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such as self-control (σωφροσύνη) and courage (ἀνδρεία), that are the right kind of dispositions to everyday pleasurable and painful experiences.¹⁵ Julia Annas aptly observed that ‘if virtue lies not in coping with the imperfect and messy world, but in rising above it, we run a risk of characterising virtue in a way which loses the point of it’.¹⁶ The *Timaeus*, however, is not completely silent on moral virtues. For example, they are mentioned twice in the eschatological plan:

T21 And if they could master these feelings, their lives would be just, whereas if they were mastered by them, they would be unjust. And if a person lived a good life throughout the due course of his time, he would at the end return to his dwelling place in his companion star, to live a life of happiness that agreed with his character. But if he failed in this, he would be born a second time, now as a woman. . . . And he would have no rest from these toilsome transformations until he had dragged that massive accretion of fire-water-air-earth into conformity with the revolution of sameness and uniform within him, and so subdued that turbulent, irrational mass by means of reason. This would return him to his original condition of excellence. (*Ti.* 42b2–d3, mod.)

ὧν εἰ μὲν κρατήσοιεν, δίκη βιώσοιντο, κρατηθέντες δὲ ἀδικία. καὶ ὁ μὲν εὖ τὸν προσήκοντα χρόνον βιούσ, πάλιν εἰς τὴν τοῦ συννόμου πορευθεὶς οἴκησιν ἄστρου, βίον εὐδαίμονα καὶ συνήθη ἔξει, σφαλεῖς δὲ τούτων εἰς γυναικὸς φύσιν ἐν τῇ δευτέρᾳ γενέσει μεταβαλοῖ . . . ἀλλάττων τε οὐ πρότερον πόνων λήξει, πρὶν τῇ ταύτου καὶ ὁμοίου περιόδῳ τῇ ἐν αὐτῷ συνεπισπώμενος τὸν πολὺν ὄχλον καὶ ὕστερον προσφύντα ἐκ πυρὸς καὶ ὕδατος καὶ ἀέρος καὶ γῆς, θορυβώδη καὶ ἄλογον ὄντα, λόγῳ κρατήσας εἰς τὸ τῆς πρώτης καὶ ἀρίστης ἀφίκοιτο εἶδος ἕξεως.

T22 According to our likely account, all male-born humans who lived lives of cowardice and injustice were reborn in the second generation as women. And this explains why at that time the gods fashioned the desire for sexual union, by constructing one ensouled living thing in us as well as another one in women. (*Ti.* 90e6–91a3)

τῶν γενομένων ἀνδρῶν ὅσοι δειλοὶ καὶ τὸν βίον ἀδικῶς διήλθον, κατὰ λόγον τὸν εἰκότα γυναικὲς μετεφύοντο ἐν τῇ δευτέρᾳ γενέσει· καὶ κατ’ ἐκεῖνον δὴ τὸν χρόνον διὰ ταῦτα θεοὶ τὸν τῆς συνουσίας ἔρωτα ἔτεκτῆναντο, ζῶον τὸ μὲν ἐν ἡμῖν, τὸ δ’ ἐν ταῖς γυναιξὶν συστήσαντες ἕμψυχον.

The first passage brings us back to the regulations of ethical progress, which human souls learned before their embodied

¹⁵ This makes a clear contrast with the earlier dialogues, where the moral virtues were essential to the ideal of godlikeness, see for example *Tht.* 176a–c.

¹⁶ Annas (1999) 71.

existence, and introduces the eschatological mechanism, which is designed to generate new living beings out of those who failed to comply with the regulations. The instruction of T21 is to control all sorts of sensations and feelings – pleasure, pain, desires, fear, anger and suchlike (cf. ἡδονῆ καὶ λύπη μεμειγμένον ἔρωτα, πρὸς δὲ τούτοις φόβον καὶ θυμὸν ὅσα τε ἐπόμενα αὐτοῖς, 42a6–b1) – in order to lead a just life. This text nicely parallels what we saw previously in the speech of the Demiurge (T15), where he insists that the rational soul will be prevalent within those humans ‘who always consent to follow after justice and after you [viz. the younger gods]’ (41c7–8). The second passage returns to the eschatological mechanism and once again speaks of an immoral condition, an unjust and cowardly life, that leads to gender transformation. At the very least, T21 and 22 show that human beings have to abstain from indulging in moral vices in order to avoid punishments in the afterlife.

This textual evidence motivates some authors to argue that moral virtues are integral to the ethical model of the *Timaeus*.¹⁷ There is no denying that, for instance, T21 urges us to have correct dispositions to feelings, but even the latter are approached from the perspective of cosmological physics: they create disturbances in one’s psychic orbits (43b–44c, 64a–c), so the remedy is to bring them into ‘conformity with the revolution of sameness and uniform . . . by means of reason’ (42c4–d1 = T21). The best reading of the present material can only make the just life part of the overall outcome of being godlike – the more someone is advanced in intellectual assimilation, the more they live in accordance with the providential plan and the rules of cosmic justice. None of the passages discussed so far indicate that the typical cases of moral virtue, such as a daring attempt at saving someone’s life or a restrained stance in relation to various pleasures, bring the virtuous agent closer to the gods. The reason is that courage or self-control has no place in the lives of the cosmic gods, which is why moral virtues are not relevant for the imitation of these gods.¹⁸ Although these gods perceive sensible objects, they are not

¹⁷ For example, Mahoney (2005).

¹⁸ See further Sedley (2017) 323–7 and Section 3.5 below.

3.1 The Elitist Ideal of Godlikeness in the *Timaeus*

troubled with the usual problems of the sensible world: they do not experience pain or deterioration and though they partake in change, their motions always express a recurrent pattern. The ultimate objective is to understand the intelligent world by contemplating the nature of the cosmic gods.

It is worthwhile to note, however, that cosmological studies are not the only means to stabilise the human soul. In addition to them, music can bestow order and harmony upon the psychic revolutions (47c–e) as long as its sound and rhythm are not used to gain ‘irrational pleasure’ (ἡδονὴν ἄλογον, 47d4), while gymnastics can produce a body appropriate to the soul in its power (87c–88c), thus avoiding two threats: if the rational soul resides in a weaker body, then its intellectual pursuits wear out the body, whereas if the immortal soul dwells in a stronger body, then it loses to the desires induced by the motions of the mortal soul. The reason these educational tools are helpful is that both musical harmony and gymnastic motions are in the same relation to the human psychic revolutions as human rational souls are in relation to the souls of gods – there is some kinship between them (συγγενεῖς, 47d2; συγγενής, 89a3). This allows Timaeus even to describe the physical training of body as an imitation of the physical aspect of the universe, the so-called ‘nurturer and nurse’ (ἐὰν δὲ ᾗν τε τροφὸν καὶ τιθήνην τοῦ παντὸς προσείπομεν μιμηταί τις, 88d6–7). The aim here is to make the human body live according to the cosmological values by balancing liquids, moderating movements etc. Timaeus does not mention moral virtues in relation to either musical or gymnastic training, though if one recalls the educational programme of the *Republic*, a programme that Socrates specifically invokes at the beginning of the *Timaeus* (18a), these are precisely the venues for developing the moral dispositions to pleasurable and painful experiences. Let us assume for the sake of argument that Timaeus expects from future cosmologists to acquire exactly these virtues. Even on this assumption, music and gymnastics have an instrumental, preparatory role for cosmology and they cannot act as a substitute for proper intellectual development. Likewise, moral virtues must have a supplementary role, which explains their low profile in the dialogue. This is emphasised by calling music merely a ‘fighting

companion' (σύμμαχος, 47d6) and a 'ally' (ἐπίκουρος, 47e1) to cosmology. And although Timaeus gives a propaedeutic recommendation for the intellectuals to take part in bodily exercises and for the athletes to have a taste for 'philosophy in general' (πάσῃ φιλοσοφίᾳ, 88c5), this does not make the two practices equal. Immediately after discussing the value of gymnastics, Timaeus adds that 'there is but one way to care for anything' (θεραπεία δὲ δὴ παντὶ παντὸς μία, 90c6 = T20), which is cosmology. It is precisely the kind of philosophy that matters in the end, for we know that in the next cycle of birth, the aerial animals will come from the people who made no use of the mathematical astronomy and only relied on the observational data, while the land animals will result from the people who completely ignored the study of the heavens (91d–e). And this idea stands in a striking contrast to our earlier reading of T22, where immoral life results in rebirth in a different gender: we now see that the neglect of any kind of astronomy leads to more severe consequences, for it results in a transformation into a different species.¹⁹

We can conclude that the path of the imitators of the cosmic gods is partly reminiscent of the cave prisoner of *Republic 7*: the imitators take a similar flight from the business of our everyday environment, but unlike the prisoner, they have no intention to return to it. In addition, the *Timaeus* model can be used to question the need for the more ordinary Greek religious practice. If the intellectual advancement and assimilation to the cosmic gods is the primary way to ethical progress, then the beliefs in the traditional gods and various rituals seem to be of little significance to ethics. In other words, one can either take part in cult practices or ignore them without becoming a better or worse person. The question then is why moral agents have to concern themselves with the worship of the traditional gods. The traditional gods have to find their place in the ideal of godlikeness so that one could consider religion seriously from the Platonist point of view. Such a project, I believe, is at the heart of the *Laws*. In Section 3.2, I shall

¹⁹ It also means that fairly few people can be reborn as humans, since there are few who can actually do mathematical astronomy and so in every cycle, fewer and fewer people should be reborn as human beings. Such an elitist eschatology faces a major challenge in trying to explain how the number of reincarnated people is not declining.

3.2 The Egalitarian Ideal of Godlikeness in the *Laws*

advance this argument with a preliminary reading of the *Laws*, where I claim that the assimilation to god constitutes the core of the Magnesian moral life. In contrast to the *Timaeus*, we will see that this ideal has two sets of assimilative objects, two ways of imitating the gods, and it appeals to two different groups of people.

3.2 The Egalitarian Ideal of Godlikeness in the *Laws*

The aim of Sections 3.2–3.6 is to demonstrate that the *Laws* works with an alternative psychological framework and with a fresh view to the moral fulfilment that we discussed above. In contrast to the *Timaeus*, the *Laws* recognises the value of other ways of imitating the gods. We shall see that these are precisely the stages of ethical development which correspond to moral virtues. The new and previously undetected aspect of this process is the idea that human beings can acquire moral virtues by considering the traditional gods as moral role models and thus assimilating to them. I claim that the imitation of the traditional gods gives an inclusive and egalitarian ethical ideal to the ordinary citizens of Magnesia.²⁰ The key passage that summarises what it takes to become godlike is the following text. It is an excerpt from the foundational speech, in which the Athenian Stranger gives the Magnesian colonists an outline of their future moral life:

T23 So what kind of activity is dear to god and attendant upon him? Only one kind, based on one long-standing principle – that like is dear to like, so long as it observes measure or due proportion . . . And for the person who is going to be dear to such a being, it is essential that he himself, to the best of his ability, become as like god as he can. And what our argument suggests is that he among us who has self-control is dear to god – because he is like him – whereas he who lacks self-control is unlike him and at odds with him, as is the unjust person. (*Lg.* 4.716c1–d3)

Τίς οὖν δὴ πρᾶξις φίλη καὶ ἀκόλουθος θεῶ; μία, καὶ ἓνα λόγον ἔχουσα ἀρχαίων, ὅτι τῶ μὲν ὁμοίῳ τὸ ὅμοιον ὄντι μετρίῳ φίλον ἂν εἴη . . . τὸν οὖν τῶ τοιοῦτον προσφιλεῖ γενησόμενον, εἰς δύναμιν ὅτι μάλιστα καὶ αὐτὸν τοιοῦτον ἀναγκαῖον γίνεσθαι, καὶ κατὰ τοῦτον δὴ τὸν λόγον ὁ μὲν σώφρων ἡμῶν θεῶ φίλος, ὁμοῖος γάρ, ὁ δὲ μὴ σώφρων ἀνόμοιός τε καὶ διάφορος καὶ ὁ ἄδικος.

²⁰ Pace Cleary (2003) 173, who argues that the Magnesian institutions cannot bring the citizens to the realisation of this ideal.

The initial task is to find the kind of *praxis* that is ‘dear to god’, and a few lines down we discover it in assimilation to god. Although the passage specifies that assimilative process amounts to becoming self-controlled and thereby acquiring a moral virtue, it cannot be an exhaustive explanation of how to implement the ideal of godlikeness. In Book 10, we can find the Athenian arguing that the gods are not only self-controlled, but also just, courageous and wise (10.900d–901e, 10.906a–b). These four virtues, moreover, appear as ‘divine goods’ (τῶν θεείων . . . ἀγαθῶν, 1.631c6) for those who want to lead a happy life in the opening of the *Laws*, which from a retrospective reading should be considered ‘divine’ precisely because the gods possess these goods. So, if someone is to strive for a complete imitation of the divine character, all four virtues must be part of the assimilative package. As modern commentators have argued, the purpose of the passage above is to leave no doubts that the Athenian widens the means to become godlike by including the moral virtues and resisting an overly intellectualist and elitist interpretation, which endorses only the virtues of reason.²¹ The godlike state is now a moderate middle position between extreme pleasures and pains (cf. τὸν μέλλοντα ἔσεσθαι θεῖον, 7.792d5).

What modern commentators have missed in the passage is the ambiguity that pertains to the identity of the god that has to be imitated.²² The singular *theos* is rather enigmatic: it can mean one god, but it can also mean a collective singular; it can mean the highest god, whoever he may be, but it can also mean any other divinity. How are we to find out its identity? Surely, one would expect to find here the cosmic gods, who are perfectly fit for this candidacy judging by the Athenian’s theology in Book 10 (10.891b–899c). The larger context of the passage, however, points to the traditional gods. The foundational speech begins with a reference to the two gods whose company and guidance is recommended for the Magnesians who want to avoid leading a

²¹ This thesis is defended in Mahoney (2005) 77–91 and Van Riel (2013) 17–18, 24. See also Schöpsdau (2003) 207–8.

²² The consensus is that the object of imitation is the divine Intellect (*nous*), see Mahoney (2005) 87 and Armstrong (2004) 174–7, which, as we are about to see, is far from being obvious.

3.2 The Egalitarian Ideal of Godlikeness in the *Laws*

vicious life (4.716a–716b). One of these gods is personified Justice, while the other remains nameless, though it is introduced as someone ‘who holds the beginning and end and middle of all things in his hands’ (ἀρχὴν τε καὶ τελευτὴν καὶ μέσα τῶν ὄντων ἀπάντων ἔχων, 4.715e8–716a1), which is usually taken as an Orphic characterisation of Zeus.²³ Afterwards, we learn about the way in which the Magnesians can remain in the company of gods, which is the theme of the previous passage at 4.716c1–d3 (T23), and immediately after it a conclusion follows:

T24 Let us observe the following principle resulting from all of this – the finest and truest of all principles, in my view – which is that for the good person sacrifice to the gods, contact with them by means of prayers and offerings, and religious observance of every kind is at all times finest and best, the most likely to result in a happy life, and far and away the most appropriate thing for him . . . This, then, is the mark at which we should be aiming. But with what arrows? And how will we shoot them for maximum accuracy? What are they called? First, we say, honours paid to the Olympian gods and the gods who protect the city. (*Lg.* 4.716d4–717a7)

νοήσωμεν δὴ τούτοις ἐπόμενον εἶναι τὸν τοιόνδε λόγον, ὡς τῶ μὲν ἀγαθῷ θύειν καὶ προσομιλεῖν αἰεὶ τοῖς θεοῖς εὐχαῖς καὶ ἀναθήμασιν καὶ συμπάσῃ θεραπείᾳ θεῶν κάλλιστον καὶ ἀριστον καὶ ἀνυσιμώτατον πρὸς τὸν εὐδαίμονα βίον καὶ δὴ καὶ διαφερόντως πρέπειν, τῷ δὲ κακῷ τούτων τὰναντία πέφυκεν . . . σκοπὸς μὲν οὖν ἡμῖν οὗτος οὗ δεῖ στοχάζεσθαι· βέλη δὲ αὐτοῦ καὶ οἶον ἢ τοῖς βέλεσιν ἔφεις τὰ ποιῖ' ἂν λεγόμενα ὀρθότατα φέροιτ' ἄν; πρῶτον μὲν, φαμέν, τιμὰς τὰς μετ' Ὀλυμπίους τε καὶ τοὺς τὴν πόλιν ἔχοντας θεοὺς.

The Athenian envisions a good and happy life as consisting of honouring the gods by a diverse set of cult practices, some of which we will explore in Section 3.3. Towards the end of the speech, the Athenian declares that the main focus of the Magnesian moral life will be the Olympian gods and various lower traditional deities (4.717a–b).

Presumably, scholars have been reluctant to see the conceptual link between the ideal of godlikeness outlined in T23 and the traditional gods discussed in T24, because the second passage (1) does not explicitly refer to the imitation of these gods and (2) does not explain how performative piety can contribute to the

²³ On the Orphic verses in this context, see Schöpsdau (2003) 208 and Mayhew (2010) 200–2. Cf. Pseudo-Aristotle, *De Mundo* 401a28–b6.

cultivation of moral virtues. However, these are not persuasive reasons for disconnecting the two passages. The opening of T24 is formulated as a consequence of the reasoning in T23 (νοήσωμεν δὴ τούτοις ἐπόμενον εἶναι τὸν τοιόνδε λόγον, 4.716d4–5). The Athenian applies this regulative principle in practice by determining the achievable objectives and recognisable means for ordinary moral agents of Magnesia. The second passage is important for understanding the ethical value of cult practice, since it requires us to imitate the ambiguous god of T23 by focusing on the traditional gods and their worship. In this way, it establishes a connection between ritual practice and the most fundamental moral principle in the *Laws*.

Although both passages fail to mention the cosmic gods as the imitative paradigms, we do not need to infer that the Athenian excludes them from the ideal of godlikeness. Here we have to recall that the special rhetorical situation of the foundational speech has to set the basic theological and ethical truths for Magnesia. Both passages are the central parts of the foundational speech to the imaginary colonists of Magnesia (4.715e), who are still an undifferentiated group that encompasses the whole population of the future city. We know that as soon as Magnesia is inhabited by the arriving colonists, the society will break down into two social classes, consisting of the ordinary citizens and the governing elite, a division that will reflect their respective ethical achievements and cognitive capacities.²⁴ Thus, the foundational speech should not include advanced theological knowledge that will be expected only from those who are to join the ranks of the ruling class. Indeed, the Athenian is right to avoid giving a more complicated picture, because, as Robert Mayhew observes, ‘to expose citizens generally to deep and difficult issues and questions on the cutting edge of Platonic philosophical theology would not reinforce or solidify proper civic-religious beliefs, but would in

²⁴ Armstrong (2004) 178–82 suggests that the division here differentiates the citizens into those who rely on their own intellect and those who follow the city’s laws for making ethical choices. Carone (2005) 72, 74 thinks that it is based on the differences in astronomical and cosmological understanding. I am inclined to follow the orthodox reading which accepts that the distinction between the two sectors of society overlaps with the distinction between moral and intellectual virtues, see e.g. Bobonich (2002) 9–10 and (2017) 304; Kraut (2010) 64–6; Prauscello (2014) 68–73.

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fact undercut them by casting doubt upon them or shrouding them in obscurity'.²⁵ Only in later parts of the dialogue will the Athenian reveal himself as a staunch proponent of intellectual assimilation, for example, when he claims that anyone without a basic understanding of mathematics, stereometry and astronomy will be far from becoming godlike (πολλοῦ δ' ἂν δεήσειεν ἄνθρωπός γε θεῖος γενέσθαι, 7.818c3–4).

If the immediate context of T23 refers to the traditional gods and the broader argument of the *Laws* includes the cosmic gods in the ideal of godlikeness, the problem still remains: can it accommodate both groups? This question, I believe, can be answered positively. The passage explains the relationship between the imitator and the object of imitation without explicating the precise identity of the object of imitation, the anonymous god. The word *theos* is a place holder that can be filled in different ways according to the cognitive capacities of the given audience so that the requirements of assimilation can get different according to the particular object of imitation and the capacities of the imitator. The task of the imitator then is to imitate what he recognises as *the* god in the most relevant sense to them. For instance, if someone belongs to the general population of Magnesia, they will have fewer intellectual means to become godlike and so they will understand *theos* in T23 as referring to the traditional gods. But the more educated recognise the cosmic gods as the gods in the most proper sense of the term, at least in so far as the astronomical and cosmological evidence is concerned, and so the intellectual progress puts a new object of imitation in this place holder.²⁶ The general picture of the two-tier moral system is captured in Table 3.1.²⁷

A more egalitarian vision of godlikeness is necessary in the *Laws* because the audience of colonists is not exclusively composed of expert astronomers, philosophers and statesmen. In light of this, the Athenian is in a peculiar rhetorical position. On the one hand, he has to make an ethical appeal that would be relevant to the

²⁵ Mayhew (2010) 215.

²⁶ For the relation between the cosmic god(s) and intellectual virtues, see Section 3.1.

²⁷ The two-tier moral system also displays a general commitment of the *Laws* to combine the idealistic vision of the *Republic* with the more realistic political theory. For this point, see Schofield (2010) 21–6.

Table 3.1 *The model of godlikeness in the Laws*

	Imitators	Field	Object of imitation	Ethical means
Basic level of imitation	Ordinary citizens	Cult practice	Traditional gods	Moral virtues
Advanced level of imitation	Philosophical elite	Cosmology	Cosmic gods	Intellectual virtues

present homogenous audience which expects to receive the basic outlines of their ethical life. But on the other hand, this appeal also has to be meaningful for the future society, whose members will be more stratified and will eventually look back at the foundational narratives to find support for their particular lifestyles. This is the reason, I think, why we find only the bare minimum of what qualifies as imitation of god without learning about the full palette of the ideal of godlikeness. Once the constitutional arrangements and educational curriculum are drafted, the citizens will find wider moral horizons than mere nurture of self-control or courage. They will realise that their ethical progress corresponds to what Sedley elsewhere calls a ‘convergence model’: ‘As one ascends towards, and converges on, the pinnacle of godlikeness, moral considerations take second place, and intellectual self-fulfilment becomes dominant; but lower down the scale a lesser degree of godlikeness may be attained by less intellectual means.’²⁸

3.3 Moral Virtues and Cult Practice in Magnesia

Our next objective is to look into the details of how the ideal of godlikeness is implemented in the civic framework of Magnesia. In Section 3.2, we saw that the Athenian addresses the moral and psychological needs of Magnesian society by including the worship

²⁸ Sedley (2017) 334–5. Sedley’s paper does not apply this model to the *Laws*. To my knowledge, Morrow (1960) 400, 469n226 is unique in arguing for traditional gods being part of the ideal of godlikeness, though he does not propose a clear explanation of how this ideal is to be achieved in Magnesia.

3.3 Moral Virtues and Cult Practice in Magnesia

of the traditional gods in the ideal of godlikeness. If we take a broader view of the religious landscape of Magnesia, it is indeed evident that cult practice permeates civic life both spatially and temporally. The city of Magnesia is divided into twelve districts with different temples and altars for twelve Olympian gods allocated to protect those districts (6.771d, 8.828b–c, 8.848c–d). The centre of the city has an acropolis with temples dedicated to Hestia, Zeus and Athena (5.745b), a plan that is replicated in every district (8.848d). Sometimes the Athenian singles out temples to particular deities, such as Apollo (6.766b), Apollo and Artemis (8.833b), Apollo–Helios (12.945e) and Ares (8.833b), but we cannot be certain whether or not these temples are the same as the district temples. It is impossible to determine the real number of the sacred spaces, because the Athenian repeatedly mentions various altars, precincts and temples dedicated to gods, local deities, daemons and heroes (5.738c–d, 8.848d) and refers to an unspecified number of temples around the city’s agora (6.778c) and in the countryside (5.745c). The religious calendar, on the other hand, is more fixed. The city officially holds daily sacrifices to every god and divinity (8.828b) and has two major festivals every month, one for a particular district and another for the whole city (6.771d, 8.828b). If we are to include other minor festivals and miscellaneous religious events, Morrow estimates that ‘the citizen would devote at least a sixth of the days of the year, in whole or in part, to these religious and civic ceremonies’.²⁹

The key question here concerns the purpose of these arrangements. One could follow the Athenian’s own suggestion at 5.738d–e that primarily, cult practice is conducive towards extending the social network and thus strengthening the social bonds.³⁰ The Athenian emphasises that the greater familiarity between the

²⁹ Morrow (1960) 354. All religious matters in Magnesia will be regulated by the Delphic god, Apollo (6.759c–e, 8.828a, 9.856d–e, 11.914a, 12.947d, 5.738b–c, though the latter passage also includes the sacred sites of Dodona and Ammon; cf. 3.686a, where the Dorian consultations with Delphi are cited as a positive example). In particular, the Magnesians will use the Delphic prophecies to establish temples, the sacred calendar, the circuit of festivals and various religious offices. In order to harmonise those prophecies with the needs of the city, the Magnesians will appoint their own interpreters of prophecies (6.759c–e) and require the lawgivers to consult with the prophets and the interpreters (8.828b). For the role of Delphi in Magnesia, see further Lefka (2013) 200–3.

³⁰ It is also reflected in Aristotle’s explanation of the use of the religious festivals (see *Politics* 1280b35–38, 1321a31–39).

citizens will help them to do justice when giving civic honours and electing officers. We may call it a political reading of cult practice. On this interpretation, the value of cult practice lies in its substantial resources to consolidate communal identity and subordinate personal objectives to larger social needs. The political reading finds further evidence at 6.771d, where the Athenian describes a twofold function of sacrifices: they endorse social cohesion and ‘obtain the god’s blessing and promote religious observance’ (θεῶν μὲν δὴ πρῶτον χάριτος ἕνεκα καὶ τῶν περὶ θεοῦς, 6.771d5–6). Although the last part may seem to attach a higher value to cult practice, it can still be fleshed out in political terms. Solmsen has argued that the traditional religion gives a transcendent sanction to the legal code of Magnesia, which is ‘the most powerful incentive to loyal conduct and the strongest deterrent from transgressions’.³¹ The political reading portrays the religious institutions as the bulwark of social arrangements and the external source of authority. The challenge to this reading is that it is too weak to explain the value of religious institutions in comparison to other kinds of institutions. One can admit that sacrifices may improve civic friendship, but so does virtually any other social activity.

The cult practices would demonstrate stronger value if they can be considered as the activity which directly trains, tests and demonstrates the moral virtues of the citizens. This reading relies on taking the ritual practice as capable of shaping virtuous dispositions to pleasures, pains, desires and fears. In this section, I explore two institutions (the symposium and the chorus) that take into account this psychological challenge, expect from the participants a specific pattern of behaviour that is essentially a demonstration of moral virtues (self-control and courage), and thus navigate the Magnesian citizens towards ethical progress. My reconstruction of the link between these institutions and moral habituation will be based on a number of contemporary studies that investigate the ethical potential of sympotic gatherings, choral songs and dances.³² What they do not always show, however, is the following: (1) why the

³¹ Solmsen (1942) 132. See also Burkert (1990) 333.

³² See Morrow (1960) 353 and more recently Frede (2010) 121–6; Kamtekar (2010) 142; Kurke (2013) 128–39; Prauscello (2014) 128–9; Folch (2015) 71–97; Meyer (2015) 222–3.

3.3 Moral Virtues and Cult Practice in Magnesia

symposia and the choral performances should be regarded as specifically cult practices; (2) how the worship of gods in a religious setting is related to the development and practice of moral virtues.³³ In Section 3.4 I propose a new response to both problems by showing that these institutions encourage such a worship of the traditional gods that demands the imitation of their exemplary moral character and thus religion provides concrete ethical role models, which instantiate the desired ethical qualities. In this way, we can find that performative religiosity is not accidental to ethics – it has an intrinsic value to virtuous life.³⁴ It means that cult practice constitutes an essential part of the Athenian's conception of moral progress and education, for it gives a recognisable cultural framework to develop and perform virtues on a daily basis. We may call it an ethical reading of cult practice.

Our starting point is the objectives of Magnesian society and the educational process which is supposed to achieve them. At the outset of Book 2, the Athenian talks about how feelings form the basis of early judgements. Children instinctively have emotional reactions to all experiences, which they encounter as either pleasant or painful. On this basis, they form their further impressions of what is good and bad (2.653a). Judgements based on intellect come considerably later in life, if a person ever succeeds in his ethical development and acquires wisdom or at least true beliefs. Some reactions may lead towards the impression that a virtuous life is something toilsome and painful, which would then discourage the person from training the rational self and arriving at such rational judgements. For these reasons, education has to focus on children's feelings. The Athenian defines *paideia* as 'a proper upbringing in pleasures and pains' (τῶν ὀρθῶς τετραμμένων ἡδονῶν καὶ λυπῶν παιδεῶν οὐσῶν, 2.653c7–8), and insists on

³³ A notable exception is Prauscello (2014) 131, who responds to objection (1) by showing that at least choral songs and dances are designed to please the gods and invoke their assistance, but does not respond to objection (2).

³⁴ If cult practices were merely means to develop virtuous dispositions, then their value would be instrumental. However, the Athenian believes that the effect of virtues can wear off (2.653c) and so they require a continuous exercise and trial (1.644a–b). The intrinsic moral value of cult practices is based on the idea that being and staying virtuous is tantamount to practicing and displaying these dispositions, which the Magnesians can accomplish through their institutions.

training human reactions to these feelings from the earliest age possible so that they would ‘arise in the proper way in the soul’ (ἀν ὀρθῶς ἐν ψυχαῖς ἐγγίγνωνται, 2.653b3–4). The right dispositions to feelings are nothing else than moral virtues.³⁵

We would expect that each of the two basic feelings has a corresponding virtuous disposition: the right reaction to pain is courage, and to pleasure is self-control. However, the division is not based on emotive variations, since some feelings have both courage and self-control as their virtuous dispositions. For example, courage is a disposition to a wide palette of feelings, including fears, pains, desires and pleasures (1.633c–d). The first two items on the list, fear and pain, come from a commonplace understanding of courage: a courageous person is someone who is confident in their anticipation of bad things (1.646e), say when someone holds the ranks while the enemy is charging. Pleasures, on the other hand, might look more naturally at home in a discussion of self-control. And, indeed, self-control is chiefly presented as a virtuous disposition to pleasures and desires (e.g. 1.635e, 1.636c, 1.647d, 2.673e). But these psychological states also reappear as variations of fear in the Athenian’s account of courage.³⁶ For instance, a courageous person can be someone

³⁵ I follow Griffith’s translation of *pathos* by rendering it as ‘feeling’, though other options are ‘emotion’ (Saunders), ‘passion’ (Pangle), ‘experience’ (Meyer). As we can see, the sensorial perceptions of pleasure and pain generate doxastic results, which means that *pathos* has a cognitive component. Prauscello (2014) 147–8 compellingly argues that ‘pleasure deriving from anticipation involves a propositional attitude – that is, alongside the instinctual perception, anticipation of pleasure requires also what we can call an evaluative belief. Memory plays an important role in this: because we remember the rhythmic progress so far, we are inclined to form the expectation that it will continue in an orderly fashion and take pleasure in the fulfilment of that expectation.’ See also Kamtekar (2010) 143–8.

³⁶ On the ambiguities of pleasures and pains in the Athenian’s account, see further Meyer (2015) 127–9. Meyer (2015) 140, however, believes that the ambiguity has dramatic rather than theoretical roots: ‘The ensuing treatment of moderation (*sôphrosunê*) indicates that resistance to pleasure, originally introduced under the rubric of courage (633c–d), is the domain of moderation . . . The strategy of presenting moderation as a form of courage is a device . . . to introduce a novel idea to the interlocutors in terms of values (e.g. courage) that they already endorse.’ Cf. Frede (2010) 114–15. If that were the case, then the Athenian could make a coherent distinction between the two virtues once he has proved to the interlocutors the need to consider self-control on an equal footing with courage. But the repeated conflation of the two virtues throughout the dialogue (e.g. 1.648c–e, 7.815e–816a), when the interlocutors have already accepted the importance of self-control and pleasures, suggests stronger reasons than merely dramatic.

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who is fearful in their anticipation of what people will think of their reactions to pleasure (I.647a), say when the feeling of shame stops someone from indulging in unconventional forms of entertainment.³⁷ We will see in a moment that the two virtues assume clearer differentiation in the religious setting and the institutional mechanism underpinning it.

The main challenge to moral habituation is to counterbalance feelings with intellect. The Athenian proposes to imagine that ‘each of us is a single entity’ (ἕνα ἡμῶν ἕκαστον αὐτόν, I.644c4), who nonetheless has a number of internal psychic ‘advisers’ with a motivational power over us. The advisers for the present experiences are pleasure and pain, while the advisers for future anticipations are fear and confidence. The rational adviser is calculation (λογισμός, I.644d2). The Athenian offers ‘a pictorial image’ (εἰκῶν, I.644c1) to make his conception clearer, which brings us the famous analogy of marionettes.³⁸ Here the psychic advisers are transformed into strings that pull human beings like the marionettes to opposing actions and ethical choices:

T25 According to this account, there is one of the pulls which each of us must always follow, never letting go of that string, and resisting the other tendons; this pull comes from the golden and sacred string of calculation, which calls in aid the public law of the city; the other strings are hard, made of iron – where this one is pliant, being made of gold – but resembling various kinds of things; and we must always cooperate with the finest pull, which is from the law, since calculation, fine as it is, is also gentle and non-violent, and therefore its pull needs helpers, to make sure the golden type of string within us overcomes the other types. (*Lg.* I.644e4–645b1)

μίγ γάρ φησιν ὁ λόγος δεῖν τῶν ἔλξεων συνεπόμενον αἰεὶ καὶ μηδαμῆ ἀπολειπόμενον ἐκείνης, ἀνθέλκειν τοῖς ἄλλοις νεύροις ἕκαστον, ταύτην δ’ εἶναι τὴν τοῦ λογισμοῦ ἀγωγὴν χρυσοῦν καὶ ἱεράν, τῆς πόλεως κοινὸν νόμον ἐπικαλουμένην, ἄλλας δὲ σκληρὰς καὶ σιδηρὰς, τὴν δὲ μαλακὴν ἄτε χρυσοῦν

³⁷ Cf. I.647d, which defines a person with the right kind of fearfulness as someone with both complete courage (τέλειον ... πρὸς ἀνδρείαν, I.647d1) and complete self-control (σώφρων ... τελείως, I.647d3–4), which again confirms the lack of proper differentiation between these virtues.

³⁸ For the translation of *thauma* as ‘marionette’, see Schöpsdau (1994) 237 and especially Schofield (2016) 135–40. Schofield argues that in so far as humans are dominated by feelings, they resemble mindless puppets, but once they are liberated by intellect, humans regain control and thus ‘the very idea that we are puppets is subverted, from within, one might say’.

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οὔσαν, τὰς δὲ ἄλλας παντοδαποῖς εἶδεσιν ὁμοίας. δεῖν δὴ τῇ καλλίστῃ ἀγωγῇ τῇ τοῦ νόμου ἀεὶ συλλαμβάνειν· ἅτε γὰρ τοῦ λογισμοῦ καλοῦ μὲν ὄντος, πράξου δὲ καὶ οὐ βιαίου, δεῖσθαι ὑπηρετῶν αὐτοῦ τὴν ἀγωγὴν, ὅπως ἂν ἐν ἡμῖν τὸ χρυσοῦν γένος νικᾷ τὰ ἄλλα γένη.

The analogy depicts the golden string of calculation as too soft and fragile to have complete control over us on its own. If unassisted, it may fall prey to the stronger and more violent strings of feelings. Hence, the need for the ‘helpers’ (ὑπηρετῶν, I.645a6) and ‘the public law of the city’ (τῆς πόλεως κοινὸν νόμον, I.645a2). The passage lacks the optimism of the *Timaeus*, which is confident in the potential of human rationality to overcome the destabilised psychic motions and so imagines moral agents as self-sufficient in their quest for ethical development. In contrast to this sort of individualism, the moral agents of the *Laws* are to be supported by communal resources. The city has to enact rational laws (I.644d), which would give us external motivations and authority to follow the pull of the golden string.³⁹ This digression to self-mastery and its psychological challenges uncovers the significance of the institutional support to human moral habituation. The passage ends with plural ‘helpers’, which suggests that there should be more assistants ready to offer their help to a rational self than just the city’s laws.⁴⁰ In this way, the analogy prepares the ground for justifying the importance of the sympotic practices and, more generally, the religious festivals.⁴¹

³⁹ I follow Schofield (2016) 143–5 against Wilburn (2012) 32 in taking the golden string of reasoning as a broad metaphor, which includes more items than merely the law.

⁴⁰ Schöpsdau (1994) 231–2. For an overview of alternative ways of reading this passage, see Meyer (2015) 183–4.

⁴¹ For a similar ‘institutional’ interpretation of the passage, see Frede (2010) 118; Kamtekar (2010) 141–2; Bartels (2017) 86–92. The wider implications of the analogy are a matter of academic controversy. On the surface, the division between the golden and iron strings seems to present a bipartite organisation of the soul, where the calculative part of the soul is opposed to the emotional part, see Schöpsdau (1994) 228–31. For a recent defence of this reading, see Sassi (2008) 128–38; for a useful overview of bipartite readings, see Meyer (2012) 313–15. Bobonich (2002) 258–67, on the other hand, denies the partition of soul in the *Laws* on the grounds that for each part to count as separate, it must be like an individual agent that possesses its own distinctive beliefs and desires. He finds the iron strings dependent on the calculative aspect of the self, since the latter ultimately decides which desires to pursue or avoid. A third alternative is found in Gerson (2003) 152 and Kahn (2004) 353–62, who criticise the unitary reading and argue that the *Laws* as a whole is not incompatible with the tripartite model. The tripartite model was recently defended by Meyer (2012) 315–28 and Wilburn (2013) 65–72.

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Let us apply the analogy of marionettes to explain the threats to self-control in the symposia. Alcohol intensifies the iron strings and weakens our cognitive abilities, which in turn diminishes self-mastery and reveals the true character of the celebrator (I.645d–e). Unless the person has self-control, the alcohol will stimulate him to perform shameful acts which will disgrace him. It also induces a temporary state of panic and dread over current and future events, which vanishes as soon as the person sobers up (I.647e–648a). Why is this any good then? First, alcohol may not only intensify, but also soften the iron strings, thus increasing one's overall cheerfulness, optimism and self-confidence (I.649a–b). Such a temporary transformation is crucial for ensuring the lifelong education of the Magnesian citizenry: it is an artificial way of bringing an adult or a senior person to the state of mind which is more typical of the young and thus precisely more willing to receive education (I.671b–c). Manuela Tecusan acutely notes that the symposia are capable of rejuvenating the soul by temporarily making it younger and softer.⁴² Second, feasting has positive long-term effects because it stimulates the conditions for the development and trial of self-control. If a person performs well in a symposium, everyone will learn about his good character without any need for further tests, which is also a way to increase familiarity and civic friendship (I.640c–d). But if the person fails in this trial, he will experience shame and public disgrace. The peer pressure in the symposium can be compared to the military life, where the fear of disgrace vis-à-vis our comrades motivates us to perform courageous acts in war (I.647b). Likewise, after a disgraceful banquet, the person will be shamed by his fellow-drinkers. Hopefully, next time he will know better and will try to remain in control of himself and resist anything excessive in pleasures (I.648c–e).

One can object that the peer pressure hardly has the motivational power parallel to the inner desires. So there must be certain additional provisions for a successful arrival at positive results in ethical development. The Athenian suggests assembling the participants in three age groups, starting with children, for whom there

⁴² Tecusan (1990) 249–50.

is a zero-tolerance policy in drinking, and finishing with the elders, who will have the most liberal access to alcohol (2.666a–c). The increasing amount of accessibility to alcohol reflects the increasing trials in character.⁴³ Next, the drinking parties will be supervised by skilled and wise leaders (1.639b, 1.640c). They will be precisely the people who will observe the participants, shame the immoderate, praise the temperate and thus ensure the order of the symposium (2.671c–d). The leaders will be the same senior people that belong to the chorus of Dionysus (2.671d–e), who will perform dances and songs in the banquets (2.665a–b).⁴⁴ They will become storytellers who will use these performative modes to transmit civic values (2.664d), and because of their authority and wisdom, the moral message will have the greatest likelihood to persuade the younger generations (2.665d).

The chorus of Dionysus brings us to the choral practices of Magnesia, which involve singing and dancing. The combination of these activities unites the two major branches of Magnesian education, the musical and the gymnastic, thanks to which the choral institutions can be regarded as probably the most significant source of moral development (2.654a–b). The Athenian claims that the educational value of songs and dances lies in their capacity to train ‘the perception of rhythm and harmony’ (τὴν ἔνρυσθμόν τε καὶ ἐναρμόνιον αἴσθησιν, 2.654a2). The key psychological puzzle of this is about the way in which such a perception corrects our cognitive states and brings us to courage and self-control. The answer begins with the distinction between the objects of rhythm and harmony: the former is a control of movement, while the latter is a control of voice (2.665a, 2.672e–673a). Naturally, the motions and utterances of the young are disorderly – they trail behind, run, jump, shout and cannot remain quiet (2.653d–e, 2.664e, 7.792a). If uncorrected, over the course of time they develop into a character that takes pleasure in

⁴³ Tecusan (1990) 251 has accurately observed that ‘the argument about wine contains no mention of quantity, proportion, or manner of drinking. Almost all the details which concern the real *symposion* are left aside.’

⁴⁴ On the Dionysiac chorus, see further Morrow (1960) 313–8; Schöpsdau (1994) 306–9, 314–15, 336–8, 340–1; Prauscello (2014) 160–73; Folch (2015) 136–50; Meyer (2015) 288–323. Another practical problem of the Magnesian symposia stems from the difficulty ‘for us to imagine the performance of choral dances within any normal-sized *andron* or drinking room’ (Murray (2013) 116).

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disorganisation, which makes a person cowardly and unrestrained (2.654e–655b, 2.658e–659c, 3.700d–701a). The solution is to teach the Magnesian citizens how to remain in an orderly condition and to enjoy it. In order to learn someone's character, one can look into the kind of dance and music the person likes: no one is capable of taking pleasure in something that is against their character, and so choral performance gives a representation of the participant's character (2.655d–e). A habituation into rhythmical dancing and harmonious singing trains the citizens to perceive the order in movement and voice (2.654c–d, 2.659c–660a). It ultimately leads towards commanding pleasures and pains, since without a certain degree of self-control and courage, a person cannot produce a good choral performance.⁴⁵

In organisational terms, the whole civic body will be divided into three permanent choruses. We already mentioned the senior chorus of Dionysus. The youngest chorus will be dedicated to the Muses, while the middle chorus will be dedicated to Apollo Paeon and comprised of citizens in their prime years (2.664c).⁴⁶ The performance of the latter chorus is crucial to confirming the civic values that the younger chorus will sing about.⁴⁷ Those will be variations on a few basic themes: that 'the most pleasant life and

⁴⁵ There are two ways to understand such a control of psychological attitudes: a 'victory' model, whereby a person seeks to overcome pleasures and pains and master them (e.g. 1.626e, 1.632c–d); or an 'agreement' model, according to which it is possible to avoid an internal conflict by aligning pleasures and pains with reasoned judgement (e.g. 2.653b–c). We cannot be certain as to which way precisely the commanding of pleasures and pains proceeds, because, as Meyer (2015) 161–3 observes, there is sufficient textual evidence for both options. The Athenian is, however, unsure whether the melody and movements in the choral performance amounts to full virtue or just its likeness (εἰκόων, 2.655b5), which appears to be an acknowledgement of the difference between the actual virtue and its artistic representation. Despite this slightly negative contrast, the Athenian implies that the performer develops virtuous dispositions by imitating speech and action of and approximating to the really virtuous person. On this point, see further Meyer (2015) 266.

⁴⁶ It is hard to tell at which age the children will start these performances. We only know that the second chorus will include those under thirty, while the most senior chorus will be composed of those over thirty and up to sixty (2.664c–d). A page later the Athenian offers one more tripartite classification, which is now applied to the drinking laws. The first group is composed of 'children under the age of eighteen', who are not allowed to drink wine at all, while the second age group, which is allowed moderate drinking, are of those under thirty (2.666a). Meyer (2015) 280–2 treats the two classifications as applicable to the same age group. However, the third drinking group clearly contradicts the previous classification, for its members are above forty (2.666b).

⁴⁷ The songs and their content will be as strictly defined as the laws (7.799e–800a).

the best life are one and the same' (τὸν αὐτὸν ἥδιστόν τε καὶ ἄριστον βίον, 2.664b7–8), that the primary aim of Magnesians is 'justice and virtue in its entirety' (δικαιοσύνης τε καὶ ἀρετῆς ἀπάσης, 2.661c3–4), and that such goods as health or wealth are advantageous in so far as one possesses a just and pious disposition (2.661b).⁴⁸ Apart from the senior Dionysiac chorus, which will have no public performances other than those in the symposia (2.665e), the younger choruses will perform during the sacrifices, festivals and competitions (cf. 7.812e–813a, 8.828b–c, 8.834e–835b). However, these three permanent choruses will not be the only ones operating in the city. The Athenian also mentions a chorus dedicated to Athena (7.796b), and the festivals and sacrifices dedicated to other gods will presumably require forming temporal choruses for those particular occasions.

To summarise, the sympotic gatherings and the choral activities have the required mixture of publicity, agonistic competition, motivational power and educational benefits for a complete implementation of the vision of a good life. For this reason, participation in these settings will be compulsory for every citizen throughout the whole of his or her life. This approach to the two institutions squares with a broader observation popular among the political theorists who highlight the increased realism and historical sensitivity of the *Laws*.⁴⁹ By employing the historical structures, the Athenian shows that his ethical proposals can be rooted in his own cultural reality. The challenge to this reading is to explain what additional input to moral habituation is provided by the specifically religious aspect of these institutions. One can surely imagine a singing exercise which instils into the participants a sense of harmony without singing hymns to the gods. In Section 3.4, I propose a novel answer to this kind of objection by considering the patron gods of the respective cult practices. I argue that they are the paradigms of moral virtue, whose character is reflected in the institution under their patronage. In this way, the traditional gods serve as the ethical role models who give patterns of imitation to their worshipers. So instead of building a more

⁴⁸ On the relation between virtues and dependent goods, see Bobonich (2002) 123–30, 179–215; Meyer (2015) 256–8.

⁴⁹ E.g. Morrow (1960); Samaras (2002); Klosko (2006); Schofield (2006) and (2010).

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comprehensive account of morality in ritual context, the scope of the next section is limited to the interaction between the traditional gods and the two instances of cult practice. It is my hope to show that the traditional gods assume a significant role in the ethical framework of the *Laws* by mediating between the average moral capacities of an ordinary citizen and the long-term ethical goals that Magnesia establishes for him or her.

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So far, we have seen that the moral value of cult practice can be explained exclusively in terms of the psychological mechanism that underpins the symposia and the choruses. There was nothing in the argument to suppose that moral habituation demonstrates some specific religious feature. In other words, one can imagine a banquet that makes no reference to Dionysus and still succeeds in inculcating self-control or dancing, which trains a courageous and self-controlled character without offering a religious performance. Therefore, it may seem that such gods as Dionysus and Apollo are merely convenient labels for distinguishing between different cult practices. The aim of Section 3.4 is to respond to this objection by reconstructing a bolder and previously undetected conception of the traditional gods: they serve as the paradigms of moral virtue, which navigate the worshippers towards virtue through the imitation of the gods and thus merge together ethical nurture with religious observation. As noted in the Introduction, the first version of this conception is found in the *Phaedrus* (252c–253c). Here each Olympian god has a different character pattern and attracts human beings with corresponding personalities. In this dialogue, the irreducible differences in divine nature are not geared towards highlighting the traditional fights between gods, but towards explaining the inherent differences of love. Each human being is tied to one of the twelve Olympians by means of honouring and imitating the specific god (τιμῶν τε καὶ μιμούμενος, 252d2), which then translates into a particular lifestyle (e.g. Ares for the martial life, Zeus for the philosophical, Hera for the royal) and a search for a beloved who has a similar nature. As a result, a correspondence emerges between the divine character and the

object of love.⁵⁰ The novelty of the *Laws* is to narrow down the plurality of lifestyles from twelve to just one, namely, the life of a morally virtuous agent, and differentiate the gods not in terms of their preferred professions (general, philosopher, king), but of distinct virtues.

Our starting point is the passage which explains the origins of religious festivals and determines the function of the traditional gods in moral habituation:

T26 Now, this education which consists in a proper upbringing in pleasures and pains – it's only human for this to lose its effect and be in large measure destroyed over the course of a lifetime; so the gods have taken pity on the human race, born as it is to hardship, and have prescribed it the recompense of religious festivals by way of relief from its labours. And they have given them the Muses, Apollo the leader of the Muses, and Dionysus as fellow-celebrants, so that they may put their upbringing back on the right lines. That way they have provided the sort of nurturing experience that (with god's help) festivals supply . . . [T]he gods we said were given to us to be our companions in the dance – they are also the ones who have given us the ability to take pleasure in the perception of rhythm and harmony. This is their way of moving us and acting as our chorus-leader, joining us one with another through song and dance, and giving this the name 'choir', from the word 'cheer' that captures its nature. (*Lg.* 2.653c7–654a5)

τούτων γὰρ δὴ τῶν ὀρθῶς τεθραμμένων ἡδονῶν καὶ λυπῶν παιδειῶν οὐσῶν χαλᾶται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ διαφθείρεται κατὰ πολλὰ ἐν τῷ βίῳ, θεοὶ δὲ οἰκτιράντες τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπίπτονον πεφυκὸς γένος, ἀναπαύλας τε αὐτοῖς τῶν πόνων ἐτάξαντο τὰς τῶν ἑορτῶν ἀμοιβὰς τοῖς θεοῖς, καὶ Μούσας Ἀπόλλωνά τε μουσηγέτην καὶ Διόνυσον συνεορταστὰς ἔδωσαν, ἵν' ἐπανορθῶνται, τὰς τε τροφὰς γενομένας ἐν ταῖς ἑορταῖς μετὰ θεῶν . . . ἡμῖν δὲ οὓς εἴπομεν τοὺς θεοὺς συγχορευτὰς δεδόσθαι, τούτους εἶναι καὶ τοὺς δεδωκότας τὴν ἔνρυσμόν τε καὶ ἐναρμόνιον αἴσθησιν μεθ' ἡδονῆς, ἧ δὴ κινεῖν τε ἡμᾶς καὶ χορηγεῖν ἡμῶν τούτους, ᾠδαῖς τε καὶ ὀρχήσεσιν ἀλλήλοις συνείροντας, χοροὺς τε ὀνομακέναι παρὰ τὸ τῆς χαρᾶς ἔμφυτον ὄνομα.

Kurke accurately observes that the passage reinvoles the analogy of marionettes.⁵¹ Recall that the analogy primarily played with the language of attraction: the soft string of calculation suffered from

⁵⁰ From the conceptual point of view, the closest literary source to the *Phaedrus* is Euripides' *Hippolytus*, which presents the protagonist following the virgin lifestyle of Artemis and imitating her σωφροσύνη (*Hipp.* 995, 1100, 1365), whilst at the same time opposing the erotic lifestyle of Aphrodite.

⁵¹ See Kurke (2013) 131–4.

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the harder pulls of the iron strings and so it needed an extra pulling force from the law to win the day. The passage above tells a further story about the tension in those strings. Even if the strings of a marionette are pulled in the right direction and thus tightened with education (or laws), the tension wears out and slackens (χαλᾶται, 2.653c8) over time.

The gods gave to humans various festivals, and choral performance in particular, as a kind of lifelong learning, the additional support promised in the previous passage (the ‘helpers’ at 1.646a6 = T25) so that the strings of marionettes would be straightened (ἐπανορθῶνται, 2.653d4) by the religious experience.⁵² The cult practice is imitative activity.⁵³ It partly reveals the current condition of the worshipper’s soul, but at the same time the worshipper strives to become better by emulating the gods. The traditional gods are summoned on these occasions to lead human beings (χορηγεῖν, 2.654a3) and join them as the divine fellow dancers and celebrants (τοὺς θεοὺς συγχορευτάς, 2.654a1; συνεορταστάς, 2.653d4) by determining the right patterns of conduct. The performance straightens the participant’s strings by following these patterns and replicating them in dances and songs, thus joining, ‘stringing’ the participants together (ἀλλήλοις συνείροντας, 2.654a4).⁵⁴ Let us take a closer look at the character traits of the patron gods that should be reproduced by the Magnesians.

Both the leading senior chorus and the sympotic gatherings will be dedicated to Dionysus and celebrated during his festivals (1.650a). The participants will follow the chorus of Dionysus and honour the

⁵² The educational aspect of festivals is based on the account of *paideia* given at 2.653c, 2.654a. For this point see Schöpsdau (1994) 257–8. The passage makes the anonymous gods (θεοί, 2.653c9) to give us the specific gods (Apollo, Dionysus, the Muses) and the festivals as if their providential care was indirect, which is also reiterated at 2.665a. One should not read too much into this curious stylistic choice, because later on these traditional gods directly bestow their gifts onto human beings (e.g. 2.672d).

⁵³ On the dramatic and choral mode of imitation, see Kowalzig (2004) 48; Prauscello (2014) 118–28. As Furley and Bremmer (2001) 16 note, even the act of singing a hymn can be understood from the mimetic perspective: ‘This is the purpose of the various aspects of *mimesis* in religious ceremonial: the cult image suggests the presence of the god and provides the focus for the religious adoration; the god is given the gifts and offerings which are thought to entice him; but above all, the congregation sing the words which they trust will fall on receptive ears: the god’s name, pedigree, areas of power and heroic deeds. The very act of hymn-singing assimilates the worshipper with the divine nature through its beauty and its uplifting quality.’

⁵⁴ For this point, see Kurke (2013) 134. For a sceptical view, see Kowalzig (2013) 174.

god just as the military follow their generals and honour Ares (2.671d–e). Throughout the text we find the interlocutors of the Athenian, Cleinias and Megillus, repeatedly anxious about this god, presumably because the imitation of Dionysus is conventionally associated with the Bacchic frenzies, madness, which distorts one's psychic stability, rather than temperate actions. The ordinary citizens of Magnesia have to believe in the reformed version of the god, who will exhibit harmony and self-control. As we saw in our discussion of the symposia (Section 3.3), the primary attribute of Dionysus, wine, is no longer associated with bad emotional conditions, but with the golden string of calculation. The Athenian retells the myth of Dionysus' gift and the origin of wine in such a way as to invoke the imagery of marionettes: wine mends the iron and hardness in our souls and makes it softer, just as the golden string does (2.666b7–c2). It means that the god's intention in giving wine to the people was entirely good. He wanted to provide them with medicine, which strengthens the body and restores wholeness to the agitated soul, thus showing a wide-ranging divine care for human beings (2.672d).⁵⁵ The properties of wine are a projection of the new identity of Dionysus: just as the divine gift loses its destructive aspects and instead becomes capable of constantly rejuvenating the soul, so too the god ceases to inflict madness and becomes a lifelong teacher of the Magnesians.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ The passage at 2.672b refers to the myth of Dionysus' madness inflicted by Hera (Euripides, *Cyc.* 3; Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 3.5.1). However, Seaford (2006) 114–15 argues that the verb in the sentence διεφορήθη τῆς ψυχῆς τὴν γνώμην (2.672b4–5) can be interpreted both in the psychic and physical sense. On the latter reading, it seems that the *Laws* makes a hint at Dionysus' dismemberment by the Titans in the Orphic myths (see Proclus, *In Ti.* II 145.4–146.22, 197.14–198.14 = fr. 210 Kern). Cf. *Cra.* 406c and its etymologisation of Dionysus' name from 'the giver of wine', where 'wine' stands for a mindless state of being.

⁵⁶ Fiona Hobden finds similar correlations between the traits of Dionysus and the qualities of wine in various sixth and fifth century BC sympotic texts produced by such poets and thinkers as Simonides, Ion of Chios and Euenus of Paros. Euenus is perhaps the most interesting case here, because for him 'wine is Bacchus, or rather Bacchus possesses the properties of wine. He can be measured and mixed; he causes grief and madness; and he can stimulate desire or submerge the drinker in sleep, depending on his strength . . . The rhetorics of drinking and moderation that commonly circulate there are innovatively harnessed to project Dionysus into sympotic space: the audience is encouraged to conceptualize its wine as an instantiation of the god that maps onto its drinking experience, divinely infused' (Hobden (2011) 46).

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Dionysus is transformed into a god of a moderate consumption of wine, which is the precondition for having symposia rather than some kind of chaotic revelry.⁵⁷ Dionysus sanctions the symposia not because it expresses his own flawed nature, as some believe (2.672a–b), but because it provides the occasion for nurturing oneself and achieving character traits that are dear to the god. That is why people, and especially the adult and senior citizens, who are in need of refreshing their virtuous dispositions, will summon Dionysus and imitate his self-control in the drinking festivals, which will combine educational and recreational aspects by ensuring that the cult practice sustains and renews moral development (2.666b). This theological reform not only affects the sympotic conduct, but also the dances in the chorus of Dionysus. The god is grouped with Apollo as the patron gods of choral activity, whose nature is paradigmatic of rhythm and harmony (2.672c). On this evidence, it is small wonder that the Athenian removes the Bacchic dances from Magnesia – they were notorious for their disorderly and ecstatic qualities, and in particular the imitation of the lower divinities, such as Nymphs, Pans, Silenuses and Satyrs (7.815c–d).⁵⁸

Another important god is Apollo, who is the patron of musical and gymnastic training, and thus education as such (2.654a, 7.796e).⁵⁹ Unlike Dionysus, Apollo is not typically regarded as a divinity with a flawed nature, but he can be seen as a violent and angry god as well.⁶⁰ For the three legislators, however, his identity

⁵⁷ For this point, see further Lefka (2013) 238. Cf. Schöpsdau (1994) 341–2, who fails to see the reformed version of the myth.

⁵⁸ The transformation of Dionysus into a self-controlled divinity can be interpreted not only as a moral correction of the god, but also as an integration of the Apollonian character to Dionysus (*pace* Yu (2020) 619). In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche (1999) 14–46 suggested viewing Apollo and Dionysus as an opposition between beautiful order and ecstatic disorder, the principle of individuation and the primordial unity of opposites. Although Nietzsche does not examine Plato's *Laws*, he would definitely view the Athenian's theological reform as a distortion of Dionysus' nature and a prioritisation of the Apollonian values, a reading that is also adopted by Vicaire (1958) 18. Nietzsche's account of Dionysus has been criticised for its highly ahistorical and abstract approach, for which see Henrichs (1993) 22–43; Seaford (2006) 5–12, 138–45.

⁵⁹ This conception rests on the Athenian's comment that in terms of anthropogony Apollo, Dionysus and Muses were the gods who generated the human beings with the capacity to perceive rhythm and harmony (2.672c–d). See further Lefka (2013) 228–35. Cf. *Ti.* 47d–e, where rhythm and harmony are the gifts of the Muses.

⁶⁰ See for example Homer, *Il.* 1.43–45.

poses another kind of moral danger. Apollo is presented together with Zeus as the founders of various Spartan and Cretan institutions, which promote courage and martial skills (1.625c–626b, 1.633a–d). Although the interlocutors are right to suggest that Apollo helps with the human struggle against pains, it also implies that the god of education endorses only one virtue and thus an incomplete vision of moral habituation. For this reason, the god has to educate on both pains and pleasures (1.634a), which means that he cares for the whole of moral virtue, both courage and self-control. The Athenian introduces the chorus of Apollo as the vehicle to embody a comprehensive virtue and to imitate the orderly and disciplined Apollonian character. In particular, Apollo is invoked in the choral performance to testify to the truth of this doctrine and to persuade the audience, that is, the younger minds, of the right lifestyle (2.664c–d). It is interesting that Apollo is summoned in his capacity as Apollo Paean, namely the healer, who grants absolving power through a special rhythm in dance and hymn.⁶¹ This is a creative act of religious re-characterisation: the god of diseases and healing becomes the god who recovers the wellness of the psychic strings and leads towards moral health.

We saw that the Magnesian citizens belong to the chorus of Apollo Paean in their thirties (Section 3.3). The typical Greek performer of the paeanic song-dance, however, is slightly younger: he is an ephebe, a young male of military age, whose physical appearance resembles the long-haired youthful god. But the political function that emerges from belonging to the Apollonian group is virtually the same in both instances. As I. C. Rutherford observes, for the historical Greeks, the paeanic song-dance was a disciplined and well-organised performance, which celebrated the military capacities and group solidarity of young adults. The paeon integrated the young into the citizenry through the collective initiatory experience and the shared standards of behaviour, whilst also presenting them to the audience as the

⁶¹ For this aspect of Apollo, see further Burkert (1990) 44, 74; Schöpsdau (1994) 306; Rutherford (1995) 113; Graf (2009) 15; Lefka (2013) 233–4. The connection between the arts of Muses, their potential to cleanse and heal human soul, and the nature of Apollo is also captured in *Cra.* 405a–e, where his name is etymologised from ὁ ἀπολούων: the one who washes away and releases from bad things.

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future guardians of the stability, unity and safety of the city. Rutherford concludes that ‘the invocation of Paian/Apollo concomitant with performance of paeanic song-dance can be construed as an external projection of the strong, youthful male – the ideal citizen’.⁶² For the fictional Magnesians, the chorus of Apollo is the paradigm of a complete moral virtue, the kind of quality that makes a person worthy of being a citizen of Magnesia. In addition, the majority of the most important Magnesian institutions as well as many branches of the government are under Apollo’s protection.⁶³ Apollo is the point of intersection of the offices, which define and control the ethical and political life of the utopian city, and the chorus, which communicates the content of these decisions and ideas to the rest of society. Therefore, Apollo can be rightly regarded as the god who is at the centre of identity of both the Magnesian elite and the ordinary citizens.

Given the strong parallelism between the religious choruses *qua* the groups of imitators and the patron gods *qua* the object of imitation, one may conjecture that the children chorus of the Muses has as its object the imitation of the Muses. It would be a natural choice for the Magnesians, for the educational path in this institution mirrors the Apollonian development by concentrating on intensive training in singing and dancing skills, which eventually translates into a moral virtue embodied by the Muses (cf. 2.655d).⁶⁴ It is an undifferentiated moral virtue though, since both courage and self-control seems to be required for the activity of this chorus. In other contexts of the *Laws*, the Muses represent the kind of divine figures that care for fitting and harmonious rhythms (2.669b–d), high standards and order in art, which protect from inappropriate pleasures (3.700d), and finally the proper type of pleasure resulting from a sense of well-being (7.815d–e). Given this evidence, it is highly likely that the Muses can be regarded as the role models exemplifying the ethical ideal for the younger Magnesians before they join the Apollonian chorus. After all, the

⁶² Rutherford (1995) 115–16. See also Furley and Bremmer (2001) 89–91.

⁶³ The guardians of law: 1.624a, 1.632d, 1.634a with 6.754d–755c. The supervisor of education: 6.766b. The auditors: 12.945e–946d. All questions pertaining to religion are also under his auspices as well, see 5.738b–c, 6.759c–d, 8.828a.

⁶⁴ For a similar point, see Calame (2013) 96–7.

performance of the chorus of the Muses is artistically subordinated to the chorus of Apollo (2.664b–c), just as the Muses are theologically subordinated to Apollo (2.653d = T26).

One more divinity relevant to our discussion, albeit on a somewhat smaller scale, is Athena. Her worship is included in the Magnesian religion by borrowing a specific game from the Panathenaic festival, in which children dance in full armour (7.796b–c). The story behind this performance relates to the gigantomachy, the battle between the Olympians and the Giants, which ended in the defeat of the latter and which was celebrated by Athena with a dance while still wearing armour. Similarly, the Athenian expects the Magnesian children to do a war dance and imitate her (μιμῆσθαι, 7.796c2), as in Pyrrhic dances of the Panathenaic festival (cf. 7.815a–b), by wielding ‘shields, helmets, and spears ... [and simulating] defensive and offensive movements’.⁶⁵ These actions imply that Athena is regarded as the goddess whose imitation consists of overcoming hardships and pain with courage.⁶⁶ The assimilation to Athena in the festival also promotes gender equality by drawing together both boys and girls so that children would become accustomed to war and capable of imitating the martial aspect of the goddess (μιμήσασθαι τὴν θεόν, 7.806b2–3). So the worship of Athena is included in a very defined and specific sense: the Magnesian colony prefers facilitating the emulation of Athena as a courageous virgin warrior who mixes up the gender roles rather than endorsing a more contemplative identity of Athena, such as the goddess of wisdom.⁶⁷ In this way, Athena not only acquires a moral function to train the virtues required for war and peace, but also plays a political role by reinforcing the Magnesian ideology, which integrates women into military and political offices on a similar, though ultimately unequal, footing to men (6.785b).⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Kyle (2015) 157. ⁶⁶ For a similar reading of this passage, see Calame (2013) 95–7.

⁶⁷ In other contexts, Athena joins Ares as the patron goddess of the city’s defenders and Hephaestus as the patron goddess of crafts (11.920d–e). We can also infer from her temple on the acropolis that she will be regarded as the protectress of the city along with Zeus and Hestia (5.745b; cf. 8.848d, 11.921c). For an etymological interpretation of Athena as a contemplating divinity, see *Cra.* 407a–c.

⁶⁸ The connection between Athena’s martial iconography and the status of women in the ideal city is also echoed in the *Critias* passage at 110b5–c2, where the protagonist

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Magnesia has more religious festivals than we covered in this section. It is not necessary to suppose that every festival and institution will have a different god with different distinctive features.⁶⁹ The Athenian makes clear that Dionysus and Apollo are the most important gods for educational purposes. As for the remaining divinities, the general rule is that they are to be included in so far as the legislator can reform their nature according to the moral framework delineated above. We can see that the traditional gods are conceptualised as the paradigms of virtue, whose character and stories embody the moral capacities relevant to the institutions under their patronage. The traditional gods play a key role in the ethical framework of Magnesia, because they give the moral agents a stronger sense of how to achieve the expected psychological growth. Their function in moral habituation is to exemplify the *telos* of virtuous life and thus facilitate moral progress by providing the precise patterns of imitation and serving as the ethical role models for the worshipers. In this way, the worship of the traditional gods gives an egalitarian version of the ideal of godlikeness to the Magnesians citizens. But given the two levels of religious thought discussed in Section 3.2, it is now important to show that this interpretation fits not only with the general religious framework of the dialogue, but also with the advanced theology of Book 10.

explains that the primeval Athenians honoured Athena by depicting the goddess in armour because of their own gender equality in politics and war. For the imitation of Poseidon and Athena in the primeval cities of the *Critias*, see Section 2.5.

⁶⁹ Kowalzig (2004) 45–9 rightly notes that the Athenian differentiates the twelve gods by assigning to each of them a separate festival with choral, musical and athletic competitions (8.828b–d), but her conclusion that the Athenian urges not to ‘mix the gods but keep them clearly distinct’ and achieves it by distinguishing ‘between different types of worship and, more importantly, the community’s attitude towards a particular god’ is unwarranted. First, the passage in question separates the honours to the Olympian gods from the chthonian rites: *ἔτι δὲ καὶ τὸ τῶν χθονίων καὶ ὄσους αὐ θεοῦς οὐρανίου ἐπινομαστέον καὶ τὸ τῶν τούτοις ἐπινομένων οὐ συμμεικτέον ἀλλὰ χωριστέον* (8.828c6–8). Second, the proposed differentiation would be hardly achievable on the ethical level. There are two moral virtues for the ordinary Magnesians citizens to nurture and the differentiation between gods can only go so far – the gods are either courageous or self-controlled or both. They should be both. See also Pfefferkorn (2021), who is sceptical about the integration of the three main choruses to Plato’s legislative project due to the lack of cross-references to Books 1–2 in the later parts of the dialogue, but this cannot be a decisive argument, given the unfinished nature of the *Laws* as a whole and the early Academic editing of the text, for which see Nails and Thesleff (2003). For a tentative attempt at identifying the most edited books of the *Laws*, see Tarrant (2020) 209–12.

To conclude, the interpretation proposed above explains why the Athenian does not distinguish between the ethical and religious life. A good example is the early nurturing of religious beliefs. In the prelude to the three arguments against impious views (10.887d–e), we find a vivid picture of how children experience religion for the first time when mothers and nurses tell stories and sing songs while feeding their infants.⁷⁰ Children will learn in the domestic space how to take the gods and worship them in ‘absolute seriousness’ (ἐν σπουδῇ τῇ μεγίστῃ, 10.887d7). In their later years children will see those narratives featured in festivals and rites, where they will come as spectators to observe the prayers and religious performance of their parents and neighbours. On our reading, then, children do not merely observe the parental example of worship during religious occasions, but also internalise how they perform these virtuous actions. So, religious experience accustoms children to the idea of virtuous life: once the children begin their formal education, they will already know what is expected of them. Or take, for instance, the ban on private cults at the end of Book 10. Private religiosity is forbidden not only because there can be no personal relation to the gods for the Magnesians, but also because there is no private morality. The relation to gods is manifested in and through community (10.909d–e), where citizens demonstrate their virtues to each other and to the gods.⁷¹ Therefore, religion is not a socially useful fiction designed to govern people, but a discourse that can actually embody moral truths and translate philosophy into a form which is more attractive and comprehensible to the ordinary people.⁷²

⁷⁰ These moments are compared to enchantments (οἷον ἐν ἐπαρδασί, 10.887d4), which refers to a type of discourse that is amusing in its form, but preparatory for ethical development in its content (cf. 2.659d–660a, 2.671a). Its combination of playfulness and seriousness captures the imagination of the young whilst also teaching them something about the gods and virtues. We know that these enchantments will contain reformed stories based on traditional myths, but without theologically flawed content, and will be rearranged with a view to the good nature of gods. Cf. 1.636c–d, 2.672b–c, 11.941b–c, 10.886b–c, which refrain from passing judgement on the poetic theogonies. There is some uncertainty about the educational value of these stories and so one is recommended to respect the antiquity of these accounts, but without using them as examples for how to treat one’s parents.

⁷¹ Another reason for abolishing private religion is its spontaneity, which gives rise to new kinds of rites and shrines and attracts marginal religious experts. On this point, see Dillon (2015) and Flower (2015). Cf. Schöpsdau 2011, 455–7.

⁷² See further Schofield (2006) 309–25.

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Book 10 is famous for its three arguments against irreligious views (10.885b), which confronts those who disbelieve in (1) the existence of gods (*atheism*), (2) the divine care for human beings (*deism*), and who think (3) that the gods can be bribed by religious rituals (*traditional theism*).⁷³ The Athenian's answer to these three positions is (1) to argue for the priority of the psychic motions over the bodily ones, thereby showing that soul is ontologically prior to the body, and then identifying soul with the principle of life and the god (10.890d–899d). His next move is (2) to prove that the gods have a complete set of virtues and because of their good nature, they cannot show neglect to anything, even to such small-scale events as human affairs (10.899d–905c). This leads to (3) the conclusion that the rule and care of the gods is good, which is incompatible with the idea that they can be placated with sacrifices and prayers (10.905d–907b). None of these arguments is used to directly support (or reform) the beliefs in the traditional gods and the individual Olympian gods are never mentioned in the text.⁷⁴ The target audience are the new intellectuals, who claim that the stars and planets are inanimate entities and thus deny the divinity of the astral beings in their cosmological accounts (10.886d–e; cf. 10.890a). Book 10, therefore, can be considered as primarily a philosophical defence of the cosmic gods. My contention, however, is that the ethical reading of cult practice and the traditional gods is consistent with and even supports the theology of Book 10. The purpose of Section 3.5 is to show that it can both strengthen the second argument that the gods are morally virtuous and explain just what the third argument wants to say about ritual activity. For this reason, I will illustrate these arguments with examples of gods taken from other books of the *Laws*. It does not imply that Book 10 as a whole is intended to cosmologise the figures of traditional religion (recall our discussion on Zeus/Kronos in relation to Intellect or Apollo in relation to Helios in Section 1.7). My objective is more minimalistic, namely

⁷³ The headings in the brackets come from the classification in Mayhew (2008) and (2010) 204. For the theme of impiety in the *Laws*, see Bruit Zaidman (2003) 161–8. For the erotic dimension of piety in Plato's earlier dialogues, see Sheffield (2017).

⁷⁴ A single exception is Hades (10.904d2, 10.905b1), who is presented here a place of eschatological destination.

to show that the two discourses – religion and cosmology – are not antagonistic to each other. But before we examine these issues, we must face the most serious challenge to approaching the traditional gods from the perspective of Book 10, which is the conception of the divine advanced in the first argument.

The first argument aims to prove that the gods are immortal, intelligent and invisible souls. The primary examples of such beings are the cosmic gods, the souls that inhabit the universe and move the planets and the stars (10.896e, 10.897b–c, 10.898d). Gerd Van Riel argues that this description may apply to the traditional gods, since they can be regarded as invisible and incorporeal beings as well.⁷⁵ However, the argumentative context of Book 10 does not allow for such a smooth accommodation of the traditional gods. The specific feature that grants the divine status to the cosmic entities is not invisibility or incorporeality, but the capacity for self-movement, which is the defining feature of soul (10.896a).⁷⁶ The cosmic beings demonstrate it by moving in perfectly uniform and circular motions and thus indicating the presence of a rational soul (10.898a–d). It would seem that the traditional gods are incapable of displaying this feature, because they do not have the kind of heavenly bodies that repeatedly express self-movement in the celestial region. Does it lead to the conclusion that the traditional gods are inanimate and soulless entities? The first argument does not imply that the Athenian denies the existence of the traditional gods, but nor does it mean that he confirms it. The first argument leaves room for any kind of divinity, provided it satisfies the relevant philosophical conditions.

One could respond to this problem by drawing attention to the fact that the Athenian repeatedly speaks of the traditional gods as if he is committed to the existence of them. Our findings in Section 3.4 showed that the traditional gods are not deified virtues

⁷⁵ Van Riel (2013) 51. See also Brisson (2003) 18–20, who examines the *Timaeus* and the *Phaedrus* and conjectures that the traditional gods may have fiery bodies and humanlike, but perfected, souls.

⁷⁶ For the Athenian's notion of gods as self-moving intelligent causes, see further Jirsa (2008). In the final conclusions, Jirsa (2008) 256 makes a thought-provoking suggestion that 'nothing in the argument [of *Laws* 10] suggests that only souls can be gods'. Cf. Mayhew (2008) 137–8, who concludes that the first argument does not resolve the precise relation between gods, souls and *nous*.

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or vivid metaphors for the masses, but real beings with elaborate identities and stories. We had just discussed a number of markers (e.g. *συνεορταστάς*, 2.653d4; *συγχορευτάς*, 2.654a1; *χορηγεῖν*, 2.654a3 = T26), which imply the presence of Dionysus and Apollo in the festival environment. One cannot explain the activities, spheres of influence and moral profiles of the traditional gods without positing their capacity for action and self-motion, and thereby accepting that they have souls. This conceptual issue finds parallels in both the *Critias* and the *Timaeus*. In Section 2.1, we examined, for instance, the remark that the traditional gods ‘show themselves only in so far they are willing to do so’ (ὅσοι φαίνονται καθ’ ὅσον ἂν ἐθέλωσιν, *Ti.* 41a4). It is true that the dialogue never suggests that the Demiurge gave souls to the traditional gods. But one cannot explain the epiphanic situation in the quoted passage or the theogonies of the traditional gods unless we assume that the traditional gods are ensouled beings. Another alternative is to relapse into the ironic reading of these passages, an interpretation that we dismissed in Chapter 1. So we are led to the following conclusion. The Athenian takes for granted the existence of the traditional gods, but whether he thinks that the argument in Book 10 is applicable to the existence of the traditional gods is another question. The Athenian remains silent on whether their nature can conform to the cosmological regulations of the first argument, but he also leaves some room for us to test and explore this case, which combined with the evidence outside Book 10 eventually yields positive results.

Let us move to the second argument. The gods have to be wise and full of virtue (τὸ φρόνιμον καὶ ἀρετῆς πλήρες, 10.897b8–c1; cf. 10.900d7), but their possession of moral virtues appears to be rather indirect. The key passage at 10.900d–901a asks whether courage and self-control should be included in god’s excellence, but it leaves the question open. It is striking that it opts for a negative theological move which identifies characteristics that are not fitting to the divine nature.⁷⁷ It rejects two moral vices, self-indulgence or idleness, which are opposite to self-control and

⁷⁷ It is important to emphasise that at this point the Athenian does not claim that the gods possess moral virtues. *Pace* Mayhew (2010) 207 and Carone (2005) 177, who assume that the passage at 10.900d–901a can support a positive claim that self-control and courage are part of divine nature.

to cowardice (10.901a–b, 10.901e), because both of them seriously threaten the idea of providential care. A god who embodies such characteristics would be either lazy or afraid of action, or inattentive to what happens in the world, and this is incompatible with the notion of divine goodness (10.901b–902a). Thus, the presence of moral vices in the nature of gods is rejected, but his actual argument amounts to saying that the gods cannot be non-courageous and immoderate.

There is some uncertainty about the moral virtues of gods in the argument and rightly so, for it requires elaborating on the kinds of dangers they are exposed to. After all, the cosmic gods never experience a situation where they need to perform these virtues. We saw in Chapter 1 that the cosmic gods live a supremely intelligent life, which is expressed by their regular, orderly and everlasting motions in the universe. The cosmic gods never experience painful or pleasing situations, never perform brave or moderate actions and they know that they will never need to do this.⁷⁸ For them, moral virtue is a potential disposition rather than an activity (δυσάμεις, 10.899a3; δυσάμεσιν, 10.906b2). These findings may not compromise the theology of the cosmic gods, but they challenge the relevance of imitation of the cosmic gods for the development of moral virtues, a problem that we already found in the ideal of godlikeness of the *Timaeus* (see Section 3.1). What is it that human beings imitate in these gods? They surely do not imitate the moral activity of the cosmic gods, which would provide some examples of how to be and to stay courageous and self-controlled. One could say that they imitate a mere potentiality which will never actualise, but it is a grotesque alternative irrelevant to everyday human life and unlikely to persuade anyone not inclined to agree at the outset. So it is reasonable to suppose that the second argument is not deployed to primarily defend the moral status of the cosmic gods.

⁷⁸ A similar objection is found in Aristotle, *EN* 1178b8–22, where Aristotle dismisses the possibility that the gods perform acts of moral virtue: they cannot act justly, because they are not committed to anyone in their proceedings; they cannot perform brave actions, because they never face dangers; they cannot act generously, because they have nothing to give; and they cannot perform temperate actions, because they are not affected by appetites.

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Our findings in Sections 3.2–3.4, however, allow us to bypass this problem, because they expand the available examples of virtuous divinities. On our reading, the traditional gods serve as good theological illustrations of moral virtues by providing paradigms of courage and self-control. For the traditional gods, moral virtues are not potential dispositions. It is the key function of Dionysus to soften the effects of pain and pleasure, while the main job of Apollo is to teach human beings harmonious rhythms and self-discipline. Moral virtues are embedded in the reformed identities and stories of the traditional gods, thereby becoming part and parcel of their actual character. So if someone wants to find out how courage and self-control works in the divine nature, they have to turn to their instantiation in the traditional gods. For this reason, it is worthwhile not to think of the second argument as confined only to the cosmic gods.

In addition, the traditional gods can also deepen our understanding of how the gods care for human beings. The second argument proceeds with the typically Platonic move of comparing the god's activity with various fields of practical knowledge, such as military strategy, household management, statesmanship, demiurgy and medicine. It would seem that the household manager could be the most appropriate model to capture the idea of divine ownership, but it is exemplified with the doctor and the artisan. The two of them are analogous to the god in so far as both medicine and craftsmanship are the kinds of caring which by improving a small part improve the whole object and *vice versa* (10.902d–e). The comparison, however, is not sustained for long, since a few lines later these models are replaced with a story about the way in which the providential plan reflects the decisions of human beings (10.903b). So what the argument manages to achieve is a bare minimum: it establishes a general idea of the providential plan without giving any further details about the ways in which the gods take care of human beings.⁷⁹ A notable exception to this thesis is the eschatological mechanism discussed at 10.904c–905c. But if we are to picture an example of providential care in this life and specifically in relation to Magnesia, we have to

⁷⁹ Cf. Mayhew (2008) 169.

look at the material outside Book 10. And here once again the traditional gods, such as Dionysus, Apollo and the Muses, are the best candidates for being the human nurturers with their gifts of wine, dance, festivals and games that educate and improve the souls of human beings.

Unlike Timaeus, the Athenian does not have a preferred explanatory model of providence and he seems to be interested only in a very limited theological contribution that a proposed analogy can give us. The models that capture the divine rule may vary, but what remains is the idea of the providential plan. So it is small wonder to find the Athenian switching the models again and returning to the analogy of ruler and commander. The improvement of the cosmos is no longer viewed as a peaceful evolution towards the good, but a struggle where souls are fighting for the victory of virtue and defeat of evil (νικῶσαν ἀρετὴν, ἡττωμένην δὲ κακίαν, 10.904b4–5). It is both a process happening on a cosmic scale (10.904b–d) and a very intimate fight for human beings, for the enemy is not some external foe, but first and foremost one's own moral flaws (10.904c–905a). The recipe for performing well in these cosmic battles is the following:

T27 (1) When the changes the soul undergoes in relation to evil or virtue are relatively large – because of the strength of its own will and the company it keeps – (2) then where a soul mingles with the virtue that comes from god and takes on, to an exceptional degree, a similar nature, (3) it changes likewise and turns to a completely holy place, being transported to some better and different place. (*Lg.* 10.904d4–e2, mod.)

(1) μείζω δὲ δὴ ψυχὴ κακίας ἢ ἀρετῆς ὁπότεν μεταλάβῃ διὰ τὴν αὐτῆς βούλησίν τε καὶ ὁμίλιαν γενομένην ἰσχυράν, (2) ὁπότεν μὲν ἀρετῇ θείᾳ προσμείξασα γίγνηται διαφερόντως τοιαύτη, (3) διαφέροντα καὶ μετέβαλεν τόπον ἄγιον ὅλον, μετακομισθεῖσα εἰς ἀμείνω τινὰ τόπον ἕτερον.

The inference in clause (2) is rather vague. The most natural rendering suggests that the radical improvement of soul stems from a communion with a virtue that is divine, that is, acquiring or approximating the ethical characteristics that belong to the gods. This imitative process seems to be nothing else than a rephrasing of the ideal of godlikeness, which is rewarded in clause (3) with the access to the gifts of the afterlife.

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T27 naturally forms the basis for the third argument against irreligious views. It is the function of gods to help us in these cosmic battles against evil and, as good governors of this universe, they cannot be bribed (10.905e–906d). So there is no use in enticing the gods with sacrifices and offerings. It is unlikely that this argument is intended to correct the beliefs in the cosmic gods, because ritual honouring of the cosmic gods was not an established practice and here the Athenian deals with what he assumes to be a more common belief shared by his contemporaries (10.885d).⁸⁰ Given that the predominant recipients of sacrifices are the traditional gods, the third argument should be considered as a critique of some aspect of ritual activity in relation to these gods. It surely does not deny the importance of cult practice. The Athenian supports an intensive ritual life in Magnesia, which is expressed through choral performances and sympotic celebrations, and also in the form of sacrifices and other conventional rituals. Sacrifices in particular are beneficial for strengthening social cohesion among the citizens (5.738d–e), doing justice to the gods by honouring them (8.828b–829a), and connecting human beings with the gods (4.716d–e). As a consequence, the true recipient of the advantages of sacrifices is not a god, but the Magnesians, who achieve both political and moral ends with this practice.

It appears then that the third argument criticises what it posits as an incorrect type of religious mindset, namely the intention to win the favour of gods over with various rituals, rather than cult practice as such. However, what really matters in the cosmic fight from the ethical perspective is one's virtue. Hence, the Athenian concludes that it is essential for humans to maintain

⁸⁰ It is notoriously hard to reconstruct the average person's perspective on sacrifice that would escape the privileged philosophical perspective. Parker (2011) 136–9 follows Plato in presenting Greek sacrifice as a gift to gods that opens a channel of communication. Bremmer (2007) 139–41 follows Theophrastus in naming three specific aims – to honour the gods, to express gratitude and to ask for things – but he emphasises that the literary evidence mostly points to gratitude. Osborne (2016) 246–7 concludes his study of the epigraphical evidence in sacrificial calendars by confirming that sacrifice both empowers to communicate and creates hierarchies between gods and humans and also between human themselves. So although the Athenian makes an overstatement by highlighting bad intentions only, he is correct to picture this practice as geared towards pleasing the gods and communicating with them.

‘justice, and self-control allied to wisdom, and these are to be found dwelling in the psychic powers of the gods’ (δικαιοσύνη καὶ σωφροσύνη μετὰ φρονήσεως, ἐν ταῖς τῶν θεῶν ἐμψύχοις οἰκοῦσαι δυνάμεσιν, 10.906a8–b2). These final remarks nicely bring together a number of themes discussed both here and throughout Sections 3.2–3.4: they revisit the idea that the virtues of (traditional) gods reside in their souls; and remind us that the (traditional) gods should be considered as the ethical role models for human beings; and also suggest that the purpose of ritual activity is to emulate these characteristics rather than to seek for some external advantages. So, the combined force of the three arguments does not compromise our findings on the traditional gods. Indeed, our interpretation of the traditional gods can be used to illustrate various aspects of the theology of Book 10.

3.6 Intellectual Virtues and Political Practice in Magnesia

Thus far, we have discussed the moral life of the ordinary Magnesians. Our next topic is the Magnesian elite. Who are they? One could think that political power is the primary differentiating criterion in politics and so anyone in the governing bodies of the city could be considered as belonging to the elite. But Magnesia will have many important offices, such as the Assembly (κοινός σύλλογος, ἐκκλησία) or the Council (βουλή), which do not require any special merit.⁸¹ To qualify for these offices, a person needs merely to reach a certain age and belong to a specific property class (6.753b, 6.756b–e, 6.764a). The ordinary people will not consider them the ruling class. For the Magnesian citizens, the elite must possess not only political power, but also a higher degree of virtue than the ordinary people. Four types of officials meet these criteria: the supervisor of education (παιδείας ἐπιμελητής), the guardians of the laws (νομοφύλακες), the auditors (εὔθυνοι) and the Nocturnal Council (νυκτερινός σύλλογος).

⁸¹ As Morrow (1960) 157 notes, ‘since military service is compulsory in Plato’s state for all men who have reached the age of twenty (758b), the assembly of the armed forces is indistinguishable from the assembly of the people’.

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- (1) The guardians of the laws are characterised as people of the highest calibre (μάλιστα ἄκρους, 6.753e5), some of whom ‘will be guided by wisdom, others by true opinion’ (τοὺς μὲν διὰ φρονήσεως, τοὺς δὲ δι’ ἀληθοῦς δόξης ἰόντας, 1.632c5–6). Their role is to oversee the functioning of the laws and revise them, maintain the property register, and serve as a jury for the cases of excessive property accumulation (7.754d–755a; cf. 7.769a–770c).
- (2) The supervisor of education is characterised as altogether the best person (ἄριστος εἰς πάντα, 7.766a8). Naturally, he oversees all areas of children’s education (7.765d).
- (3) The auditors are those with full virtue (πᾶσαν ἀρετήν, 12.945e3; cf. 12.945c1–2), which must be so great that they can be regarded as godlike (ὀμῶς . . . θείους, 12.945c2), which will allow them to be ‘the rulers of the rulers’ (τῶν ἀρχόντων ἄρχοντα, 12.945c1) by overseeing and examining the conduct of officials (12.945c–d).
- (4) The Nocturnal Council will co-opt the present and past supervisors and the eldest guardians with an additional inclusion of all citizens who have won prizes for their virtue (τῶν τὰ ἀριστεία εἰληφότων, 12.951d8; cf. 12.961a3), and some younger people of distinguished nature and education (αὐτὸν κρίναντα ἐπάξιον εἶναι φύσει καὶ τροφῇ, 12.961b2).⁸²

It is safe to say that the Council will work towards the re-education of the atheists (10.908b, 10.909a), hear out the observers’ reports about foreign constitutions (12.951d) and provide the intellectual space for self-education of the elite.⁸³ But its legal role is notoriously enigmatic. There are three ways to understand the function of the Nocturnal Council: it might work like the Faculty of Law – it studies the laws without making any practical changes;⁸⁴ or it might work like a political party in a one-party system – all members deliberate on the law, but only those in the official position of power can implement the proposals, therefore the deliberators and implementors of the Nocturnal Council are not coextensive groups;⁸⁵ or the nocturnal councillors could be like

⁸² Passages 12.951d–e and 12.961a–b give slightly different accounts of these additional citizens that will be invited to the Nocturnal Council. The first passage mentions only the virtuous priests, while the second passage broadens the social scope to include anyone distinguished for their virtue together with the observers who have returned home unaffected by foreign customs. Neither passage mentions the auditors, but we must assume that they will belong to the Nocturnal Council because of their supreme virtue.

⁸³ See Morrow (1960) 507–10; Bobonich (2002) 393–4. ⁸⁴ See Stalley (1983) 134.

⁸⁵ See Morrow (1960) 505–7, 510–15; Bobonich (2002) 407–8; Laks (2000) 283–4; Samaras (2002) 285–301.

the philosopher kings of the *Republic* – the same people study the laws and have the power to change them.⁸⁶ We do not have decisive evidence on this matter, so it is better to suspend judgement. The passage at 12.957b–958a depicts the guardians of the laws as legislators during the foundation of Magnesia. It does not mention whether they will continue to exercise this function afterwards, though it seems that they are specifically asked not to make legal innovations. The passage at 12.962b presents the Nocturnal Council as the interpreter of the existing laws, but without specifying whether they have the power to enact new laws.

This short overview gives us three observations. First, what we termed ‘the Magnesian elite’ is, on the institutional level, the Nocturnal Council, since anyone whom we consider a political and moral leader belongs to this office. Second, there is a variety of ways to rise to the highest echelons of the city: from showing promise in your education to exhibiting remarkable virtue in competitions and positions of responsibility. Finally, the ruling class is not uniform in terms of its ethical achievements. The descriptions of their character show that, upon entering the Nocturnal Council, they will have varying degrees of virtue. It seems that the prize winners will be those with an exceptional degree of self-control and courage, while the auditors will be those in the heights of intellectual virtue, with the remaining members falling somewhere in between.⁸⁷ As a club of self-education, however, the Nocturnal Council will clearly aim at making these

⁸⁶ See Klosko (1988) 84–8; cf. Klosko (2006) 252–8, where he no longer commits himself to this position. Schofield (1997) 230–41 denies the presence of the philosopher-kings in Magnesia on the grounds that the Athenian is sceptical about the possibility of a young tyrant in whose personality power and knowledge could be united (7.709d–712a). Cf. Kamtekar (1997) 246–52, who aims to find more positive notes in that passage. However, Schofield does not consider whether the political power and, more significantly, the educational programme of the Nocturnal Council matches what we find in the *Republic*. For this point, see Brisson (2005a) 109–16 and Rowe (2010) 47n59.

⁸⁷ Note that even the guardians of the law are not a uniform group, for they will have epistemic achievements ranging from true opinion to wisdom, as confirmed by the disjunction μὲν . . . δὲ at 1.632c5: ‘the lawgiver will review his laws, and appoint guardians to watch over all these things; some of these guardians will be guided by wisdom, others by true opinion’ (κατιδῶν δὲ ὁ θεὸς τοὺς νόμους ἄπασιν τούτοις φύλακας ἐπιστήσει, τοὺς μὲν διὰ φρονήσεως, τοὺς δὲ δι’ ἀληθοῦς δόξης ἰόντας, 1.632c4–6). However, the Athenian never clarifies what is at stake in this division. Cf. 2.653a, where the two epistemic conditions conjunctively characterise the elders; 2.654c–d,

3.6 Intellectual Virtues and Political Practice in Magnesia

virtuous dispositions more homogenous to the point where the councillors will achieve full virtue (πᾶσαν ἀρετὴν, 12.962d2). Full virtue is understood as a possession of all four virtues with a pre-eminence given to reason, intelligence and wisdom (12.963a; cf. 12.963e, 12.965a). Therefore, the Nocturnal Council will primarily train intellectual virtues, since councillors will enter the office already possessing a high degree of moral virtues.

The self-educational function of the Nocturnal Council embodies the ultimate purpose of the city. At the beginning of the *Laws*, the Athenian defined the legislative objective as the promotion of full virtue (πᾶσαν ἀρετὴν, 1.630e2–3) and the possession of all divine goods (1.630b–d). However, this goal will not be achieved by every Magnesians, since perfect virtue is not a prerequisite for becoming a perfect citizen. A few passages that refer to the perfect citizens never associate citizens with intellectual dispositions or the complete set of virtues. Instead, the latter are defined in more realistic terms as someone who passionately practises virtue and follows justice (1.643d–e), obeys the authorities and punishes the wrongdoers (5.730d) and conforms to the values of the city (7.823a).⁸⁸ Moral virtues are sufficient for a good life, because they allow the Magnesians to treat the secondary goods, such as wealth or beauty, in the right way (2.660d–661c, 3.696b–c, 5.733e–734b). But in order to understand whether other people exercise their virtues in the right way and whether the institutions provide adequate moral support, a citizen needs the intellectual virtues (2.632c). Thus, full virtue appears only when a person reaches the point where intelligence leads these moral dispositions and becomes capable of giving rational accounts of actions (2.653a–b; cf. 12.964a).⁸⁹ Naturally, then, the first step in the higher education of the elite is to understand the nature of virtue. The councillors will investigate the unity of virtue: its parts,

where a good choral performance shows that a person internalised a true belief about the good; 9.864b, where true beliefs about the good can lead to injustice.

⁸⁸ For this reading, see Prauscello (2014) 68–73. For a more controversial claim that *erōs* is the main motivational source for becoming a perfect citizen, see Prauscello (2014) 73–96.

⁸⁹ Thus, we are back to the convergence model of godlikeness discussed in Section 3.5. Cf. Sedley (2017) 334–5. *Lg.* 10.906a–b emphasises that the combination of moral and intellectual virtues is what brings their possessors closest to the gods.

the relationship between them, and how they constitute a single disposition (12.964b, 12.966a).⁹⁰ Two outcomes from this activity can be anticipated. On a personal level, it will contribute towards the development of the intellectual virtues of the councillors (cf. 12.964a). On a social level, it will make them better statesmen by giving them an understanding of the moral *telos* of the city and how to make the citizens achieve it (12.962b–d, 12.963b). In so far as such ethical knowledge defends the city against polarisation and civic strife, the councillors assume a protective role and thus they can be called the guardians (12.962c, 12.964c–d).

The remaining educational programme is rather sketchy. The second area of their studies seems to be extremely close to dialectics. We find the first echoes of this science when the Athenian puts forward a requirement for the councillors to be capable of comprehending a single *form* (τὸ πρὸς μίαν ἰδέαν ἐκ τῶν πολλῶν καὶ ἀνομοίων δυνατὸν εἶναι βλέπειν, 12.965c2–3).⁹¹ How are we to understand this concept? The immediate context of the passage still discusses the final goal of the city and the unity of virtue. It can justify a minimalistic reading, on which the synoptic vision concerns only practical matters without going as far as the metaphysics of Forms.⁹² But there are further hints at a more foundational field of philosophy, namely dialectics. The councillors are also required to study ‘the fine and the good’ (περὶ καλοῦ τε καὶ ἀγαθοῦ, 12.966a5), to learn the truth about the most fundamental things (12.966b4–6), to be capable of judging what exists according nature (κατὰ φύσιν, 12.966b8), and to be competent in giving proofs and explanations (ἐνδείκνυσθαι, 12.966b2; ἐρμηνεύειν,

⁹⁰ Although the parts of virtue are sometimes called ‘names’ (12.963d5) and sometimes ‘things’ (12.963e1–3), the Athenian seems to be committed to saying that virtues can be genuinely separated (e.g. in the case of the ordinary citizens) *and yet* also constitute a single entity, where it no longer breaks down into parts (e.g. in the case of the elite). Unfortunately, the Athenian does not elaborate on how this claim can be substantiated and leaves it to the everyday research activity of the Nocturnal Council.

⁹¹ As noticed by Schofield (2017) 465n65. Cf. *Lg.* 12.965b7–9: ‘and we were saying that the person who is a top craftsman or guardian in any particular activity must be capable not only viewing the many, but also of pressing on towards the one’ (οὐκοῦν ἐλέγομεν τὸν γε πρὸς ἕκαστα ἄκρον δημιουργὸν τε καὶ φύλακα μὴ μόνον δεῖν πρὸς τὰ πολλὰ βλέπειν δυνατὸν εἶναι, πρὸς δὲ τὸ ἐν ἐπιείγασθαι).

⁹² A sceptical reading of lines 12.965c2–3 is defended by Bartels (2017) 190–4, whose reading, however, misses the argument at 12.966a–b and so should be considered inconclusive.

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12.966b7).⁹³ A ‘practised reader’ could say that these references indicate the language of dialectics, despite the unfortunate fact that the Athenian’s presentation lacks the sophistication of *Republic* 6 to 7.⁹⁴ However, a sceptical interpretation is still available. The argumentative context shows that these philosophical studies serve to examine the nature of virtue: the knowledge of ‘the fine and the good’ has to assist the councillors in understanding the unity of virtue (12.966a5–7), while the remaining philosophical skills have to make them the real legal guardians, whose dispositions and actions are in harmony (12.966b). But we do not need to take a side on whether the councillors are doing dialectics or something similar to it, since it remains uncontroversial that the activity involves exercising intellectual virtues.

The Nocturnal Council will reach the final part of their higher education with an enquiry into the existence and powers of the gods (12.966c), which involves two major questions:

T28 One is what we were saying about the soul – that it is the oldest and most divine of all the things whose motion, once it comes into being, provides an inexhaustible flow of existence. The other is to do with the – clearly regular – movement of the stars and all other bodies controlled by the intellect which has imposed order on the universe. (*Lg.* 12.966d9–e4)

Ἐν μὲν ὁ περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐλέγομεν, ὡς πρεσβύτατόν τε καὶ θειότατόν ἐστιν πάντων ὧν κινήσεις γένεσιν παραλαβοῦσα ἀέναον οὐσίαν ἐπόρισεν· ἔν δὲ τὸ περὶ τὴν φοράν, ὡς ἔχει τάξεως, ἀστρων τε καὶ ὄσων ἄλλων ἐγκρατῆς νοῦς ἐστιν τὸ πᾶν διακεκοσμηκῶς.

The first topic concerns the nature of the soul, especially its causal role in motion and making ‘all things’ alive. This is a cosmological rather than a cosmogonic question, because the councillors will investigate its nature ‘once it comes into being’ (γένεσιν παραλαβοῦσα, 12.966e1–2). The second area that T28 explores is astronomy: the councillors will investigate the motions of the cosmic beings and the cosmic order as organised

⁹³ See Morrow (1960) 573; Samaras (2002) 271–82; Mayhew (2010) 215.

⁹⁴ That is, if we approach the passage at 12.966a–b as ‘practised readers’ *à la* Rowe (2010) 35, who, upon recognising the general Platonic themes, aim to fill in the argumentative gaps by revisiting other dialogues, rather than *à la* Schofield (2003) 7, who, upon recognising that a particular Platonic theme of the *Laws* is ‘philosophy within limits’, avoids pushing ‘back to first principles’.

by *nous*.⁹⁵ At this point, the reader is already familiar with these themes, since these two ideas constitute the core of the first argument concerning the existence of gods in *Laws* 10. The Athenian wants his interlocutors (and us) to remember it – the short reminder ‘what we were saying about the soul’ in T28 serves as a bridge to the previous discussion. In other words, the Athenian invites his audience to recollect and reinterpret the argument of Book 10 as an example of the kind of intellectual exercise that the councillors should be doing in their meetings. It means that the everyday business of the leading Magnesian officers will be primarily dedicated to the understanding of the cosmic gods, which will be one of the key qualities that will differentiate the elite from the ordinary citizens, whose conception of gods is instead based on the more conventional religious discourse (12.966c). Cosmological investigation will be partly considered as a religious activity, since the objects of study are the cosmic gods, and a right conception of their nature is tantamount to honouring them and becoming pious (7.821b–d, 12.967c). But it will also be considered an ethical activity, since by studying the cosmic gods the councillors will assimilate to them. Thus, the Nocturnal Council is designed to achieve the advanced level assimilation as promised in the ideal of godlikeness. But for the councillors, the cosmic beings may not be the only objects of theological research. Our findings on the compatibility between the theology of Book 10 and the traditional

⁹⁵ We should resist treating soul and intellect as distinct entities in T28 regardless of the fact that they are located in two different clauses separately. For the conceptual separation to hold, intellect and soul should be allocated to different cosmic regions or have two different areas of activity, but such evidence is absent in the text. Both of them pervade the universe and have the same function: intellect controls all cosmic beings in T28, just as soul ‘controls all physical bodies’ (ἄρχει τε δὴ σωμάτων πάντων) at 12.967d7. There is a later passage where *nous* works ἐν τοῖς ἀστροῖς (12.967e1), which could be translated more restrictively as ‘in the region of stars’ rather than ‘in the heavenly bodies’. This could be the basis for arguing that *nous* works in an enclosed cosmic region. But a restrictive translation would be inconsistent with T28, where the role of *nous* encompasses the whole cosmos. Moreover, it would conflict with the function of the soul consistently treated as the source of all motions, including the cosmic beings such as stars (10.898c–d). And finally, if we followed the advice of T28 to look back at *Laws* 10, we would find that soul is synonymous to intellect (e.g. 10.897b–898b). This is unsurprising, since it shares the same qualities with intellect (10.892b, 10.896e–897a), and, just like intellect in T28, it is characterised as an entity that controls and imposes order on the universe (10.896e, 10.897c).

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gods suggest that the councillors could potentially apply their theological arguments to support, reform and deepen the Magnesian beliefs in the traditional gods. They may use this evidence to explain, for example, the imitable moral virtues in those gods or their providential care for human beings.

Provided that Book 10 is the research paradigm of the Nocturnal Council, the higher education starts looking far more ‘interdisciplinary’ than we could expect from T28. On this reading, the councillors will investigate the nature of soul (the first argument, 10.891c) and then apply the conclusions to understand providence, eschatology, ethics (the second argument, 10.899d) and religion (the third argument, 10.905d). The comprehensive character of cosmology is also apparent from a network of sciences that are subordinated to it (12.967e–a). These are the preliminary studies, which will include arithmetic, geometry and astronomy (cf. 7.809c, 7.817e–818a).⁹⁶ Besides, the councillors will not confine their research to the three arguments of *Laws* 10. A person will not become a true councillor, we are told, ‘unless he really worked at mastering every proof that there is relating to the gods’ (ἀν μὴ διαπονήσῃται τὸ πᾶσαν πίστιν λαβεῖν τῶν οὐσῶν περὶ θεῶν, 12.966c7–8), which may suggest that the Nocturnal Council will have more theological arguments than the former three. However, there are some indications in the text that Magnesia will allow only restricted research on the gods. The passage 7.821a2–5 considers impious the kind of enquiry that investigates the nature of ‘the greatest god and the universe as a whole’ (τὸν μέγιστον θεὸν καὶ ὅλον τὸν κόσμον).⁹⁷ We also have to remember that the Athenian never encourages enquiries into cosmogony, and despite his occasional use of technological language, he never turns to the *Timaeus* and its creator god, the Demiurge, or its first created cosmic being,

⁹⁶ For the practical and political benefits of studying astronomy and mathematics, see Burnyeat (2000) 53–6, 64–81.

⁹⁷ Mayhew (2010) 212–14 takes these lines as implying that it will be forbidden to investigate ‘the precise nature of the greatest god, and what (if anything) is its cause (or explanation); the relationship between this greatest god and the other gods; what else (if anything), besides soul, is among the first things to come to be’. We have to bear in mind, however, that the passage at 7.821a2–5 belongs to topics covered in the general education, and so we can say that the research restriction will primarily hold for the ordinary citizens, while for the Nocturnal Council it might be more relaxed.

Ouranos. The farthest he gets in this direction is when he declares that soul is what controls *ouranos* (10.897c) and when he makes the thought experiment concerning the standstill universe (10.895a). Although the latter gives a theory of how the change could begin in the world, it never says that this is a definite account of the cosmological process. The highest cosmic divinity discussed in the text is the soul of the sun, and even here no conclusive thesis is formulated regarding its precise nature (10.898d–899a). So the principle not to investigate the prime god and the cosmic totality is respected. But we have to be cautious in drawing our conclusions from the Athenian's silence on the more sophisticated cosmological matters, for we 'might want to leave open the possibility that in other contexts Plato would have located the truest form of divinity elsewhere than in soul'.⁹⁸

3.7 Revisiting the Religious Divisions

Our exploration of the *Laws* was guided by a bipartite classification, which reappears at various discursive levels and captures the philosophical organisation of Magnesia. On a political level, we found a division between the ordinary and elite citizens. On an ethical level, it translates into a division between those who have the moral virtues and those with the intellectual virtues. On a religious level, it maps onto a division between the imitators of the traditional gods and those who assimilate to the cosmic gods. So far, we regarded them as *thick* divisions: a person can belong to only one of those groups because of the considerable gulf that separates them in terms of their political power, ethical achievement and religious understanding. In the last two decades, however, scholars have revisited the political and ethical divisions of Magnesia and advanced what we might call a *thin* division, whereby the two groups are no longer approached as belonging to mutually exclusive categories.⁹⁹ In Section 3.7, I shall take a similar approach to religious classification. In short, I shall argue

⁹⁸ Schofield (2006) 325.

⁹⁹ The most important contribution is Bobonich (2002). Kraut (2010) supports Bobonich's reading on the ethical level. Prauscello (2014) supports his reading on the political level. These revisionist readings are challenged by Kahn (2004) and Brisson (2005a).

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that (1) although the ordinary citizens will primarily honour the traditional gods, education in astronomy will provide them with a means to a limited understanding of the cosmic gods; and (2) although the governing elite will primarily honour the cosmic gods, cult practice will give them an opportunity to exercise their full virtue, which is how they will see the value of honouring the traditional gods.

The popular worship of the cosmic gods

When do the cosmic gods come into the lives of ordinary citizens? We already mentioned a passage at 10.887e, which testifies to an early experience of children seeing their parents' supplications to Helios (the sun-god) and Selene (the moon-goddess). But if we follow the daily routine of Magnesia, we never find special occasions or established institutions to celebrate these gods in worship. The next time the young Magnesians will encounter the cosmic gods is during the years of general education. The Athenian mentions three elementary subjects, namely the letters, the lyre and arithmetic, to which he abruptly adds the fourth: 'the useful things about the gods in their orbits, namely the stars, the sun, and the moon' (τὰ χρήσιμα τῶν ἐν ταῖς περιόδοις τῶν θείων, ἄστρον τε πέρι καὶ ἡλίου καὶ σελήνης, 7.809c6–8). The present context says nothing about the content of these studies. Astronomy is presented as a somewhat simple and entirely practical field of education: the knowledge of celestial motions is required for drafting the calendars, which are then used for administrative and religious purposes (7.809d). Although the children will study the cosmic gods, it does not imply astral worship. On the contrary, the calendar is for traditional festivals and sacrifices and thus for honouring the traditional gods.

Only towards the end of Book 7 does the Athenian reveal his cards about the true purpose of astronomical education. He explains that astronomy is actually needed for fighting against the impious views about the gods and correcting a widespread mistake according to which the cosmic gods are 'wanderers', that is, beings with irregular motion (7.821b–c). What we can extract from the extremely concise account which follows is that children

will learn mathematical astronomy, whereby they will use arithmetic and a science of measures to observe and calculate the velocities and trajectories of cosmic beings. The goal is to discover that the cosmic gods travel in regular and circular motions (7.822a). And this brings us to the religious implications of astronomy: it seems that the limited understanding of the cosmos is sufficient for becoming pious in relation to the cosmic gods (7.821d). There is also a certain ceiling to the civic education, so that the young people would be protected from discovering another kind of impiety which no longer stems from the lack of understanding, but from excessive intellectualism. They will not embark on the cosmological journey matching the one of the *Timaeus* in order to investigate the nature and causes of celestial motions and cosmic arrangement (cf. 7.817e–818a), for there is a danger that the young untrained minds might be readier to believe in all kinds of materialistic or atheistic causal explanations than anything else (cf. 10.888b–c, 10.889a–890a). This department is left for those who show a greater philosophical promise: that is, the Nocturnal Council. However, we can say that its research activity will not look esoteric to the society at large, since the citizens will be trained in the basics of what the councillors will be doing on a more sophisticated level.

That being said, the cosmic gods will occupy only a minor part in ordinary civic life, since astral worship is not established on a parallel footing to traditional religion. There are two passages on the sacrifices, prayers and hymns to the cosmic gods (see 7.821d, 7.822c), which explain how the reformed astronomy will correct these religious practices. However, they do not imply that the citizens will systemically worship the cosmic gods in a performative way comparable to the traditional gods. We never find the Athenian discussing a religion of the cosmic gods within or outside the framework of polis religion: there are no separate temples to the cosmic gods, they have no religious festivals (cf. 828b–d), and they are absent from the Athenian's list of gods that are to be worshipped by the city (cf. 4.717a–b).¹⁰⁰ We can only

¹⁰⁰ Pace Morrow (1960) 445, whose argument for the presence of astral religion is based on the passages at 7.821d and 12.945e–947a. The former passage does not even remotely mention the characteristics that would imply a fully functioning astral

3.7 Revisiting the Religious Divisions

speculate as to why the Athenian avoids establishing a full-scale astral religion. My conjecture is that the honouring of the cosmic gods chiefly requires intellectual disposition rather than performative devotion – that is why the astronomical education is sufficient for ordinary piety, while the advanced cosmology in the Nocturnal Council will lead to the true imitation of the cosmic gods – but it cannot be known for certain because of the limited information in the textual evidence.

Our uncertainty is strengthened by a remarkable exception to this general rule, which is the joint cult of Apollo and Helios (12.945e–947a), who is the only god in the dialogue considered a divine being with double (traditional and cosmic) identity. This is part of a broader pattern in Plato's later philosophy, which we discovered in Chapter 1: there is no attempt to create a complete system of double identification for traditional gods. A clear unity between the traditional and cosmic gods was achieved only in the figures of Ouranos, Gaia, Apollo–Helios and, somewhat more mysteriously, in Hermes, while the systematic identification of the remaining gods, as we are about to see in Chapter 4, was completed by his students Xenocrates and Philip of Opus in the Academy. Nonetheless, the project itself had a great philosophical significance, for it prepared the ground for bridging the gap between the Platonic cosmology and traditional religion. Now we can see the social implication of this idea: a common worship of a god who has a double identity joins the philosophical elite with the general population.¹⁰¹ Of course, such a worship will have different meanings to different audiences. The ordinary citizens will recognise in Apollo–Helios the old traditional god, whose reformed conception represents the light, musical education and moral virtue. The elite will recognise in Apollo–Helios the cosmic god, whose motions embody intelligence and who perhaps might even represent 'the true source of light', namely the Form of the Good.¹⁰² Although the

religion. However, the latter passage is a single instance where the Athenian considers a possibility of astral worship. On its meaning, see the paragraph, 'Our uncertainty is strengthened . . .'. For a similar take on cosmic religion to mine, see Tarán (1975) 35.

¹⁰¹ See Morrow (1960) 447–8.

¹⁰² Cf. Abolafia (2015) 382. It is important to observe, however, that the famous link between the idea of the Good and the sun proposed in *R.* 6.508a–c plays no explicit role in giving the theological and political priority to Helios in the *Laws*.

Magnesians will arrive at different conceptions of Apollo–Helios, this religious experience will bring the two audiences together, for they are bound to recognise something fine, good and beautiful about this god.

The elite worship of the traditional gods

If we considered only the example of Apollo–Helios, we would get an incorrect impression that the governing elite participates in religion only to the extent that it conforms to their intellectual standards, in which case they should be absent whenever religion is short of the cosmic gods or intellectual stimulation. But there is every reason to suppose that the elite citizens will accompany the ordinary citizens in every step of their religious life. They will serve as priests of various Magnesian cults (12.951d); they will inspect the musical and choral training and performance in the festivals (7.813a); they will oversee the organisation of religious festivals and serve as judges of competitions (8.835a; cf. 2.659a); and they will surely belong to the senior ranks of the Dionysiac chorus which will transmit wisdom to the younger generations in the symposia (2.665d). It seems that the elite citizens will be preoccupied with the traditional gods far more than the ordinary citizens with the cosmic gods. Why? First, their religious activity is aimed at talent hunting: it reflects the fact that the governing class will be partly chosen from the gifted students and partly from the well-performing citizens, and so the elite has to be present in the festivals and competitions to find out who of them are worthy to rise to higher political positions. While the elite citizens will be surveying the potential candidates, the ordinary people, moreover, will benefit from the presence of the most virtuous citizens. The Athenian argues that the practical examples of harmonious dispositions and actions, such as you can find in the elders or the more virtuous, is more valuable for the young than all the lectures one might give on morality (e.g. 5.729c). Second, the participation has a protective function: the elite citizens will use their expertise in theology and ethics to determine whether the songs, dances, speeches and acts of devotion transgress the religious limits or not.

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But is there any personal reason for the elite citizens to take part in religious life? Will they receive any ethical advantage from it? And will they take religion seriously? These questions, I believe, can be answered positively. A real Magnesian leader has to combine the intellectual virtues that are nurtured through the higher education with moral virtues that are nurtured through musical training (12.967d–968a). The idea is derived from a broader claim that the full virtue is incomplete unless both the moral and the intellectual components are exercised. The councillors are supposed to show their full virtue more rigorously in theory and practice than the average person is capable of showing (12.964b–d; cf. 12.966b). In Section 3.4, we saw, moreover, that the analogy of marionettes revealed that a commitment to a psychological theory, according to which the effects of education and ethical training may wear off unless the agent continuously practises and displays moral virtues. This was the reason why the Magnesian senior citizens are required to continuously perform in the chorus of Dionysus: the consumption of wine is intended to prepare the hardened souls to receive moral instruction, which is then infused through songs and dances. It appears then that the elite finds intrinsic value in religious practices. The principal reason for being serious about religion is not the external outcomes discussed above, but the fact that the Magnesian elite acquires and retains moral virtues as long as they participate in the religious institutions.

It would be wrong to assume, therefore, that once someone climbs up the social ladder, they no longer take an active part in the institutions that got them into the Nocturnal Council in the first place. We saw that cult practices are capable of fostering the moral virtues, that the traditional gods are purified from theological misconception and coordinated with the key tenets of Book 10, and that religious stories are redirected towards showing the good nature of gods. Since religious thought will represent the same ideas that the elite discovered by philosophical means, and since religion will provide the cultural framework for virtuous action, it means that such institutions, gods and stories are not simply lies or suitable fictions invented for the masses.¹⁰³ So neither the

¹⁰³ These reformed institutions and purified stories will be based on the ancestral tradition and its authority (5.738b–e, 7.793a–d, 11.930e–931a, 12.959b). The emerging picture is quite close to what we observed in the *Timaeus*, where the ancestral tradition

religious institutions, nor the traditional gods are noble lies designed to control those of lower intellectual accomplishment. They tell something true about the nature of human beings and political communities, and that is why the elite will believe in them as strongly as the ordinary citizens and thus act on their beliefs.¹⁰⁴

3.8 Conclusions

The aim of this chapter was to uncover the role of cult practice in Plato's later ethics, especially in relation to the ideal and practice of godlikeness. We found that the intellectual assimilation of philosophers as conceived in Plato's *Timaeus* makes no use of religion. By contrast, the ideal of godlikeness is tightly integrated within the framework of ritual activity in the *Laws*. In sum, Plato regards religion as a discourse which can produce ethically better and more divineline human beings.

Several conceptual steps lead to this result. First, the *Laws* considers the ideal of godlikeness from the perspective of the ordinary citizens and explores the practical ways in which godlikeness could be considered as an ethical norm applicable to everyone. It lowers the ethical bar for ordinary people and instead of expecting from them the intellectual assimilation to the gods, it requests them to cultivate the moral virtues. This proposal is strengthened by the reconsideration of the divine nature in Book 10: the gods possess the moral virtues no less than the intellectual virtues, and so the moral assimilation to the gods is secured on a parallel footing to the intellectual assimilation. Second, the *Laws* considers a number of institutions that could endorse Plato's vision of a good life. More specifically, it deliberately explores the situations and settings in which courage and self-control could be trained and exercised. For this purpose, the two most important institutions are the symposia and the choruses. We found that all of them have the required balance of psychological resources, political expediency and ethical value to ensure that the ordinary citizens of Magnesia would methodically become virtuous. But

regarding the traditional gods is incorporated into the new theological discourse (40d6–41a3 = T1).

¹⁰⁴ For a similar point, see Balot (2014) 75–82.

3.8 Conclusions

Magnesia will also have institutions such as the Nocturnal Council, which will invite the more ethically promising people and train their intellectual virtues by means of cosmological investigations. Finally, this institutional proposal gives a recognisable cultural framework to Plato's contemporaries, which is more relatable than the utopian institutions of the *Republic*. From a historical perspective, the symposia and the choruses were indisputably regarded as religious, for they functioned under the auspices of the gods, they were held on religious occasions, such as festivals, and their participants honoured the respective patron gods. Plato's innovation is to reorient these institutions towards the promotion of moral virtues and to review the characteristics of the patron gods, so that the nature of these gods would reflect their respective institutions and ethical objectives. In this way, the participants honour the patron gods by cultivating the moral virtues and thus imitating the character of the traditional gods.

If we return to the relationship between the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*, we can see that the two dialogues propose alternative visions of godlikeness. The *Laws* begins with expanding on what we found in the *Timaeus* and adapting it to a plausible political environment. This necessitates a serious readjustment of some of the parameters of the *Timaeus*: the ideal of godlikeness is no longer intended for an exclusive club of philosophers, but for a diverse population of a city. This means that it has to be analysed not only from an individual perspective, but also from a communal point of view, and it has to be presented in a way that would be practically achievable by the whole society. This is the reason, I believe, why the dialogue joins the triplet of the cosmic gods, the intellectual virtues and the philosophical elite of the *Timaeus* with another triplet of the traditional gods, the moral virtues and the ordinary citizens. By introducing a two-tier system, it makes sure that everyone in the city can 'become like god so far as is possible'. The role of the traditional gods here is crucial, for without them the ordinary citizens could only achieve a failed imitation of the cosmic gods. But now they can imitate the character of the traditional gods as far as it is possible to them.

As we can see, religion and ethics are closely connected in Plato's *Laws*. Plato's ethical enquiry sets the guidelines for

moral progress, while religion gives the means to implement these ideas. However, we should not view cult practice as an empty shell that has nothing to offer unless it is filled with philosophical conceptions. On the contrary, Plato approaches religion as the space which already fosters virtues even without the intervention of a Platonic legislator. The point is rather that Plato wants ritual activity to deliver good results in a more systematic way, which is why it needs some technical reforms, such as a selection of good leaders for the symposia, and clearer ethical objectives. It also receives a firmer theological basis for protection against the atheistic challenge. Cult practice neither loses its traditional cultural form, nor becomes completely absorbed in philosophical cosmology, but merely receives some updates from the cosmological investigations of the *Laws*. We can say then that religion is a medium of Plato's later ethics, though not to the extent that it becomes a propaganda machine that transmits the intentions of a philosophical legislator. Instead, the legislator finds in religion a framework which already corresponds to the ultimate ethical needs, and so religion is intrinsically valuable to him.

On the whole, Chapter 3 reveals a similar pattern in the relationship between philosophy and religious tradition to what we discovered in the previous two chapters. Plato is not an ardent revolutionary eager to reshape all religious institutions and create a new kind of religious paradigm. Nor is he a firm conservative ready to defend every religious institution and support it by any philosophical means possible. Neither discourse – philosophy and religion – absorbs the other. The philosophical discourse interacts with the religious discourse in a mutually beneficial way. Philosophy purifies the religious language, revisits some of its theological conceptions, provides arguments for religion's weaker spots. Religion, on the other hand, supports the more exotic cosmological ideas with its pious rhetoric and offers its rich cultural tradition for the implementation of some of the philosophical proposals. Thus, Plato's later philosophy introduces religious innovations within cautiously delineated limits.