

MSt in Ancient Philosophy Thesis

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ABSTRACT

In *Metaphysics* Λ, Aristotle defines a god as an intellect thinking itself, which is an entity not concerned with human affairs. However, in the *Politics*, he takes the provision of worship to be a necessary element of any self-sufficient *polis*, including the ideal *polis*. This thesis aims to answer the question, what role do religious institutions play in the ideal *polis*? Aristotle finds that the Greek traditional religion encourages the faithful to obey the law of the *polis*, while ceremonies provide them with opportunities to form friendships and enjoy rest and leisure. But we have reasons against ascribing to him advocacy of a policy of maintaining a cult of gods responsive to human actions even though there are no such gods. Passages from the *Metaphysics* and the *Parts of Animals* render unlikely Mor Segev's suggestion that, on Aristotle's view, exposure to anthropomorphic depictions of gods might inspire one to inquire into and contemplate the true divine nature. Limiting religious practice in the ideal *polis* to the traditional cult, elements of which are present there, makes us unable to explain how the ideal *polis* promotes the human good. Finally, this thesis argues that Aristotle takes *theōria* to be a religious practice which the ideal *polis* aims to foster. Sarah Broadie's case for taking *theōria* to be our religious duty is modified in order to answer an objection to her reading of the *theophilestatos* argument, and expanded with more textual evidence.

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WHAT ROLE DO RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS PLAY IN ARISTOTLE'S IDEAL *POLIS*?

INTRODUCTION

Aristotle's rejection of the traditional view of gods, according to which they are responsive to prayers and sacrifices, seems *prima facie* irreconcilable with his affirmation of the necessity of religious practice in any self-sufficient *polis* in the *Politics*, including the ideal *polis* of Books VII–VIII. This thesis aims to answer the question, what is the role religious institutions play in the latter?

Section 1, firstly, motivates the common interpretation of Aristotle's theology, according to which he denies divine interest in human affairs, rendering prayers and sacrifices futile. *Metaphysics* Λ defines the prime mover(s)¹ as thinking thinking thinking (1074^b34). In the *Nicomachean Ethics* (henceforth *NE*), the sole activity of the god(s) is identified as θεωρία (see, for instance, X.8.1178^b21–3). Secondly, this interpretation is defended against the counterarguments of Bodéüs (2000). *Metaphysics* Λ is found to identify the god(s) with the prime mover(s), while both the *Politics* and the *Ethics* refer to claims about the god(s) established there, thereby confirming the status of *Metaphysics* Λ as the primary *locus* of Aristotle's theology. Thirdly, the outline of the interpretative problem this thesis aims to answer is completed with a survey of all mentions Aristotle makes of religious practice in the *Politics*.

Section 2 examines three attempts at interpreting the role religious institutions play in the ideal *polis*. First is the view that maintenance of the traditional cult by the *polis* is meant to produce positive impact on the citizens through encouraging them to obey the law of the *polis* and

¹ This thesis remains silent on the number of gods Aristotle believes in. While one god seems suggested by *Metaphysics* Λ.7, many (or many lower gods) seem present in Λ.8.

providing them with opportunities to form friendships and enjoy rest and leisure. However, the passages where these benefits are described are better read as advocating certain modifications of the organisation of a religious practice presumed to already exist in the *polis*, rather than as being Aristotle's hints at the need for a policy of maintaining a fake cult. Second is Segev's (2017) proposal that, in Aristotle's eyes, the Greek traditional religious narrative is needed to produce in the citizens wonder ($\theta\alpha\upsilon\mu\alpha\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$) at its false gods, which translates into inquiry into and contemplation of the true god(s). This view is neither intuitively plausible, nor ascribable to Aristotle in light of his description of the traditional anthropomorphic gods as 'nothing but eternal human beings' in the *Metaphysics* (B.2.997^b11)², and his approval of Heraclitus' dictum in the *Parts of Animals*. Third is the view that, as Aristotle's empirical investigation into the constitutions of the *poleis* of his time might suggest, it is a bare fact that religious practice always arises in a *polis*. However, while he does include elements of the traditional cult in the ideal *polis*, limiting worship there to the traditional one makes us unable to explain how the best regime promotes its aim of making 'anyone [...] able to do best and live blessedly' (*Politics* VII.2.1324^a24–5), given that none of the other elements of the ideal *polis* contributes to promoting the human good that contemplation is (a necessary constituent of³).

Section 3 argues for an alternative view of the function of religious institutions in the ideal *polis*. Firstly, it motivates Broadie's (2003) claim that $\theta\epsilon\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\alpha$ is a religious duty anyone capable of performing it has. Given that Broadie's argument relies on ascribing to Aristotle affirmation

² Except where noted, all translations of Aristotle are by Halliwell (*Poetics*), Inwood and Woolf (*Eudemian Ethics*), Irwin (*Nicomachean Ethics*), Lennox (*Parts of Animals*), Reeve (*Metaphysics, Physics, Politics, Rhetoric*), and Smith (*Topics*). All translations of Aristotle's fragments, except of the fragments of the *On Poets* which are by Janko, come from the *Revised Oxford Translation* edition. All translations of Plato come from Cooper's *Collected Works*. The word *polis* is left untranslated. For Aristotle's original texts, the *Oxford Classical Texts* are used, except in the cases of the *Politics* (Dreizehnter), the *Eudemian Ethics* (Susemihl), and the fragments (Rose).

³ The question of what exactly is *eudaimonia* in the *Ethics* has been the subject of a debate encompassing centuries of scholarship. Influential treatments include Hardie 1965, Ackrill 1974, Cooper 1987, Kraut 1989, Kenny 1992, Crisp 1994, Scott 1999, Lear 2004, and Aufderheide 2015. The argument of this thesis assumes no more than that there is a special relationship between contemplation and *eudaimonia*, and that the former is a necessary element of the latter.

of the hypothetical of the *theophilestatos* argument, which is incompatible with *Metaphysics* Λ, her reading of the passage is modified so that the passage offers no weaker support for taking θεωρία to be our religious duty, while Aristotle is provided with a reason to express his thought through positing the hypothetical. Secondly, it is argued that Aristotle reforms religious practice accordingly. Despite the lack of an explicit argument to this effect in his extant *corpus*⁴, we find several passages and fragments of his lost works to suggest the measure. Most importantly, Aristotle speaks of participating in a religious festival solely for the sake of θεωρία in the *Protrepticus* (fr. 58 [R³] = Iamblichus, *Protrepticus* IX.53.17–20). We have reasons to presume that the religious ceremonies Aristotle envisions do not differ significantly from the ancient Greek religious festivals, which comprised elements such as theatrical plays. That Aristotle found works of poets able to inspire θεωρία is suggested by his categorisation of the form of Plato’s dialogues as between ‘poetry and prose’ (fr. 73 [R³] = Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* III.37), and his inclusion of an account of the history of philosophy in the *On Poets* (see fr. 43a [Janko] = Themistius, *Orations* XXVI.316^d–19^a). Thirdly, it is argued that religious ceremonies occasioning θεωρία coexist in the ideal *polis* with elements of the traditional cult. These include, for instance, the Oracle of Delphi, which is given an authority to make decisions on the location of new temples, even when its decrees collide with Aristotle’s plan of erecting temples in places such that are ‘conspicuous enough setting for virtue’ (*Politics* VII.12.1331^a29).

⁴ Aristotle’s relative silence and seemingly contradicting statements on religious practice in the extant *corpus* and fragments have led some scholars to posit that he neglects or at least fails to provide definite answers to questions concerning its meaning and usefulness. See, for instance, Verdenius 1960: 60; Pépin 1971: 233; Babut 1974: 105–35; Mikalson 2010: 15n.; and Geiger 2013: 37. However, Mayhew (2007: 297) and Barney (2022: 183n.) rightly point out that his authoring of a now-lost work *On Prayer*—assuming that its content agreed with the title attached by its editors—suggests that he took religious practice to be a legitimate subject of philosophical inquiry and had definite views on it.

1. OUTLINE OF THE PROBLEM

1.1. ARISTOTLE ON GOD(S)

The most detailed treatment of the nature of the god(s) we find in Aristotle's extant *corpus* is in *Metaphysics* Λ. There, 'something that moves without being moved', and that has always been and will always be, comes as a solution to the problem of explaining movement in a universe where time has no beginning or end, for movement cannot come-to-be or pass-away (1071^b5–1072^a26; see, also, *Physics* Θ.6.259^a13–20). As Aristotle concludes, 'there is something that moves without being moved, being eternal, substance, and activity' (*Metaphysics* Λ.7.1072^a25–6). A prime mover must be active, for mere potential to move will not suffice to bring about movement. Movement is 'the actualization of what is potentially' (*Physics* Γ.1.201^a10–11), while it is possible for a potential not to be actualised (*Metaphysics* Λ.7.1071^b12–14).

At *Metaphysics* Λ.7.1072^b14–30, Aristotle offers two arguments for identifying a prime mover's activity with thinking: since thinking is the only activity that does not require matter, and since 'contemplation seems to be most pleasant and best'. A prime mover contemplates incessantly, it 'can in no way admit of being otherwise' (Λ.7.1072^b8). A prime mover's understanding has to have a subject; otherwise, it would be like someone asleep (Λ.9.1074^b18). 'Active understanding (νόησις) [...] is intrinsically of what is intrinsically best' (Λ.7.1072^b18–19); it is of 'what is most divine (θειότατον) and most worthy of honour (τιμιώτατον)' (Λ.9.1074^b26; modified translation). There can be no better subject for a prime mover's thinking than thinking, the activity which a prime mover is itself (Λ.7.1072^b26–8; see, also, *De Anima* III.4.430^a3–4). Its 'thinking is a thinking of thinking (νόησις νοήσεως νόησις)' (Λ.9.1074^b34; modified translation).

At *Λ.7.1072^b25*, a (or the) prime mover is explicitly identified with a (or the) god (θεός). A prime mover is the highest being, enjoying a life of the highest activity—thinking, and a god is nothing other than the highest being.

[T1] We say (φαμὲν), indeed, that the god (θεὸν) is a living being (ζῶον) who is eternal and best, so that living (ζωή) and continuous and everlasting eternity belong to the god, since this is god (τοῦτο γὰρ ὁ θεός) (*Λ.7.1072^b28–30*; modified translation).

It should already be clear that the theology of *Metaphysics Λ* is incompatible with the view of gods underlying the Greek traditional religion⁵. Indeed, in many places, Aristotle is explicit in his criticisms of the latter. In *Metaphysics Λ.8*, he describes the content of myths that is added ‘in a mythical way’ to the beliefs about the gods of the ancients, some of which he finds true, as false:

[T2] [t]here is a tradition handed down from the ancients of the earliest times and bequeathed to posterity in the shape of a myth to the effect that the heavenly bodies are gods and that the divine encompasses the whole of nature. The rest of the tradition has been added later in a mythical way with a view to the persuasion of ordinary people and with

⁵ Distinguishing between the religious beliefs expressed in ancient Greek works of literature and those that underlay the actual cult is no easy task. As writes Posidonius, ‘[t]hose who handed down to us reverence (σεβασμὸν) concerning the gods set it out for us through three forms, first that of “nature” (τοῦ φυσικοῦ), second that of “myth” (τοῦ μυθικοῦ), and third that which has taken its evidence from the laws (τοῦ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἐκ τῶν νόμων εὐληφότος). The one of “nature” is taught by the philosophers, that of “myth” by the poets, and that of the laws is put together by the *polis*’ (fr. 364 [Theiler] = Aëtius, *Placita* I.6; Mikalson’s translation as in 2010: 17n.). Varro, according to Augustine (*City of God* VI.5), describes one of three parts of theology using the adjective *mythicon*, derived from the Greek μῦθος; the other two are, in Augustine’s wording, *naturale* and *civile*. By ‘the Greek traditional religion’, this thesis refers to the religion of the established cult in Athens in Aristotle’s time, and to the religious beliefs presented in or implied by works of the poets who contributed to shaping the established cult, as agreed by the majority of historians of the ancient Greek religion (hence, for instance, inclusive of the theology of the works of Homer and Hesiod, and exclusive of, for instance, Euripides’ Xenophanes-inspired criticism of the depictions of gods in myths; see, for instance, Mikalson 1991 Chs. 1 and 6). Therefore, for instance, Aristotle’s naturalistic explanation of the portrayal of gods as ruled by a king (see pages 10–11) is treated as a criticism of the Greek traditional religion, even though he attributes the description of Zeus as ‘ruling as king and governing (βασιλεύειν καὶ ἄρχειν)’ the other gods to ‘the poets (οἱ [...] ποιηταί)’ (*Metaphysics* N.4.1091^b4–5; modified translation), for Zeus is designated as the king of the gods by, for instance, Hesiod at *Theogony* 886.

a view to its use for legal purposes and for what is advantageous. For they say that these gods are human in form or like some of the other animals, and also other features similar that follow from or are similar to those just mentioned. But if we separate the first point from these additions and grasp it alone, namely, that they thought that the primary substances were gods, we would have to regard it as divinely said (1074^a38–^b9).

He describes the theology that Hesiod's stories imply as absurd in *Metaphysics* B.4:

the followers of Hesiod and all the theologians [...] made the starting-points to be gods and what is born from gods, and say that those who did not taste nectar or ambrosia became mortal [...]. For if [...] nectar and ambrosia [...] *are* the causes of their [the gods'] being, how could the gods be eternal, since they need nourishment? (1000^a9–18; emphasis as in Reeve's translation).

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle claims Xenophanes' criticisms of myths 'justified', for 'it may satisfy neither morality nor truth to say such things' as the stories about gods say (XXV.1460^b32–1461^a1).

But what is most important in the context of the present inquiry is that the theology of the *Metaphysics* implies that the god(s) should not be thought to engage in the actions concerning human beings that the Greek traditional religion ascribes to them—that is, punishing human beings or rewarding them for their good actions, including sacrifices and prayers, or good

character⁶. This conclusion is confirmed in the *NE*, where Aristotle finds it absurd to attribute to the god(s) ‘just’, ‘brave’, ‘generous’, or ‘temperate’ actions; for, instead,

the god’s activity, being superior in blessedness, will be an activity of study. And so the human activity that is most akin to this activity will, more than any others, have the character of happiness (X.8.1178^b21–3).

The passage refers to the identification of the activity of the god(s) with contemplation we have seen Aristotle to establish in *Metaphysics* Λ. We cannot think of any way that the god(s) who is(are) always in the perfect state could be benefited by us; ‘god is in need of nothing’ (*Eudemian Ethics* [henceforth *EE*] VIII.3.1249^b17). Prayers and sacrifices are futile.

We do not find this view expressed in the *Politics*, but the work, like the *NE* and the *EE*, assumes the theology of *Metaphysics* Λ. In VII.3, the view that an active life does not need to involve action relative to others is defended by way of comparison to the life of the god(s):

otherwise the [primary] god and the entire cosmos could scarcely be in a noble condition, since they have no external actions beyond the [internal] ones that are proper to them (1325^b28–30).

External goods are not intrinsic to the happiness of the god(s), hence neither they are to human happiness (VII.1.1323^b23–6). Moreover, the criticism of anthropomorphic depictions of gods we found in T2 is echoed in I.2.1252^b24–7, where Aristotle offers a naturalistic explanation of the portrayal of Zeus as the king of the gods:

[T3] it is because of this that all people say that the gods too are ruled by a king, namely, that they themselves were ruled by kings in ancient

⁶ The belief that the gods are concerned with and intervene in human affairs is an essential tenet of the Greek traditional religion. For an argument for this view, see Yunis 1988: 43–4. Plato lists this belief among the three beliefs that Magnesia’s citizens must share in the preamble to the law of impiety at *Laws* 885^b.

times, and some still are. And human beings model not only the forms of the gods on their own, but their way of life as well.

1.2. THE CASE FOR A TRADITIONALLY RELIGIOUS ARISTOTLE

The view that Aristotle denies the possibility of divine intervention in response to a prayer or sacrifice is the prevalent view in the scholarship⁷. However, Richard Bodéüs (2000; see, especially, 1–13) identifies the god(s) Aristotle believes in not with the prime mover(s) of *Metaphysics* Λ —which, on Bodéüs’ reading, is(are) called god(s) only through analogy—but with the gods of the Greek traditional religion, who do pay attention to human affairs and respond to prayers and sacrifices. Aristotle may believe in them while, at the same time, denouncing many inaccurate depictions of them found in myths⁸.

Bodéüs posits that the ‘prevailing view’ of Aristotle’s theology requires us to overlook ‘everything he wrote apart from [*Metaphysics*] Lambda’ (2000: 9)⁹, and notes that Aristotle does not deduce there the characteristic of a god as a prime mover from the necessary characteristic of a god. Aristotle establishes the existence of a prime mover, shows that a prime mover is an eternal living thing, and only then identifies the prime mover(s) as (a) god(s). This does not preclude identifying any other beings—should they also be eternal living things—as gods. Bodéüs takes this to be the case of the Greek traditional gods.

Bodéüs takes three passages to testify that, according to Aristotle, we ought to worship the gods: ‘[w]orth is said to [make one worthy of] external goods; and we would suppose that the

⁷ See, for instance, Ross 1924: I.cxxx–cliv; Solmsen 1963: 485–95; Johnson 2005: 262–75; Mayhew 2007; Sedley 2007: 168n.; and Segev 2017 Chs. 1–3.

⁸ Examining the entirety of Bodéüs’ body of arguments for his interpretation of Aristotle’s religious beliefs falls beyond the scope of this thesis. Thus, discussed here are only his arguments for the view that Aristotle believes that the gods are concerned with human affairs and respond to prayers and sacrifices. Proponents of this view include Nichols (1992), Simpson (1998), Chuska (2000: 203–7), Mikalson (2010: 15n.), and Naddaf (2010).

⁹ This stance is also endorsed by, for instance, Broadie (2003: 64) and Menn (2012: 423n.).

greatest of these is the one we award to the gods' (*NE* IV.3.1123^b17–19); 'the community of a father and his sons has the structure of kingship, since the father is concerned for his children. Indeed that is why Homer also calls Zeus father' (*NE* VIII.9.1160^b24–7); and *Topics* I.11.105^a3–7:

[T4] [o]ne ought not to inquire into every problem or every thesis, but only those which someone might be puzzled about who was in need of arguments, not punishment or perception. For those who puzzle about whether one must honour the gods and care for one's parents or not (πότερον δεῖ τοὺς θεοὺς τιμᾶν καὶ τοὺς γονεῖς ἀγαπᾶν ἢ οὐ) need punishment, while those who puzzle about whether snow is white or not need perception.

Bodéüs takes these three passages to justify rejecting the view that the character of a prime mover bounds Aristotle's understanding of the character of a god, since, in order to make sense of these passages, the 'gods' they speak of cannot be taken to be the prime mover(s) of *Metaphysics* Λ, but to be the gods of the Greek traditional religion, who are responsive to our worship. If Bodéüs' case is successful, the question of what role religious institutions play in the ideal *polis* is trivial; they are responsible for worship of the gods that Aristotle believes should be worshipped.

However, none of these three passages commits Aristotle to a conception of the god(s) as responsive to prayers and sacrifices. The first passage is no more than a descriptive claim about the practice of honouring the gods, which indicates that honour is the greatest external good. While in the second passage, Aristotle seems to consider Zeus as a god, the passage merely aims to explain why Homer refers to Zeus as a 'father'—since in the Homeric poems Zeus is the paradigm of monarchy or paternal rule. In the third passage, the view that one does not need to honour the gods is taken to contradict common sense and call for a punishment for one who

voices it. But this does not imply that one should honour the gods because the gods are going to reward one or that they desire to be honoured. The only reason this passage gives one to honour the gods is because it is against common sense to doubt or deny that one should do so¹⁰.

Nonetheless, two other passages from the *NE* might be taken to imply that Aristotle believes that the gods do intervene in human affairs. Firstly, he argues that if the gods take interest in human affairs, they love and reward the most those who contemplate. This is the *theophilestatos* argument provided in X.8.1179^a24–8:

[T5] [f]or if the gods pay some attention to human affairs, as is thought, it would be reasonable for them to take pleasure in what is best and most akin to them, namely understanding; and reasonable for them to benefit in return those who most of all like and honour understanding (modified translation).

Secondly, in Book I, we read,

if the gods give any gift at all to human beings, it is reasonable for them to give us happiness more than any other human good, insofar as it is the best of human goods (1099^b11–13).

However, that the gods care about human affairs is, in both places, merely a hypothetical. Hence, the passages are non-committal on whether the god(s) indeed care(s) about human affairs. As we have seen, *Metaphysics* Λ argues that the god(s) do(es) not care about human affairs¹¹.

Having found Bodéüs to fail to prove that Aristotle believes that the god(s) is(are) concerned with human affairs, we can, moreover, point to passages that speak against his reading of

¹⁰ Subsection 3.1 will argue that Aristotle indeed believes that we ought to worship the god(s), but not that the rewards we receive for doing so are delivered by the god(s) in return for our worship.

¹¹ It remains to be explained why Aristotle uses the hypothetical if not to express his own view. Subsection 3.1 will return to this problem and treat the *theophilestatos* argument in detail.

Metaphysics Λ as not restricting the status of a god in Aristotle’s theology to the prime mover(s).

Firstly, on careful reading, we can see that T1 defines the god(s) as prime mover(s)—*pace* Bodéüs (2000: 23–4), who takes the entire sentence from ‘[w]e say (φαμὲν)’ to ‘for this is god (τοῦτο γὰρ ὁ θεός)’ to fall under the scope of what ‘[w]e say (φαμὲν)’. In other words, Bodéüs takes the entire sentence to express the common view of divine nature, which Aristotle finds his prime mover to fit into, while the traditional gods do so as well. However, this is a misreading of the passage.

The common view Aristotle refers to is that a god is a ‘ζῶον (living being, animal) eternal and best’, but the more technical characteristic of divine nature that follows—‘ζωή (living) and αἰὼν συνεχῆς καὶ αἰδῖος (continuous and everlasting eternity) belong to the god’—is no longer what one would expect an average Athenian, inquired about the definition of a god, to say. Instead, this and the remaining part of the sentence belong to Aristotle’s deconstruction of the common view in order to uncover the basic intuition underlying it, and to show that the intuition matches his own view of the god(s)¹².

The uncovered basic intuition that ‘ζωή (living) and αἰὼν συνεχῆς καὶ αἰδῖος (continuous and everlasting eternity) belong to the god’ Aristotle takes to stem from the fact that, indeed, ‘this [living and continuous and everlasting eternity] is god (τοῦτο [ζωή καὶ αἰὼν συνεχῆς καὶ αἰδῖος] γὰρ ὁ θεός)’. Thereby, his view of the god(s) as prime mover(s), who is(are) an eternal and incessant activity of contemplation, is found consistent with, and confirmed by, the basic intuition underlying the common understanding of divine nature. A god is not a living being of

¹² On the importance of considering the common view in Aristotle’s method, see, especially, *Topics* I.1.100^b21 and I.10.104^a8–12. Consider, also, his project statement at *NE* I.8.1098^b9–10: ‘[w]e should examine the principle, however, not only from the conclusion and / premisses, but also from the things said about it’. For analysis and more examples of Aristotle’s deconstruction of the common view, see, for instance, Verdenius 1960, Owen 1961, and Nussbaum 2001 Ch. 8.

the sort that an animal is (ζῷον), but it is thought to be one, since we have an intuition that a certain form of living (ζωή) is what defines it.

Secondly, as noted in the previous subsection, in the *Politics* and the *Ethics*, Aristotle assumes and refers to claims established (and described in more detail) in *Metaphysics* Λ. The *Politics* and the *Ethics* thereby confirm the status of *Metaphysics* Λ as the primary *locus* of Aristotle's theology.

Finally, we have a reason to assume that the view on the efficacy of prayer we would find in Aristotle's lost work *On Prayer* is the view implied by the theology of *Metaphysics* Λ, rather than that of the Greek traditional religion. As Simplicius tells us, Aristotle is 'saying clearly at the end of his book *On Prayer* that god is either mind (νοῦς) or something even beyond mind (τι καὶ ὑπὲρ νοῦν)' (fr. 49 [R³] = Simplicius, *Aristotelis De caelo commentaria* 485.19–22)¹³.

1.3. MENTIONS OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICE IN THE *POLITICS*

Having found Bodéüs' criticism of the common reading of Aristotle's theology as denying divine concern with human affairs unconvincing, we can proceed to discuss the role religious practice plays in the *polis*. But before we examine three interpretations of its function in the ideal *polis* in the next section, this subsection will provide a survey of all mentions Aristotle makes of religious practice in the *Politics*¹⁴.

¹³ We might be puzzled by Simplicius' words that Aristotle's god might be something 'even beyond mind'. For discussion of whether we should, affirming that we do, take Simplicius' citation to be literal, see, for instance, Pépin 1967 and Castro 2019; for criticism, see, for instance, Rist 1985. For our present purposes, it suffices that the passage suggests that the theology of the *On Prayer* is akin to that of the *Metaphysics*, rather than to that of the Greek traditional religion.

¹⁴ Not considered here are Aristotle's frequent mentions of prayer, since—*pace*, for instance, Nichols (1992: 148) and Simpson (1998: 72)—prayer-language in the *Politics* is best understood as a heuristic device. He frequently refers to the ideal *polis* as one 'according to prayer (κατ' εὐχὴν)'—for instance, at IV.1.1288^b23, VII.4.1325^b36, and VII.10.1330^a25–6—and to the external conditions in which the ideal *polis* is created as ones 'according to prayer (κατ' εὐχὴν)'—for instance, at II.6.1265^a18, VII.5.1327^a4, and VII.11.1330^a37—but the phrase is best read as an expression of wish rather than as denoting a genuine prayer he makes or advises his audience to make. Consider VII.12.1331^b20–2: 'since speaking about them is a function of prayer, whereas having them come about

He affirms the necessity of the presence of religious practice in any *polis* properly called in *Politics* VI.8 and VII.8, which enumerate ‘things [...] that a *polis* cannot exist without’ (VII.8.1328^b2–3). In the latter, these elements are the provision of food, crafts, arms, property, and ‘[f]ifth, but first, the care for divine matters, which is called a priesthood (πέμπτον δὲ καὶ πρῶτον τὴν περὶ τὸ θεῖον ἐπιμέλειαν, ἣν καλοῦσιν ἱερατείαν)’ (1328^b11–13; modified translation). Rather than providing justification for the need for organised religion in the *polis*, Aristotle immediately proceeds to the sixth element, ‘judgment about what is advantageous and just in their [the *polis*’ elements’] relations with each other’ (1328^b13–14). Neither is a justification for the necessity of the provision of worship provided in VI.8 (nor anywhere else in Aristotle’s extant *corpus*), where, however, provided is a more detailed description of what ‘care for divine matters’ in the *polis* amounts to:

[a]nother kind of supervision, however, is that concerned with the gods—for example, priests, supervisors of matters relating to the temples (such as the preservation of existing buildings, the restoration of decaying ones), and all other things that are ordered in relation to the gods. In some places it happens that a single office supervises all this—for example, in small cities. But in other places there are many officials who are separate from the priesthood—for example, supervisors of sacrifices, temple-guardians, and treasurers of sacred funds. Next after this is the office set aside for all the public sacrifices that the law does not assign to the priests but which have the honor [of being celebrated]

is a function of luck’. Either the prayer mentioned is not expected to be efficacious, or the word means simply wish or hope (Mayhew 2007: 303). Aristotle’s use of prayer-language is clearly heuristic at VII.4.1325^b37–9: ‘we should hypothesize many things in advance, just like people praying (καθάπερ εὐχομένων), although none of them should be impossible’ (modified translation). Prayer in the literal sense is found only at I.9.1257^b15–17 and III.16.1287^b13–15, where Aristotle refers to, respectively, ‘Midas in the fable, where everything set before him turned to gold in answer to his own greedy prayer’, and ‘Agamemnon’s prayer, “May ten such counsellors be mine”’. However, neither passage, being merely a citation, indicates that Aristotle affirms or denies the actual efficacy of prayer.

from the communal hearth. These officials are called archons by some, kings or presidents by others (1322^b18–29).

Since provision of worship is necessary in any self-sufficient *polis*, it is so in the ideal *polis*, which Aristotle describes in *Politics* VII–VIII. There, he instructs his audience whom priesthoods should—and should not—be given to in the ideal circumstances:

no farmer or vulgar person should be appointed as a priest, since it is appropriate for the gods to be honored by citizens (VII.9.1329^a28–9).

We also learn that,

[T6] it is appropriate for those who are worn out with age to render service to the gods and find rest (ἀνάπαυσιν), it is to these that priesthoods should be assigned (VII.9.1329^a31–4).

Aristotle also covers the financial aspect of care for divine matters:

expenses relating to the gods should be shared communally by the entire city [...] [o]ne [fourth] part of the communal land should be used to support public services to the gods (VII.10.1330^a8–12).

The location of temples in the ideal *polis* is also significant:

[T7] [a]s for the buildings assigned to the gods, and the communal messes for officials with the most control, it is fitting for them to be located together in an appropriate place—except in the case of temples assigned a separate location by the law or some other prophecy delivered by the Pythian god [Apollo]. And a place like this would be one that is such as to be a conspicuous enough setting for virtue and also better fortified than the neighbouring parts of the *polis* (VII.12.1331^a24–30).

Temples should be built not only in the urban area:

[T8] temples must be distributed throughout the territory, some dedicated to gods and others to heroes (τὰ μὲν θεοῖς τὰ δὲ ἥρωσιν) (VII.12.1331^b17–18).

Throughout the *Politics*, Aristotle provides examples of benefits that religious practice in the *polis*—in some places, it is in case that a certain modification of the organisation of the practice is made—may provide. None of them is a divine reward for the citizens' worship. In his discussion of democracy, he notes that communalising religious worship helps to prevent partitioning of the society:

[T9] private cults should be absorbed into a few public ones, and every subtlety devised to mix everyone together as much as possible and break up their previous associations (VI.4.1319^b23–6).

The same benefit is identified in III.9: 'marriage connections arose in *poleis*, as well as brotherhoods, religious sacrifices, and the pastimes characteristic of living together', for 'things of this sort are the function of friendship' (1280^b35–8).

In a tyranny, making a convincing show of his earnestness in religious matters helps the tyrant prevent the citizens from revolting:

[T10] a tyrant should always be seen to be outstandingly serious where matters concerning the gods are concerned. For people are less afraid of suffering something contrary to the law at the hands of such people. And if they think their ruler is a god-fearing man, and one who takes thought of the gods, they plot against him less, on the supposition that he has even the gods on his side. In appearing to be someone of this sort, however, the tyrant must avoid silliness (V.11.1314^b38–1315^a3).

In the ideal *polis*, religious ceremonies provide the elderly citizens serving as priests with ‘rest (*ἀνάπαυσιν*)’ (see T6). Pregnant women are required by law to take daily walks to temples of gods associated with childbirth for the sake of their, and their children’s, health:

[T11] pregnant women should take care of their bodies and not stop exercising or adopt a meager diet. The legislator can easily accomplish this by requiring them to take a walk every day in order to worship the gods whose assigned prerogative is to watch over birth (VII.16.1335^b12–16).

2. THREE PROPOSALS

Given that, as we saw in the previous section, Aristotle denies the possibility of any divine reward for the citizens’ prayers and sacrifices, this section will examine three attempts at interpreting the function he ascribes to religious practice in the ideal *polis*, eventually finding all three unconvincing.

2.1. SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS OF WORSHIP

Some scholars argue that the role religious institutions play in Aristotle’s ideal *polis* is defined by the three social and psychological benefits bringing about which he explicitly ascribes to religious practice¹⁵.

The first benefit is the promotion of law-obedience. In T2, myths are said to have been created for the sake of promoting law-obedience:

¹⁵ Versions of this view are argued for, or hinted at, by, among many, Defourny (1932: 351–2), Lindsay (1991: 497–500), Mayhew (1996: 58; 2007: 307–8), Bartlett (1999: 299–300 and 311n.), Broadie (2009: 89), and Barney (2022 Ch. 7).

[t]he rest of the tradition has been added later in a mythical way with a view to the persuasion of ordinary people and with a view to its use for legal purposes and for what is advantageous.

In T11, the need for pregnant women to perform daily walks is made a religious duty in the *polis*, so that law-obedience is incentivised through the threat of divine sanction. As notes Barney (2022: 239), the passage responds to a worry that the threat of punishment by the *polis* might, in certain circumstances, not be enough to secure law-obedience. This worry is already raised by Plato in the *Laws* at VII.789^d8–90^a2, where, too, discussed is a law that pregnant women should take regular walks. As Plato thinks, this law, if enacted, would be ridiculed and thus disobeyed by the citizens. Aristotle finds a solution to this worry in making it a religious duty for pregnant women to go for daily walks. For, due to the poor dissemination of medical knowledge among the wider population¹⁶, a different motivation than the actual health benefits or the threat of punishment by the *polis* has to be given for pregnant women to perform daily walks.

The second benefit stemming from the presence of religious practice in the *polis* is that it provides the citizens with opportunities to form friendships. At T9, communalising religious worship is said to help to prevent partitioning of the democratic society. Ties of friendship is what characterises the communities of *thiasoi* and *eranoi*¹⁷ at *NE* VIII.9.1160^a19–30. In *Politics* III.9, ‘religious sacrifices’ are listed among the things which ‘are the function of friendship’ (1280^b35–8). In *NE* VIII.1, friendship is found to be ‘most necessary for our life (ἀναγκαϊότατον εἰς τὸν βίον)’ (1155^a4–5), and it ‘would seem to hold *poleis* together’ (1155^a24).

¹⁶ Even Hippocrates (*Diseases of Women* I.25, 32) speaks only of harms caused by pre-natal exercise. Aristotle describes its benefits in *Generation of Animals* 775^a27–^b2.

¹⁷ *Thiasoi* and *eranoi* were private cultic associations. See, for instance, Foucart 1873, Poland 1909, and Arnaoutoglou 2003.

The third benefit is that religious ceremonies provide the citizens with opportunities for rest and leisure. In T6, priesthoods are to be assigned to the elderly, who need rest the most. Music, public performances of which usually accompanied ancient Greek religious festivals, serves ‘for the relaxation of one’s tensions’ (*Politics* VIII.7.1341^b41). Thereby, it provides the spectators with rest, which is necessary for them to be able to work again. In *NE* VIII.9.1160^a25–7, through ‘performing sacrifices and arranging gatherings’, members of *thiasoi* and *eranoi* ‘provide themselves with pleasant relaxations’. Enjoyment of musical performances enables one to ‘use leisure well (σχολάζειν [...] καλῶς)’ (*Politics* VIII.3.1337^b31–2). This seems to make religious ceremonies necessary in the ideal *polis*, for ‘being at leisure itself [...] seems to involve pleasure, happiness, and living blessedly’ (*Politics* VIII.3.1338^a1–3).

On this interpretation, bringing about the three abovementioned benefits is what the function religious institutions play in Aristotle’s ideal *polis* amounts to. The ability religious practice has to bring them about gives him a reason to posit the need for religious institutions in the ideal *polis* even if there are no gods willing to reward its citizens for their prayers and sacrifices.

However, this interpretation ascribes to Aristotle advocacy of a policy of maintaining a fake cult in the ideal *polis*. It might seem that in T11 he indeed hints that, in circumstances where the threat of punishment by the *polis* is not efficacious enough, it might be necessary for the lawgivers to make use of religious cult to encourage the population of the ideal *polis* to obey the law. Thus, it might seem necessary to maintain a fake religious cult in the ideal *polis* so that lawgivers can resort to such means of securing law-obedience. After all, Plato, whose worry that the threat of punishment by the *polis* might not always be a successful means of securing

law-obedience Aristotle responds to, conceives of religious backing-up for the law of the *polis* (consider, especially, the Myth of Metals)¹⁸ as a necessary measure of securing public order.

The remainder of this subsection will argue that it would be wrong to ascribe to Aristotle advocacy of such a measure. He could not introduce such a plan—especially in an exoteric work—without defending it explicitly and at length, given that in Athens in his time, deception of the *dēmos* by public officials was considered entirely unacceptable, and un-Athenian in spirit. While Murray (1996: 150–1) and Hesk (2000: 151–4) note that the Platonic Socrates’ defence of lies in special circumstances when harm is involved (to avoid doing injustice to an insane friend, one must deceive him; *Republic* 331^c5–9) was not radical, but reflected the common opinion of his time, the same cannot be said about his advocacy of a full-scale programme of deception of the citizen body by public officials—the Noble Lie. The Platonic Socrates acknowledges that the Athenian audience would be shocked by his advocacy of the Noble Lie. In the *Republic*, he tells Adeimantus, ‘[w]hen you hear it, you’ll realize that I have every reason to hesitate’ (414^c9–10). Later, we find the latter shocked, when he replies to Socrates, ‘[i]t isn’t for nothing that you were so shy about telling your falsehood’ (414^c7). The Athenian law explicitly forbade deception of the *dēmos* by public officials and democratic leaders, as we learn from, among many, Herodotus (*Histories* VI.136), Demosthenes (*Orations* XLIX.67), and Hypereides (*In Defence of Euxenippus* 8). It is thus hard to read Aristotle as endorsing a nothing-but-contentious Noble Lie-like plan in the *Politics*. This would not be his usual argumentative strategy, and even less one appropriate for an exoteric work or a lecture delivered to future lawmakers brought up in the honesty-affirming culture of Athens¹⁹.

¹⁸ Followed here is the traditional interpretation of the Noble Lie as a tool of manipulation of the public; the *locus classicus* of this view is Popper 1945. For an alternative reading, see, for instance, Rowett 2016.

¹⁹ Aristotle’s opposition to lying in his ethical works is not unconditional, yet the exceptions he allows do not imply inclusion or exclusion of the type of deception that a policy of maintaining a fake cult would involve. For a survey and analysis of passages where Aristotle discusses lying, see Zembaty 1993.

Hinting at a Noble Lie-like plan of maintaining a fake cult for the purpose of manipulating the citizens into law-obedience is not what Aristotle does in T11. Instead, we should read the passage as merely putting the already existing cult of the gods associated with childbirth in the *polis* to a good use through a tiny modification of the organisation of this practice. It is more natural to read T9 the same way: Aristotle is not hinting there at a grand plan of uniting the citizens through providing them with and obligating them to participate in a public cult of actually non-existent gods responsive to prayers and sacrifices, such that some of the citizens would not believe in²⁰, but simply advising lawgivers to merge the already existing private rites in their *poleis* into public ones. This is, importantly, not to deny that religious practice can be credited with bringing about the three benefits discussed above.

Giving the *polis* the authority to distribute priesthoods does not suggest ascribing to Aristotle a Noble Lie-like plan either; it was a standard practice in the Greek *poleis* of his time. His own *Constitution of Athens* confirms this; see, especially, 47.1, 50.1, and 54.6–8. As writes Sourvinou-Inwood, ‘in the classical period the *polis* had ultimate authority in, and control of, all cults, and *polis* religion encompassed all religious discourse within it’ (1990: 307). This is in line with Aristotle’s comments on the form of sacrifices in the *Ethics*. While ‘political science’ does not rule ‘the gods’ (*NE* VI.13[= *EE* V.13].1145^a11; modified translation), ‘that a goat rather than two sheep [...] be sacrificed’ is a thing that ‘makes a difference’ only once ‘people have laid down the rule’ in their community (*NE* V.7[= *EE* IV.7].1134^b19–24).

²⁰ It might be objected that one does not need to believe in the theological claims underlying a religious practice in order to meaningfully engage in it. So argues, for instance, Wittgenstein in his remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough* (1967). Barney ascribes such a view to Aristotle, arguing that he takes worship of the traditional gods to honour the true god(s). According to Barney, T2 ‘makes clear that the gods of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and the gods of popular Greek culture share a common referent’ (2022: 216). However, Aristotle’s description of the traditional gods as ‘nothing but eternal human beings’ (*Metaphysics* B.2.997^b11), disrespectful treatment of the goddesses of childbirth, and naturalistic explanation of the cult of the Graces, which contrast with his respectful attitude towards the prime mover(s), imply that he—and, thus, on his view, anyone who shared his belief that the prime mover(s) is(are) the true god(s)—could not engage in the Greek traditional religious practice believing that the prime mover(s) is(are) thereby honoured. These passages are provided and discussed on page 27 and in footnote 24.

2.2. ΘAYMAZEIN ANTHROPOMORPHIC GODS

Segev (2017) offers an interpretation of the function religious institutions perform in a *polis*, according to which the Greek traditional religious narrative produces in the citizens ‘wonder (θαυμασία)’ at its false gods, which translates into inquiry into and contemplation of the true god(s).

Since any *polis*, while having come into being simply ‘for the sake of living (τοῦ ζῆν)’ , remains in existence for the sake of ‘living well (τοῦ εὖ ζῆν)’ (*Politics* I.2.1252^b29–30), Segev posits that encouraging citizens to contemplation, which is (a necessary constituent of²¹) the human good (for instance, at *NE* X.7.1177^a17–18), must be a necessary function of the *polis*. Among the necessary elements of any self-sufficient *polis*, Segev finds no other suitable candidate for the element performing this function than the provision of worship. It can perform this function in no other way than through producing in the citizens a sense of wonder at the god(s), for wonder at the god(s) is necessary to cause us to study the god(s):

[s]ince Aristotle takes philosophical inquiry about X to commence from “wondering” at X (*Met.* A. 2, 982b12–17: θαυμάζειν—roughly, finding X wonderful or marvelous, but puzzling), he should think that in order to gain knowledge of “first philosophy,” which is concerned with (the) god(s), one must first have a sense of “wonder” at god(s) (Segev 2017: 51).

It might, nonetheless, seem that philosophical discourse is no less efficacious as a measure of inspiring those citizens who have the capacity for philosophical contemplation to study the god(s); moreover, it speaks directly of the true god(s). No less efficacious should also be study

²¹ See footnote 3.

of nature, for, as Sextus Empiricus reports, the two sources of our concept of a god Aristotle recognises are dreams and observation of ‘the phenomena of the heavens’ (fr. 10 [R³] = Sextus Empiricus, *adversus mathematicos* IX.20–3; see, also, *Parts of Animals* I.5.645^a17–25, which will be discussed towards the end of this subsection). Hence, Segev needs to show that, in Aristotle’s view, traditional religion is more efficacious in causing us to wonder at the god(s) than philosophical discourse or study of nature.

Traditional gods are the appropriate type of thing to lead one toward an inquiry into the nature of true gods because they are easy to identify with and in fact share in the definition of “god” along with true gods such as the unmoved mover(s) [...]. Since traditional gods also share in the definition of “human being,” and since, though powerful and everlasting, they also lead political and social lives and are therefore not, strictly speaking, self-sufficient, as true gods should be, they are effective in raising the question of how and to what extent, being human, one might imitate the activity characteristic of gods—that is to say, theoretical contemplation (Segev 2017: 9).

Segev points out that at *Rhetoric* I.11.1371^b4–18, we are said to take pleasure in ‘learning (μανθάνειν) and admiring (θαυμάζειν) [...] things that are akin (συγγενές)’ to us. The anthropomorphic gods of the Greek traditional religion, whom Aristotle calls ‘eternal human beings’ at *Metaphysics* B.2.997^b11, are akin to us. He, also, describes myths as ‘composed of wonders’ (*Metaphysics* A.2.982^b19).

Accordingly, Segev concludes,

[i]n the best achievable *polis*, [...] the task of the priesthood would be the propagation of the contents of traditional religion for the purpose

of getting people to engage in good human activities, culminating in philosophical activity for those who are capable of it (2017: 77).

Having laid out Segev's interpretation of the role religious institutions play in the ideal *polis*, the remainder of this subsection will argue that it is implausible. Segev's case depends on whether the Greek traditional religious narrative is better able to motivate the citizens of the ideal *polis* to contemplate the true god(s) than philosophical discourse or study of nature. However, it is counterintuitive to posit that things which are akin to us are more puzzling, and more likely to cause us to experience wonder, than things which are not akin to us. This intuition is perhaps best captured by Nietzsche:

[w]hat do they want when they want "knowledge"? Nothing more than this: Something strange is to be reduced to something *familiar*. And we philosophers—have we really meant *more* than this when we have spoken of knowledge? What is familiar means what we are used to so that we no longer marvel at it (*The Gay Science* V.355; Kaufmann's translation; original emphasis).

While we take more pleasure in inquiring into things which are akin to us, these things are less likely to cause us to experience wonder. The former is explicitly affirmed by Aristotle, while not to ascribe to him the latter would be an uncharitable reading. Moreover, two passages in his *corpus* indicate that he would be likely to admit that imagining gods as anthropomorphic—and hearing stories of anthropomorphised gods—may lead us away from true science of them. Firstly, it is the true characteristic of the god(s) that is claimed by Aristotle to inspire wonder: '[i]f, then, that good state, which we are [i] sometimes in, the god is always in, that is a wonderful (θαυμαστόν) thing' (*Metaphysics* Λ.7.1072^b24–5). The anthropomorphic gods of the Greek

traditional religion are divested of their wonder-inspiring divine characteristic²². Religious poets have made them ‘*nothing but* eternal human beings (οὐδὲν ἄλλο [...] ἀνθρώπους ἀϊδίους)’, such as Plato made forms ‘nothing but eternal perceptibles (αἰσθητὰ αἰδία)’ (*Metaphysics* B.2.997^b11–12; emphasis added). Moreover, in this passage, Aristotle can be seen to conceive of the traditional gods as different entities from the prime mover(s), rather than as the same entity(ies) described, in the former case, inaccurately, and accurately in the latter.

The Greeks of his time conceived of the gods of the philosophers as different entities from the traditional gods, rather than as two ways of speaking of the same entities. In Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates is accused of ‘not believing in the gods in whom the *polis* believes, but in *other* new deities (θεοὺς οὓς ἡ πόλις νομίζει οὐ νομίζοντα, ἕτερα δὲ δαιμόνια καινά)’ (24^b9–^c1; modified translation; emphasis added). In Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, Socrates declares ‘Clouds [...] [o]ur own divinities (ἡμετέρασι δαίμοσιν)’ (252–3; Halliwell’s translation), and later denies the existence of Zeus (367).

Not only in *Metaphysics* B.2.997^b11–12 Aristotle makes identification of the traditional gods with the prime mover(s), or kinship between them, unlikely. For not only there he speaks of the former with an utter lack of respect. As noted by Newman (1887–1902: remark *ad loc.*), at T11, he speaks, literally, of ‘the gods (θεῶν) whose assigned prerogative is to watch over birth’, despite knowing that in the Greek traditional religion associated with childbirth were not gods, but goddesses: Artemis, Eileithyia, and Hera²³. In comparison, a prime mover, as the subject of

²² What sense of ‘wonder’, then, is Aristotle speaking of when he says that myths are ‘composed of wonders’ (*Metaphysics* A.2.982^b19)? In *Rhetoric* I.11.1371^b10–12, we find wonder to be excited by depictions of virtually impossible actions—‘reversals and narrow escapes from danger’.

²³ In contrast, he acknowledges the female identity of the Graces in a letter cited by Demetrius: ‘the gods in both are equal; hence, since the Graces are goddesses (θεαί), equal grace will accrue to you from both’ (fr. 656 [R³] = Demetrius, *de elocutione* 233).

its own understanding, is described by Aristotle as ‘most worthy of honour (τιμιώτατον)’ (Λ.9.1074^b26; modified translation).

Secondly, the gods of the Greek traditional religion point us away from the true god(s) because, unlike anything in nature, they do not imitate the prime mover(s). Consider *Parts of Animals* I.5.645^a17–25:

[e]ven as Heraclitus is said to have spoken to those strangers who wished to meet him but stopped as they were approaching when they saw him warming himself by the oven—he bade them enter without fear, ‘for there are gods here too’—so too one should approach research about each of the animals without disgust, since in every one there is something natural and good. For what is not haphazard but rather for the sake of something is in fact present most of all in the works of nature; the end for the sake of which each animal has been constituted or comes to be takes the place of the good.

Aristotle approves of Heraclitus’ dictum that, in some sense, there is something divine in any natural thing—the divine is manifested through all of nature. In *Metaphysics* Λ.7–8, we learn that the prime mover(s) is(are) the model(s) of cosmic action, which the entire physical world moves to imitate (see, especially, 1072^b1–3).

2.3. INDISPENSABILITY OF THE GREEK TRADITIONAL RELIGION

Given the failure of the interpretations of the role religious institutions play in Aristotle’s ideal *polis* discussed so far, we might wonder if he does ascribe a role for them to play there at all. Since the ideal *polis* is one that is not impossible—although the construction of the ideal *polis* will require many assumptions ‘in accordance with our prayers’, these must include nothing

impossible (VII.4.1325^b37–9)—we might wonder if Aristotle does not simply find a *polis* devoid of religious practice inconceivable, given his empirical observations²⁴.

When Aristotle is speaking of the necessary elements of any self-sufficient *polis*, we do not need to read him as saying that each element is necessary to make the *polis* what it is, or to make it serve its purpose. An institution responsible for the care for divine matters might be necessarily present there simply because such is the nature of the political communities that human beings create and maintain. ‘What is long established appears to be something close to what is by nature (φύσει)’ (*Rhetoric* II.9.1387^a15–16). Aristotle’s ideal *polis* was not constructed in abstraction but based on his and his students’ meticulous empirical investigation of the constitutions of many contemporary *poleis* (part of which was his own *Constitution of Athens*) which, presumably, all contained institutions responsible for providing worship. We find his study of different constitutions in the central books of the *Politics* preceded by the following remark:

[s]ince our deliberately chosen project is to get a theoretical grasp on which political community is superior to all others for people who are able to live as far as possible in the way they would pray to live, we must investigate other constitutions too (II.1.1260^b27–30).

²⁴ Versions of this view are advocated, or hinted at, by Kraut (1997; 2002), Chuska (2000: 207–8), Salkever (2007), Winthrop (2008), and Pangle (2013). This is, essentially, a different view from the one that Aristotle affirmed the need for religious practice in the *polis* in order to avoid a charge of impiety. His disrespect for the goddesses of childbirth (for the passage and brief discussion, see page 27) indicates that he was not afraid of such a charge. Secondly, so indicates his offering of a naturalistic explanation of the cult of the Graces in *NE* V.5(= *EE* IV.5).1132^b31–1133^a5. There, we learn that *poleis* ‘make a temple of the Graces prominent, so that there will be a return of benefits received’—that is, not in order that the Graces receive worship, but as a means of reminding the citizens of the duty of χάρις (broadly, reciprocity of benefits; see, for instance, Versnel 1981: 42–62; Mikalson 2010: 14–15; and van Berkel 2019 Ch. 2). Thirdly, as Pangle observes, Aristotle’s denial of the traditional religious narrative extends as far as to offering a naturalistic explanation of the origin of any *polis*, whereby disrespected are ‘the divine or demigod-founders who were worshipped in every Greek *polis*’, and who were to guard it against its enemies and bad fortune (2013: 25). Aristotle implicitly denies Athena’s role in the foundation, and thereby her protection, of Athens.

The strength of this interpretation lies not only in its ability to dissolve the question of what role religious institutions play in the ideal *polis*, but also in that it allows us to explain why Aristotle, at T7, grants the Oracle of Delphi an authority to make decisions on the location of new temples in the ideal *polis*, even when its decrees collide with his own plan of erecting temples in places such that are ‘conspicuous enough setting for virtue’. If he thinks that the Greek traditional religion would be present even in the ideal *polis*, it makes sense for him to advise its lawmakers not to risk public dismay by disobeying the Oracle of Delphi—such as it would be inadvisable for a tyrant not to appear pious in T10.

As we saw in subsection 2.1, when Aristotle speaks of the three social and psychological benefits he credits religious practice with bringing about, he is, in fact, speaking of the benefits of certain modifications of a practice presumed to already exist in the *polis*. T11 utilises an already existing cult of the god(desse)s associated with childbirth to motivate women to perform daily walks. This passage, which is part of Aristotle’s description of the ideal *polis*, indicates that he takes the existence of the traditional cult as something given even there.

However, this interpretation breaks the essential link between the constitution of the ideal *polis* and the human good. Aristotle explicitly defines the aim of the *polis* as ‘living well (εὖ ζῆν)’ (*Politics* I.2.1252^b30). The best regime is composed so that ‘anyone might be able to do best and live blessedly (μακαρίως)²⁵’ (*Politics* VII.2.1324^a24–5).

[T12] Anyone who is going to make an inquiry into the best constitution in the appropriate way must first determine what the most choiceworthy life is. For if this remains unclear, what the best constitution is must also remain unclear. [...] That is why there should first be agreement about what the most choiceworthy life is for (one

²⁵ Aristotle uses ‘blessedness’ as synonymous with *eudaimonia*, which he describes as ‘something divine and blessed (θεῖόν τι καὶ μακάριον)’ (*NE* I.9.1099^b17–8).

might almost say) everyone, and then determine whether it is the same or distinct for all communally as for each separately (*Politics* VII.1.1323^a15–21).

In the next chapter, Aristotle answers the last question positively. The best life for an individual and the best life for the *polis* are the same (1324^a5–7). Later, he refers his audience to his ‘ethical works’ for his complete definition of happiness (VII.13.1332^a8–9). There, we learn that the best life is the life of contemplation (see, for instance, *NE* X.7.1177^b30–2), which is most similar to the life of the true god(s) (see, for instance, *NE* X.8.1178^b23). Aristotle explicitly describes his enquiry in the *NE* as ‘a sort of political science (πολιτική)’ (I.2.1094^b11; modified translation).

If, as the interpretation examined in this subsection implies, it is not the case that care for divine matters in the *polis* is related to the aim the *polis* has of promoting the human good, then, given that none of the other elements of any self-sufficient *polis* contributes to promoting the human good, the ideal *polis* turns out not to aim at promoting the human good, which renders this interpretation implausible.

3. NEW PROPOSAL

None of the interpretations of the function the provision of worship performs in the ideal *polis* examined in the previous section challenges the idea that the religious practice that is present there is (only) the traditional one. This section will do so, arguing that the *polis* organises religious ceremonies so as to provide the citizens with opportunities for θεωρία; yet, given that not every citizen is going to be persuaded of the falsity of the Greek traditional religion, the ideal *polis* maintains some elements of the traditional cult. Subsections 3.1 and 3.2 will argue for the first part of the above claim.

3.1. ARISTOTLE ON PIETY

The view that the ideal *polis* organises religious ceremonies such that are opportunities for the citizens for θεωρία is supported by Broadie's interpretation of Aristotle's understanding of piety. She argues that he takes contemplation to be a religious duty anyone capable of performing it has. It would be surprising if the commonly esteemed virtue of piety—which was already a focus of philosophical attention, for instance, in Plato's *Euthyphro*—did not make an appearance in Aristotle's *Ethics*. In the *Topics*, wondering 'whether one must honour the gods' is taken to be as absurd as wondering '[whether one must] care for one's parents' (T4). Those who deny these duties should be punished. Aristotle treats *eudaimonia* as involving 'complete virtue (ἀρετὴν τελείαν)', for instance, in *EE* II.1.1219^a35–9.

Broadie thus aims to locate a discussion of piety in the *Ethics*. She argues that piety makes 'a veiled appearance' in the *theophilestatos* argument (T5)—that is, the argument that if the god(s) take interest in human affairs, they love and reward the most those who contemplate. She notes that the passage 'completes Aristotle's response' to the question of whether the practical or the theoretical life is the more blessed and perfect. 'One would not expect a false note at this climactic moment' (Broadie 2003: 61). We should not read Aristotle as attempting to justify through the *theophilestatos* argument the theoretical life in the eyes of the vulgar²⁶, who believe in gods responsive to human affairs, given the context of the passage:

Aristotle was not playing to the vulgar a page or two back [...], when he argued that divine activity is theoretic [X.8.1178^b8–22]. Would he not have lost any vulgar readers or listeners already long before, if he ever had them? (Broadie 2003: 62).

²⁶ So read him, for instance, Dirlmeier (1956: remark *ad loc.*) and Gauthier and Jolif (1970: II.2.898).

Hence, Broadie reads Aristotle as affirming the hypothetical of the *theophilestatos* argument. She takes it to be his own view that ‘the gods pay some attention to human affairs’ and ‘benefit us in return’ for our good actions.

She notes that nothing in the passage requires that the rewards those contemplating receive, be given a traditional interpretation in terms of flocks and herds multiplying and ships coming home. It is reasonable to suppose, instead, that what Aristotle has in mind [...] is a familiar fact of intellectual experience: devoted thinking results, often enough, in bursts of understanding (2013: 64).

Aristotle secured the conclusion that the *sophos* is happiest already at *NE* X.8.1178^b32. The new thought that the *theophilestatos* argument adds is that the *sophos* is ‘most loved by the gods (θεοφιλέστατος)’ (1179^a30). On her reading, in the passage,

Aristotle is saying that piety towards god is, in its truest form, the disposition for intellectual activity engaged in as by the *sophos*, i.e. purely for love of the activity itself (2003: 67).

Broadie finds this view corroborated by two other texts. First is *EE* VIII:

whatever choice and acquisition of natural goods [...] will most effectively produce contemplation of god, that is the best and this is the finest limit; and whatever choice and acquisition of natural goods impedes [...] our service to and contemplation of god (τὸν θεὸν θεραπεύειν καὶ θεωρεῖν), is base (1249^b17–21; modified translation).

She reads the passage as identifying service to the god(s) with contemplation. If we do not take the καὶ in τὸν θεὸν θεραπεύειν καὶ θεωρεῖν to be exegetical, we end up reading the passage as

identifying two highest activities for human beings, which contradicts with Aristotle's view that human beings have one *ergon* (see, for instance, *NE* I.7.1097^b24–8 and 1098^a6–8).

The second text Broadie cites is Seneca's *Natural Questions*. Towards the end of this work, we find a passage emphasising the religious character of doing first philosophy in one of Aristotle's now-lost works:

[T13] Aristotle excellently says that we should nowhere be more modest than in discussions about the gods. If we compose ourselves before we enter temples, [...] how much more should we do so when we discuss the constellations, the stars, and the nature of the gods, lest from temerity or impudence we should make ignorant assertions or knowingly tell lies (fr. 14 [R³] = Seneca, *quaestiones naturales* VII.30.1)²⁷.

However, as we have seen, Broadie's argument relies on taking Aristotle to affirm the hypothetical of the *theophilestatos* argument. Her reading of it is thus implausible, for the theology of *Metaphysics* Λ denies divine engagement with human affairs.

Nonetheless, we can provide a reading of the *theophilestatos* argument that neither renders Aristotle playing to the vulgar, nor takes him to affirm the hypothetical—if read literally. On this reading, the argument provides no weaker support for the view that contemplation is our religious duty, and Aristotle is found to have a reason to express his thought in this unstraightforward way. As will now be argued, the divine reward that we are to receive for

²⁷ Pace, for instance, Chroust (1975: 199–200), it would be a mistake to read the passage as affirming no more than a need for carefulness and precision in first philosophy, which is emphasised in *De Caelo* II.12.291^b25–8, rather than for proper—humble, honest, and devote—disposition towards the almost mystical activity. The context in which Seneca provides the fragment is that of a discussion of the ethical character of his own investigation (see, for instance, Bernays 1863: 166–7 and Setaioli 1988: 432). The ending 'knowingly tell lies (*scientes mentiamur*)', which is distinguished from 'make ignorant assertions (*ignorantes adfirmemus*)', presupposes consciousness of the falsehood of what one utters.

contemplation serves as a metaphor for the happiness that activity of νοῦς brings, while why Aristotle uses the metaphor instead of speaking plainly is best explained as in order to emphasise the religious character of contemplation.

When Aristotle says that the gods ‘take pleasure in what is best and most akin to them, namely understanding (ὁ νοῦς)’, we find him referencing the definition of a god as a νόησις νοήσεως νόησις established in the *Metaphysics* (Λ.9.1074^b34). The gods spoken of in this part of the *theophilestatos* passage cannot be the anthropomorphic gods of the Greek traditional religion, which neither are essentially νοῦς, nor—judging from their actions in myths—indulge in the activity of νοῦς more than in any other activity. As *Metaphysics* Λ shows, the hypothetical of the *theophilestatos* argument—that is, that ‘the gods pay some attention to human affairs’ and ‘benefit us in return’ for our good actions—if read literally, must be false.

Aufderheide (2016; 2020: 199–202) attempts to rescue the hypothetical, arguing that the god(s) indeed reward(s) us for contemplation in the sense that it(they) is(are) the prime mover(s) of a world in which contemplation brings *eudaimonia*. However, this reading is unfaithful to the text, where the gods are said to ‘benefit us in return (ἀντευποιεῖν)’ for contemplation (1179^a28). The use of ἀντευποιεῖν suggests that the gods reward us for contemplation in virtue of the relationship of reciprocity of benefits (χάρις²⁸) that obtains between those who contemplate and the god(s). For instance, it is in the context of a discussion of χάρις that Aristotle uses the word in *Rhetoric* I.13, speaking of ‘being grateful, or doing good in return for good (τὸ χάριν ἔχειν τῷ ποιήσαντι εἶ καὶ ἀντευποιεῖν τὸν εἶ ποιήσαντα)’ (1374^a23–4).

Nonetheless, we can make sense of Aristotle’s use of the hypothetical if we take the rewards we receive from the gods for contemplation to be a metaphor for the reward that using reason brings. In the text we have seen the *theophilestatos* passage to reference—*Metaphysics* Λ, a

²⁸ For the precise meaning of this term, see the references provided in footnote 24.

god is defined as a νόσις νοήσεως νόσις (1074^b34). But the gods that reward us in the *theophilestatos* argument are best read as the divine element of the human soul—the god within each of us—νοῦς. What suggests this interpretation is that the metaphor of a divine reward standing for a benefit that using reason brings appears elsewhere in Aristotle’s *corpus*. In *EE* VIII.2.1248^a25–^b7, he describes ‘good fortune (εὐτυχία)’ as being ‘divine (θεία)’ and as occurring ‘because of god (διὰ θεόν)’. The divine character of one’s luck is a metaphor for the origin of one’s good fortune in one’s use of reason. For earlier in the same chapter, Aristotle criticises taking those who are lucky to be guided by a ‘good captain’ being god (1247^a23–7).

But, we might wonder, why does Aristotle use a metaphor in the *theophilestatos* passage rather than express his thought in a more straightforward way? We can explain this by noticing that the metaphor emphasises the religious character of contemplation. Had there been gods rewarding human beings for their piety, they would be rewarding the most those who contemplate, for that is the most pious activity²⁹; and, in a sense, we are indeed rewarded for contemplation by the divine element within each of us.

We might still wonder, what is the reward that using reason brings the passage is speaking of? Aristotle relies on his audience to recall the just established view of contemplation as the final, perfect activity, pursued only for its own sake (*NE* X.7.1177^a27–^b1). Broadie is wrong to identify the reward that we receive for contemplation as ‘bursts of understanding’. As Aufderheide (2016) points out, if contemplation was to be ‘complete’ only if it included ‘bursts of understanding’ provided by the god(s), it ‘could not count as fully self-sufficient’. Contemplation does not carry with itself any reward that it is to be valued for, for contemplation is (a necessary constituent of³⁰) *eudaimonia* itself. The *theophilestatos* passage playfully

²⁹ A person dear to the gods is how the pious person is defined already in Plato’s *Euthyphro* (9^e–11^b).

³⁰ See footnote 3.

reminds us that *eudaimonia* is the reward that undertaking the activity of the divine element in us—performing which constitutes worship of the true god(s)—brings.

The remainder of this subsection will point to two other passages in Aristotle’s *corpus* and to a fragment preserved by Athenaeus which corroborate the view that Aristotle takes contemplation to be our religious duty.

Even in *Metaphysics* Λ, the object of divine understanding, which is divine understanding itself, is described as ‘most worthy of honour (τιμιώτατον)’ (1074^b26; modified translation). Nine Bekker lines earlier, Aristotle asks the rhetorical question, ‘if [...] it [divine understanding] thinks nothing, why is it the object of reverence (εἴτε γὰρ μηδὲν νοεῖ, τί ἂν εἴη τὸ σεμνόν)?’ (modified translation). The term he uses for the property of being revered—σεμνός—is etymologically related to εὐσέβεια³¹—piety understood as proper *behaviour* towards gods, as contrasted with ὁσιότης—correctness of religious *beliefs*³². These passages indicate that *Metaphysics* Λ conceives of the prime mover(s)—which is(are) (a) god(s) that we cannot engage with, but can only contemplate—as object(s) of τιμή and εὐσέβεια.

Athenaeus reports that,

Aristotle in the *Symposium* says that we offer nothing mutilated to the gods, but only what is perfect (τέλεια) and whole; and what is full is perfect (τέλειόν); and garlanding signifies a certain sort of filling (fr. 101 [R³] = Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 674^f).

In the first part of this passage, Aristotle is said to describe the common belief that what we should offer the gods is ‘nothing mutilated’. In the second part, we can see him, in his usual

³¹ Through σέβομαι—to fear, feel awe, or worship.

³² On the distinction between, and the precise meaning of, the two terms, see, for instance, Mikalson 2010: 9–11 and Ch. 5; εὐσέβεια and ὁσιότης are distinguished in Plato’s *Euthyphro* at 12^c6–9 and 13^b4–6.

manner³³, deconstruct the common view to uncover the basic intuition underlying it. Here, the intuition is that an offering to the god(s) should be something τέλειος (perfect, final, complete). While Athenaeus does not tell us where Aristotle was led in his reasoning, it is not hard to imagine him concluding that we ought to honour the god(s) with what is the most τελεία activity—contemplation (see, for instance, *NE* X.7.1177^a17).

What lends historical plausibility to this interpretation is that philosophy is already conceived of as a religious practice by Plato and Socrates. The latter understood his philosophical activity as his ‘service to the god (τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ λατρείαν)’ (*Apology* 23^c1). The Platonic Socrates’ speech in the *Symposium* is not what we would expect from an *encomium*. Rather than praising Eros with fine words, he provides a philosophical analysis of love, and finds it to honour Eros³⁴: ‘[c]onsider this speech [...] a speech in praise of Love’ (212^b8–^c1). Diotima teaches him that ‘[t]he love of the gods belongs to anyone who has given birth to true virtue and nourished it’ (212^a5–6)—that is, to a lover who has practiced philosophy with their beloved.

3.2. THE FIRST ROLE OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

Since Aristotle takes contemplation to be our religious duty, this subsection will aim to show that the view that this activity is indeed what he would like religious ceremonies in the ideal *polis* to occasion is not unsupported by his extant writings and fragments.

In a passage from the *Protrepticus* preserved by Iamblichus, observing a religious festival turns out to be an instance of θεωρία on a par with contemplation of the universe—and θεωρία is, first, confirmed as our most τελεία activity:

³³ For instance, in subsection 1.2, we saw Aristotle deconstruct the common definition of a god to uncover the basic intuition underlying it and corroborating his own view of the god(s). On the importance of considering the common view in Aristotle’s method, see footnote 12.

³⁴ Though Diotima denies that Eros is a god (202^c4).

[T14] [o]ne would see the absolute truth of what we are saying if someone as it were carried us in thought to the Isles of the Blest (μακάρων νήσους). For there, there would be need of nothing and no profit from anything; and there remain only thought and contemplation (διανοεῖσθαι καὶ θεωρεῖν), which even now we describe as the free life [...]. It is not at all strange, then, if it [understanding] does not show itself useful or advantageous; for we call it not advantageous but good, and it should be chosen not for the sake of something else but for itself. For as we travel to Olympia for the sake of the spectacle (θεωρία) itself, even if nothing more were to follow from it (for the spectacle itself is worth more than much money), and as we view the Dionysia not in order to gain anything from the actors (indeed, we spend money on them), and as there are many other spectacles we should prefer to much money, so too the contemplation (θεωρίαν) of the universe is to be honoured above all things that are thought useful (fr. 58 [R³] = Iamblichus, *Protrepticus* IX.53.1–4.3).

Aristotle claims that the proper aim of participating in a religious ceremony is to practice θεωρία—contemplation—which, as we saw in the previous subsection, is our religious duty. The word θεωρία originally meant a sacred spectacle, or ‘sacred seeing’, but in the language of the philosophers of the Socratic tradition, it embraced the meaning of philosophical study or contemplation (Nightingale 2004). In this passage, Aristotle discusses together, firstly, θεωρία as the only activity of those on the Isles of the Blessed; secondly, an activity traditionally referred to as θεωρία; and thirdly, an activity θεωρία denotes in the technical language of Plato, Aristotle, and their associates and students. This suggests that these are three instances of what he takes to be the same basic activity.

The passage also helps us to explain why, in his ethical writings, Aristotle opts to use θεωρία as the term for contemplation. It is in order to emphasise the religious character of this activity. Such a religious connotation is not carried by νόησις, which he uses, in most cases, to describe the activity of the god(s) in *Metaphysics* Λ (for instance, at 1074^b34). Neither does carry it, for instance, ζήτησις. Aristotle's identification of the activity of the θεός (or the θεοί) as θεωρία in the *NE* (for instance, at X.8.1178^b21–3), seems to be his way of suggesting etymological kinship of these words and kinship of these concepts.

While it is in the fragment of the *Protrepticus* discussed above that we find Aristotle's most explicit surviving treatment of religious ceremonies, we can point to passages in his extant *corpus* that are supportive of the interpretation of the function he would like religious institutions to perform in the ideal *polis* advocated in this thesis.

Positing that Aristotle would like religious institutions to provide the citizens with opportunities for contemplation fits well with his praise of the Egyptians for giving priests leisure time, which is why mathematical sciences originated in Egypt (*Metaphysics* I.1.981^b20–4). Aristotle's praise indicates that the tasks he would like priests to perform are more positive than, for instance, spreading useful lies. Moreover, in T13, Aristotle is said to have claimed that we should not 'knowingly tell lies (*scientes mentiamur*)' when discussing 'the nature of the gods'. In a letter to Antipater, he found 'pride' to be 'appropriate on the part of those who possess correct beliefs about the gods' (fr. 664 [R³] = Plutarch, *de tranquillitate animi* 472^e).

Ascribing a positive—and, in fact, crucial, given the *polis*' aim of promoting the human good—role to the priests might seem not in line with Aristotle's claim that priesthoods in the ideal *polis* should be given to elderly citizens (T6), given that he criticises Sparta for allowing senators to serve for life despite the fact that reason too gets old (*Politics* II.9.1270^b36–40). However, it is not implausible to posit that he found it necessary to give the tasks of the

lawgivers to the (currently) brightest minds in the *polis* since it is on their ability to rule well that the survival and prosperity of the *polis* depends. Lawgivers are the ‘[s]ixth, and most necessary (ἀναγκαϊότατον)’ element of any self-sufficient *polis* (*Politics* VII.8.1328^b13–14).

Defining the function Aristotle would like religious ceremonies to perform in the ideal *polis* as occasioning θεωρία allows us to maintain continuity between his investigation into the human good and the good for the *polis* (see, especially, T12), and to explain why the provision of worship is, while ‘[f]ifth (πέμπτον)’, the ‘first (πρῶτον)’ element of the *polis* (*Politics* VII.8.1328^b11–12). Consider, also, *NE* VI.13(= *EE* V.13).1145^a6–11:

prudence does not control wisdom or the better part of the soul, just as medical science does not control health. For medical science does not use health, but only aims to bring health into being; hence it prescribes for the sake of health, / but does not prescribe to health. Besides, <saying that prudence controls wisdom or the better part of the soul> would be like saying that political science rules the gods because it prescribes about everything in the city (modified translation).

Aristotle tells us that ‘prudence does not control wisdom or the better part of the soul, just as medical science does not control health’, and later, that to say that prudence controls wisdom or the better part of the soul would be like to say that ‘political science rules the gods’. The passage suggests that the relationship between political science and the god(s) is similar to the relationship between prudence and wisdom or the better part of the soul, which, in turn, resembles the relationship between medical science and health. Less directly, the passage suggests that political science should serve the god(s) like medical science serves health.

This interpretation, also, fits well with aspects of Aristotle's biography. The Lyceum, which he found a suitable place to lecture in³⁵, was a sanctuary of Apollo Lykaios. We found Aristotle to analogise doing philosophy with being in a sacred space in a fragment preserved by Seneca (T13). Aristotle conceives of philosophy as a communal practice, and invents the term *συμφιλοσοφεῖν* (to join in philosophising, to philosophise together; see *NE* IX.12.1172^a5; for discussion, see, for instance, Natali 2013: 76–7 and 87). Unlike, for instance, Socrates', the history of Aristotle's activity indicates his acknowledgement of a need for institutionalising philosophy, as he set up schools, for instance, in the Athenian Lyceum and in Chalkis. Hence, it seems unlikely that he would not like *θεωρία* to be facilitated by any institution of the ideal *polis*.

The remainder of this subsection will address an objection to, and a challenge for, the interpretation of the role Aristotle would like religious institutions to play in the ideal *polis* as to provide the citizens with opportunities for contemplation.

An obvious objection is that nowhere in the extant *corpus* Aristotle makes an argument for a religious reform such as the one this thesis ascribes to him. However, the proper place for him to do so would be the work his editors found suitable to entitle *On Prayer*, rather than his works on political science. We already know from Simplicius that the *On Prayer* concluded by describing the god(s) as 'either mind or something even beyond mind'. Hence, if the *On Prayer* covered the proper formula of religious ceremonies, it would be one appropriate to the aim of worshipping god(s) so understood. Whereas, if the function Aristotle ascribes to religious institutions in the *polis* was (entirely) concerned with any social and psychological benefits the presence of religious practice in the *polis* brings, the proper place to advocate the need for religious practice in the *polis* as implied by the need for these benefits would be a work on

³⁵ That Aristotle's works on political science originated as lectures is suggested by the *NE*: 'a youth is not a suitable listener of lectures (*ἀκροατής*) on political science' (I.3.1095^a2–3; modified translation).

political science. As we saw in subsection 2.1, the passages from the *Politics* where Aristotle ascribes bringing about three such benefits to religious practice in the *polis* are better read as advocating certain modifications of the organisation of a practice presumed to already exist in the *polis*, rather than as defining the function the provision of worship performs in the *polis*³⁶.

A challenge this interpretation faces is to suggest, what formula would the ideal religious ceremonies take? Aristotle advocates using as much as the income of one-fourth of the land of the ideal *polis* for expenses relating to worship (*Politics* VII.10.1330^a12–14), which suggests that philosophising together in sacred space cannot be the sole component of the religious ceremonies of the ideal *polis*.

However, we have reasons to assume that these ceremonies would not differ significantly from the traditional ones, which comprised elements such as theatrical plays³⁷. As we have seen, it is in witnessing ‘spectacles’ at Dionysia and the Olympiads, on a par with thinking about the universe, that Aristotle finds θεωρία to be practiced (see T14). That he attributes an ability to inspire θεωρία to works of poets³⁸ suggests a remark preserved by Diogenes Laertius: ‘Aristotle says that the form of his [Plato’s] writings was in between poetry and prose (τὴν τῶν λόγων ιδέαν αὐτοῦ μεταξύ ποιήματος εἶναι καὶ πεζοῦ λόγου)’ (fr. 73 [R³] = Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* III.37). Aristotle was an author of dialogues himself. That he made such a remark also testifies Themistius, who bases his account of the history of philosophy in the oration *On Speaking* on Aristotle’s *On Poets* (fr. 43a [Janko] = Themistius, *Oration XXVI* 316^d–19^a), thus indicating that a part of the *On Poets* covered the history of philosophy.

³⁶ The next subsection will argue that elements of the Greek traditional religious practice are present in the ideal *polis*. It is primarily to the organisation of this cult that these modifications should be applied.

³⁷ For a survey of these activities, see, for instance, Parker 2007.

³⁸ It is important that the object of one’s θεωρεῖν is not the performance or the music itself, and that one’s enjoyment of it is not divorced from its religious-philosophical purpose, which is why, at *EE* VII.12.1245^a22, Aristotle may contrast ‘artistic contemplation (θεωρίας μουσικῆς)’ with ‘philosophy (φιλοσοφίας)’ (modified translation) as different ways of conceiving of the highest good that one may share with another.

3.3. THE SECOND ROLE OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

However, in Aristotle's description of the ideal *polis* in *Politics* VII–VIII, we find three elements of the Greek traditional cult: the Oracle of Delphi (see T7), temples of heroes (see T8), and temples of god(esse)s associated with childbirth (see T11). This subsection will, thus, argue for the second part of the claim that the ideal *polis* organises such religious ceremonies that are opportunities for the citizens for θεωρία, yet maintains some elements of the traditional cult.

It is not implausible to assume that more than one form of cult could exist in the ideal *polis*³⁹. Temples of different cults were present in Athens in Aristotle's time (see, for instance, Parker 2011 Ch. 7). What suggests that religious cult in the ideal *polis* is not limited to one form is that in his descriptions of the provision of worship in *Politics* VI.8 and VII.8, we find Aristotle at pains to emphasise his neutrality regarding the form of the practice. In the latter chapter, he defines the tasks of priests as vaguely as 'care for divine matters (τὴν περὶ τὸ θεῖον ἐπιμέλειαν)' (1328^b12; modified translation).

We have reasons to assume that Aristotle does not expect every citizen of the ideal *polis* to accept the theology of *Metaphysics* Λ. As suggests T3, he finds it natural for us to anthropomorphise the god(s) in our imagination: 'human beings model not only the forms of the gods on their own, but their way of life as well'. In the *Metaphysics*, our customs are said to indicate that 'mythical and childish stories about things have greater power than our knowledge about them' (α.3.995^a3–6). There is little evidence that philosophical ideas had—

³⁹ Note that when Aristotle advocates merging already existing private rites (see T9), this is hard to imagine not to happen within the same cult. Otherwise, it could hardly result in the promotion of friendship, but rather in disagreement over the form of worship.

and thus that Aristotle witnessed them to have—any impact on the shape of religious cult in the ancient Greek *poleis*⁴⁰.

That Aristotle does not expect every citizen of the ideal *polis* to accept the theology of *Metaphysics* Λ explains why some elements of the traditional religious practice are allowed to be present there. He conceives of them not as positive elements of his vision, but rather as obstacles which have to be countenanced. When he describes ideal locations for new temples as places such that are ‘conspicuous enough setting for virtue’, the Oracle of Delphi comes as an obstacle to the plan. The plan is to be observed ‘except in the case of temples assigned a separate location by [...] some other prophecy delivered by the Pythian god’ (see T7). The Oracle of Delphi is an obstacle one planning the ideal *polis* has to bear in mind, for the *polis* ‘according to our prayers’ must not be something unachievable even in the ideal circumstances (*Politics* VII.4.1325^b37–9).

CONCLUSION

This thesis argued that, *pace* Bodéüs, there is a genuine tension between Aristotle’s rejection of divine interest in human affairs and his affirmation of the necessity of the provision of worship in any self-sufficient *polis*, including the ideal *polis*, should this worship be identified with the Greek traditional religious practice. Three attempts at explaining what role religious institutions play in the ideal *polis* were found unconvincing. Aristotle should not be read as advocating a policy of maintaining a fake cult for the sake of the social and psychological benefits of worship he recognises. He does not take anthropomorphic depictions of gods to be an effective bait for future contemplators of the true god(s). The presence of religious worship

⁴⁰ See, for instance, Burkert 1985: 305; Mikalson 1991: 226; and Most 2003: 308. See, also, footnote 5 on the distinction between the three forms of reverence recognised by Posidonius and Varro.

in the ideal *polis* cannot be explained as merely reflecting an empirical observation on the *poleis* of his time. Lastly, this thesis argued that the role Aristotle would like religious ceremonies in the ideal *polis* to play is to occasion contemplation by the citizens. At the same time, the ideal *polis* maintains certain elements of the traditional cult, given that not every citizen of the ideal *polis* would abandon it.

Limitations to the analysis and prompts for further study can be named. Firstly, an obvious limitation was the lack of the lost *On Prayer*. Should it ever be recovered, we would find direct answers to the questions this thesis addressed through a study of passages from the *Politics*, *Ethics*, *Metaphysics*, and some of Aristotle's other works, as well as fragments. Secondly, certain aspects of his biography are not in line with the religious views he expressed in *Metaphysics* Λ—from his will allegedly containing a request for erecting statues to Zeus and Athena (see Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* V.11–16), to his uncertain attitude towards the Eleusinian Mysteries (see fr. 15 [R³] = Synesius, *Dio* 48^a). Thirdly, a better understanding of the development of Aristotle's religious thought since the writing of the *Protrepticus* to that of his later works would aid the present investigation.

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