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Segev, Mor

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THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL RELIGION IN ARISTOTLE

Mor Segev

**A DISSERTATION
PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY
OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
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Abstract

Aristotle criticizes the content of Greek religion severely. He thinks that it is demonstrably false. Surprisingly, however, he also holds that traditional religion and its institutions are necessary if any city, including the ideal city he describes in *Politics* VII-VIII, is to exist and thrive. My dissertation aims to provide, for the first time, a coherent account of the socio-political role Aristotle attributes to traditional religion despite his rejection of its content. In the *De philosophia*, a dialogue surviving only in fragmentary quotations and paraphrases, Aristotle compares the gods of traditional religion to Platonic Forms. He dismisses both as fictional entities – the products of an erroneous inference from the obvious and universally agreed existence of certain objects to the existence of eternal beings causing them and bearing similar properties. Yet, in the same work, Aristotle attributes to religious practices the capacity to produce emotional states that are conducive to learning. This view anticipates his account of the role of institutionalized traditional religion in his extant corpus. According to his theory there, religion is necessary because it prepares the ground for what he considers the pinnacle of human endeavor: attaining the knowledge of first philosophy, whose objects are real beings worthy of being called gods, viz. the unmoved movers of the heavens. Religion performs that function by exposing citizens to the traditional depictions of divinity. These, in turn, generate in the citizens with the right potential the sense of 'wonder' (*thaumazein*) about gods that guides them from such mythological conceptions to an inquiry into the nature of the true god(s) of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. In addition, since the anthropomorphic gods partake of the definitions of both 'human being' and 'god,' wondering about their nature can initiate an inquiry into the relation between gods and humans. Both kinds of inquiry are essential for getting as close as humanly possible to the condition of the divine, and the role of traditional religion in achieving that goal, which Aristotle considers the highest human aspiration, is therefore immensely significant, both for the individual happiness of any citizen and for the flourishing of the city.

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Introduction

In the fourth century BC, the ubiquitous presence of religion in every civilization known to the Greek world was an observable fact. Greek *poleis*, in particular, invariably administered a wealth of religious practices, permeating virtually every facet of their citizens' lives. Festivals, sacrifices, libations, prayers, hymns and statues in honor of the gods, as well as temples and altars operated by priests, civic and Panhellenic cults, divination and oracles, were routine. Moreover, the divinities associated with these rituals and institutions had a central place in standard education (essentially covering epic poetry), cultural life (including the recitation of epic poems by rhapsodes and the performance of tragedies in a religious context and usually with plots involving myths about the gods), the visual arts, law and politics. Judging by the words of the Athenian in Plato's *Laws*, depictions of the traditional gods, through storytelling and live shows, were in fact presented to (prospective) citizens already in infancy (X, 887d; cf. *Republic* 377a).

As such a regular and prominent political phenomenon, traditional religion does not, indeed could not, escape Aristotle's notice. Since he views the *polis* as existing 'by nature' (φύσει: *Pol.* I. 2, 1252b30; 1253a2), and since, in his day, religion is embedded in the very fabric of the *polis*, without exception, Aristotle must account for the regular appearance of religion in political organization, either as a predictable, though in principle dispensable, concomitant, or else as serving some natural socio-political purpose. He seems to think that proper consideration of the natural functioning of the *polis* requires the second option, and describes the 'supervision of religious matters' as a

necessary task without which the *polis* simply cannot exist as such (VI. 8, 1322b18-22; VII. 8, 1328b2-13).

The attribution of a naturally necessary function to the institutions of traditional religion is striking given Aristotle's explicit criticisms of the purported uses of traditional religious practices. Divination by dreams is discredited so long as the gods are taken to be involved in it (*Div.* 462b20-2). Prayers and offerings are deemed ineffective so long as they are expected to make a meaningful contribution to a god's life (*NE* VIII. 14, 1163b15-18). Even if such a contribution were possible, the nature of the gods that Aristotle argues are the only ones that exist denies them any interaction with human beings. These gods are incapable of returning a favor or loving anything or anyone (*MM* II. 11, 1208b26-31). They are denied all 'bountiful deeds', and in fact any action whatsoever, save theoretical contemplation on the basis of metaphysical knowledge and understanding (*NE* X. 8, 1178b7-23).

In the absence of any 'care for human affairs by the gods' (*NE* X. 8, 1179a24-5), traditional religion seems futile, and it is not at all obvious why Aristotle describes it as necessary, and whether he can in fact be committed to this description. It is no wonder, then, that no comprehensive account of the role of traditional religion in Aristotle's theory has been offered so far, except one which disregards Aristotle's criticisms of traditional religious ideas and practices noted above and ascribes to him the belief in the traditional Greek gods and their benevolent concern for human beings.¹

1) R. Bodéüs, *Aristotle and the Theology of the Living Immortals*, trans. J. E. Garrett (Albany, 2000). In addition, two unpublished doctoral theses are devoted to related topics. H. S. Price, *The Philosophies of Religion of Plato and Aristotle* (PhD Dissertation, Swansea University, 1962), compares Aristotle to Plato on theological and religious issues, though he adopts the view that '...Aristotle is not seriously concerned with religion as such, and is only interested in it so far as it seems to corroborate his philosophical

Nevertheless, I claim, it is possible for Aristotle to consistently hold that traditional religion and its institutions have a positive role, and a necessary one, in the *polis*, while maintaining that the traditional gods, those that one worships with the hope of pleasing and gaining something from in return, do not at all exist. The main aim of the present work is to provide, for the first time, a coherent account of the socio-political role Aristotle attributes to traditional religion despite his rejection of the existence of its gods. Ultimately, I shall argue that Aristotle views traditional religion as necessary in order for the *polis* to exist as such because an acquaintance with its (false) conceptions of divinity is a necessary condition for arriving at the knowledge of first philosophy, which must be provided for in any *polis* that exists according to human nature and is hence directed at the flourishing lives of its individual citizens, in keeping with their potential.

However, a few preliminaries are in order. First, one may wonder whether we are entitled to attribute to Aristotle a criticism of the 'traditional' conception of gods, as if there were such a unified entity as 'traditional religion'. It is precisely the salience of religion in every part and aspect of classical Greek culture that makes it difficult to demarcate it as an independent phenomenon. Indeed, it has been conjectured that it is because religion was 'such an integrated part of Greek life that the Greeks lacked a separate word for [it]'.² Scholars have gone as far as postulating a distinction between

views' (pp. 187-8). J. B. Rowland, *The Religion of Aristotle* (PhD Dissertation, Temple University, 1953), systematically compiles the relevant evidence for a thorough investigation of Aristotle's view of religion, and helpfully points out the basic tension with which my project deals, namely that 'Aristotle [a] was somewhat skeptical of [traditional religion] ... [b] was conservative regarding its rites and practices ... [c] had a high estimate of the utility and importance of religion to the state' (p. 191). Shorter works on related topics include W. J. Verdenius, 'Traditional and Personal Elements in Aristotle's Religion', *Phronesis* 5.1 (1960), pp. 56-70 and J. K. Feibleman, 'Aristotle's Religion', in ed. H. Cairns *The Two-Story World* (New York, 1966), pp. 126-134.

2) J. N. Bremmer, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 2.

different types of Greek religion and Greek gods, based on the various cultural contexts in which gods are dealt with and represented, e.g. mythological poetry and cult rituals.

Mikalson famously and forthrightly puts forth this view as follows:³

The gods of cult and poetry shared names, and this of course suggests some identification, but, to put it simply, they shared first names only. We do not know whether an Athenian, as he made his morning offering at the little shrine of Zeus Ktesios in his house, thought of Homer's thunder-bearing, cloud-gathering Zeus. There is no evidence that he did, and the two deities, both named Zeus, are very different in both appearance and function.

There is an ongoing controversy among classicists, one which we need not go into in detail, about whether or not this way of viewing the relation between Greek poetry and practiced religion is the correct one.⁴ For our present purposes it suffices to say that, even if we allow for the radical differentiation between these systems and the gods they refer to, they share enough in common in order to evaluate them under one heading.

The common denominator between the various forms of (what I shall henceforth call) traditional Greek religion is the anthropomorphic depiction of gods, and Aristotle's criticism applies to all such forms in so far as it is directed at this feature. Let us grant, à la Mikalson, that when Aristotle criticizes the depiction of Zeus as king (or lord, or father) of the gods for its obvious underlying anthropomorphism (*Pol.* I. 2, 1252b24-7), he has the Homeric or Hesiodic Zeus exclusively in mind. Still, the same argument is just as effective, and on the same grounds, considered as mounted against the many manifestations and epithets of Zeus in cult practices. To take the example already used,

3) J. D. Mikalson, *Honor Thy Gods* (Chapel Hill, 1991), p. 4.

4) However, see C. Sourvinou-Inwood, 'Tragedy and Religion: Constructs and Readings', in C. B. R. Pelling (ed.) *Greek Tragedy and the Historian* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 161-86 for a persuasive rebuttal of Mikalson's theory.

Zeus Ktēsios ('Zeus [the protector] of property'), worshipped in domestic settings and symbolized by the kadiskos, a small urn, was prayed to with anticipation of being granted 'good health and good property' by him (Isaeus, *De cirone*, 16. 3-8).

But, as we have already seen, the divine beneficence or providence underlying that anticipation is strictly rejected by Aristotle, as it rests, again, on the attribution to divinity of specifically human features, such as the ability to perform altruistic deeds or to form friendly or reciprocal relationships with human beings. Thus, even if the gods possessing such features need not be literally man-shaped, or even bring to mind such man-shaped gods (implausible though this may be), Aristotle still would, and does, charge them with obvious and unjustified anthropomorphism, to be contrasted with his own conception of divinity, lacking all properties attributable to human beings, with the exception of the intellect.⁵

Hence, it is the anthropomorphizing of divinity, broadly construed, that separates Aristotle's own view of (what he takes to be) the true gods from the content of what we have termed 'traditional religion', a content whose truth Aristotle rejects, whether it appears in Homer, Euripides, Plato, in a public sanctuary or in the privacy of a household shrine. That anthropomorphic gods are to be reliably found in popular religions, perhaps as an essential component, is supported by modern research in anthropology, psychology, sociology and classics, *inter alia*.⁶ Aristotle's recognition, and systematic criticism, of the anthropomorphism underlying all traditional religion, though preceded by the remarks of

5) And perhaps sense perception in the case of some gods, viz. the celestial bodies, as we shall see in chapter III, pp. 109-110.

6) S. E. Guthrie refers to a long list of relevant scholars on this point, from Edward Tylor, Robin Horton, Franz Boas, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Gilbert Murray to Sigmund Freud: *Faces in the Clouds* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 178-9. Guthrie himself argues, more radically, that religion just is (a species of) anthropomorphism, *ibid.* p. 185.

earlier thinkers such as Xenophanes, should in itself be viewed as a major contribution to post-Greek culture and thought, especially if one takes into account the extent to which Aristotelian philosophy helped to shape (say) medieval Jewish and Muslim theology, with their emphasis and insistence on the entirely non-anthropomorphic nature of God. However, Aristotle goes further. As mentioned above, he argues that the same traditional religion whose content he rejects is useful, indeed necessary, for completely legitimate political purposes.⁷ It is this view, primarily, that the present work aims to elucidate.

As a second preliminary, then, we might do well to explain what a natural, necessary political function is, in Aristotle's theory, so that we would know what to expect him to mean by attributing such a thing to the institutions and practices of traditional religion. Every *polis*, in Aristotle's theory, comes to be (gradually and naturally, out of more basic forms of community [κοινωνία] including the household and the village) 'for the sake of living', but remains in existence for the sake of 'living well' (*Politics* I. 2, 1252b29-30). Political organization, if it is to function correctly and naturally, must not simply secure the continued existence of its citizens, nor even merely their safety or decent living conditions, but must, in addition, ensure that they are capable of leading flourishing lives, in accordance with their individual potentials.⁸

If that were not the case, that is to say, if a community could count as a *polis*, in the full sense of the word just explicated, simply by making sure that its members are healthy

7) In this, too, he is followed by some prominent medieval philosophers and theologians, as we shall see in chapter II when we compare Aristotle to Maimonides (pp. 89-91).

8) 'Living-well' (εὖ ζῆν) and 'flourishing' or 'happiness' (εὐδαιμονία), in this context, are closely connected and perhaps interchangeable. Aristotle uses them as such e.g. in VIII. 2, 1324a5-13. In III. 9, during a discussion echoing that surrounding I. 2, 1252b29-30, he again closely associates both terms, this time along with 'self-sufficiency' (αὐτάρκεια) (1280b29-1281a2).

and secure, then, Aristotle says, we could have equally talked about a 'a *polis* of slaves or of the other animals; but, now, such a thing does not exist, because these share neither in flourishing (*eudaimonia*) nor in a life determined by rational choice' (III. 9, 1280a32-4). Since a community that is 'slavish' cannot at all even be called a *polis* (IV. 4, 1291a8-10), then, every institution in the *polis* that is necessary for enabling the citizens to escape 'slavishness', by realizing their potential and living self-sufficiently or flourishingly, must count as serving a necessary function in the *polis*, and every *polis* must have such institutions as natural parts.

As I alluded to at the beginning, Aristotle views traditional religion, along with its practices, institutions and the class of citizens maintaining them, as such indispensable natural parts of any correctly organized *polis*. Based on what we have just seen, this does not commit Aristotle to viewing traditional religion as necessary for maintaining the lives of the citizens in the *polis*. Traditional religion may be necessary for any *polis* to exist as such, in his view, because it has some crucial contribution to make to the flourishing lives of the citizens, without the ability to enable which no *polis* can be truly deserving of the title. Now, *eudaimonia*, or human flourishing or happiness, as we learn from the concluding book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, consists primarily in a life of theoretical contemplation based on knowledge or understanding of the first principles of being as such (8, 1178b7-ff). And so, Aristotle's account of the *polis*, whose staying in existence is for the sake of the flourishing lives of its citizens, 'must', in the words of J. M. Cooper, 'include the provision that among [its people] will be a group of citizens who live the

contemplative life (and so are provided an education that will enable them to live that way).'⁹

It is precisely in the educational program that would enable those citizens who are intellectually capable of it to live contemplative lives of the highest achievable kind that I locate, in what follows, the necessary natural political function of traditional religion in Aristotle's theory. Specifically, I shall argue that traditional religion is necessary for any *polis* to exist as such because it secures the existence in the *polis* of the practice of 'first philosophy', the science dealing with the gods of Aristotle's metaphysics (primarily the unmoved movers of the heavenly bodies and spheres, which are of course quite different from the gods of traditional religion). Aristotle considers these gods the most honorable and best beings, and knowing or understanding them is therefore, in his view, the topmost intellectual achievement, and *ipso facto* the top human good, which, to repeat, is precisely what any correctly organized *polis* is naturally aimed at achieving for its citizens.

Apart from the obvious advantage of providing, for the first time, a unified, comprehensive and hopefully correct account of the role of traditional religion in Aristotle's theory, I believe the dissertation that follows has several additional benefits to offer. First, the function that Aristotle attributes to traditional religion, in my interpretation, makes it clear that his project in the *Politics* is intimately connected to his projects in the *Ethics* and the *Metaphysics*. In particular, the place of traditional religion in Aristotle's political theory sheds light on the fact that he views the primary goal of political organizations (ones that function correctly and naturally, at least) as being

9) J. M. Cooper, 'Political Community and the Highest Good', in *Being, Nature and Life in Aristotle* (eds. J. G. Lennox and R. Bolton) (Cambridge, 2010), p. 241 n. 40.

theoretical contemplation on the basis of full metaphysical knowledge and understanding, in the manner of the explication of *eudamonia* in book X of the *NE* and the descriptions of 'first philosophy' in the *Metaphysics*. This is not always taken for granted, as scholars often take the (admittedly few) explicit references to 'philosophy' in the *Politics* to signify a broader notion of musical education, which would be the 'political analogue of and substitute for contemplation proper, which they presume to be politically inaccessible, even in a best regime'.¹⁰ But, the role of traditional religion in Aristotle as I present it in what follows should count as evidence against these views, since it shows that *poleis*, if they are to count as such, in Aristotle's view, must make use of traditional religion precisely for the sake of enabling their citizens to engage in theoretical contemplation 'proper', as far as they are able.

Second, the role of traditional religion in Aristotle, as I interpret it, shows that Aristotle prefigures theories of theologians and philosophers of religion prevalent in the middle ages onward. The criticism of anthropomorphisms with regard to the gods, with the apprehension that such depictions might nevertheless be useful for arriving at knowledge of the true God or gods (whatever their nature might be and however adequately we may be able to grasp it) is familiar from the writings of such figures as Maimonides, Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza. It is striking, however, that this idea

10) D. J. DePew, 'Politics, Music and Education in Aristotle's Best State', *A Companion to Aristotle's Politics*. Ed. D. Keyt and F. Miller (London, 1991), pp. 346-380 at n. 2. DePew in his paper argues against this position, which he attributes to the following: F. Solmsen, 'Leisure and play in Aristotle's ideal state', *Rheinisches Museum* 107 (1964), pp. 193-220, repr. in Solmsen, *Kleine Schriften* II (Hildesheim, 1968), pp. 1-28; C. Lord, 'Politics and philosophy in Aristotle's Politics', *Hermes* 106 (1978), pp. 336-357, and *Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle* (Ithaca, 1982); P. A. Vander Waerdt, 'Kingship and philosophy in Aristotle's best regime', *Phronesis* 30 (1985), pp. 249-73.

dates back to Aristotle, and is supported by his philosophical principles and theory, as I hope to show.

Third, Aristotle's view of traditional religion may be of interest to a general audience as well. It exemplifies the possibility of learning certain truths even, and in some cases perhaps exclusively, on the basis of falsehoods, a possibility which is both intriguing and easily ignored. We may also learn from this view, quite generally, to look attentively for the usefulness in regularities, as Aristotle does. Even when the prospect does not seem promising, we may stumble, again as Aristotle often does, on fascinating and surprising results.¹¹

There is no single (surviving) Aristotelian text dealing continuously or systematically with the topic of traditional religion. My dissertation is therefore divided into three chapters, each dealing primarily with one relevant text or set of texts: the fragments of Aristotle's lost dialogues, the *Politics*, and the three ethical works and their connection to the *Metaphysics*. The first chapter ('Religion and Philosophy in Aristotle's *De philosophia*') reconstructs Aristotle's view of traditional religion in the lost dialogue *De philosophia* by examining his various references to religion and to the philosophical theories of his predecessors in the extant fragments. I argue, based mainly, but not only, on Aristotle's version of the cave allegory (Cicero *N.D.* II. 37. 95-6=*De phil.* Fr. 13a Ross), that he is concerned in that dialogue with unveiling the points of similarity between traditional Greek religion and Platonic philosophy, for which they both ought, in his opinion, to be criticized. Most pertinently, both traditional gods and Platonic Forms,

11) One example is Aristotle's theory of dreams, which I have dealt with *in extenso* elsewhere, see M. Segev, 'The Teleological Significance of Dreaming in Aristotle', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 43 (2012), pp. 107-141.

for Aristotle, are fictional entities – the products of an erroneous inference from the existence of certain objects to the existence of eternal beings causing them and bearing similar properties. This criticism, though, need not call into question the possible usefulness of traditional religion. In fact, Aristotle thinks, in this dialogue as well as in the *De poetis* and the *Protrepticus*, of certain religious practices, e.g. the witnessing of religious festivals and dramatic plays (and possibly also the participation in religious mystical initiation rites), as enabling a certain favorable emotional state conducive to learning.

This is in line with Aristotle's view of institutionalized traditional religion in his extant corpus. I deal with that view in my second chapter ('Traditional Religion and its Natural Function in Aristotle'). In the *Politics*, Aristotle is committed to viewing the 'supervision of matters pertaining to divinity' and the class of citizens maintaining it, viz. priests, as necessary in order for any city to exist as such, including the ideal *polis* of books VII-VIII. The religion that Aristotle retains even in the 'city of our prayers' is clearly an unrevised form of the traditional religion of his day, whose content, involving the anthropomorphic and mythical depictions of gods, he rejects. Traditional religion is kept, I argue, because it serves a necessary function. As I have said, it prepares the ground for what Aristotle considers the pinnacle of human endeavor: attaining the knowledge that constitutes first philosophy. Religion performs this function by exposing citizens to the traditional depictions of divinity. These, in turn, generate in the citizens with the right potential the sense of 'wonder' (*thaumazein*) about gods that guides them from such mythological conceptions to an inquiry into the nature of the true god(s) of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. The content of traditional religion, then, is naturally used by the

polis via its religious institutions for the attainment of a beneficial (albeit rare) outcome, even though that content is conventional and unnatural (not to mention false). There are corollaries to that phenomenon. Aristotle views money, for instance, as having an integral role in a natural (albeit rare) socio-political process, viz. natural wealth acquisition, though it is an unnatural and intrinsically valueless convention. Finally, though Aristotle does view traditional religion as useful for maintaining social stability, and possibly also for basic moral education, these uses cannot exhaust the natural function of the phenomenon in his theory.

True gods, as Aristotle conceives of them, share something significant in common with humans, in so far as the latter may engage, and the former in fact consist, in intellectual contemplative activity. Thus, gods are not merely the objects of the highest science, but they are also the paradigms for human action: reflecting on them is simultaneously both the topmost intellectual achievement and an assimilation of their very condition. My third chapter ('Humans, "Eternal Humans" and Gods': The Usefulness of Traditional Gods for the Imitation of the Divine') aims to elucidate both of these facts, and to explain why the gods of traditional religion are the proper tools for motivating people to learn them. Traditional gods are the appropriate type of thing to lead one towards 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) of the heavens and the celestial bodies. 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 on the basis of knowledge and understanding (preferably with the gods as its objects).

Aristotle thinks that we may imitate the divine activity in question only by coming to know ourselves. This may appear paradoxical, until we take into consideration the fact that human beings, in his theory, essentially consist in intellect, which is divine. By learning of our own selves (which requires friendship), first by becoming aware of our particular personality and characteristics, we gradually progress toward the apprehension of our true nature – our intellect. Fully knowing this true nature, viz. the intellect, involves knowing its best possible application, and that is in turn tantamount to knowing the nature of the gods. By activating this knowledge, finally, we approximate the condition of these gods, albeit necessarily only temporarily and imperfectly.

Chapter I: Religion and Philosophy in Aristotle's *De Philosophia*

As Werner Jaeger rightly notes, 'the connexion ... between religion and philosophy extends throughout [Aristotle's] dialogue' *On Philosophy*.¹² In some of the surviving fragments of this lost work Aristotle traces the development of the philosophical views known to him to the influence of certain religious teachings, and finds existing correlations between the two. One would therefore expect the reported criticisms in other fragments of the *De philosophia* of some of Aristotle's predecessors, most notably Plato, to be somehow linked to the aforementioned discussion of the connection between (pre-Aristotelian) philosophy and religion. In what follows, we shall see how this expectation can be met even given the scant evidence, and what we may learn from the resulting interpretation of the *De philosophia* about Aristotle's attitude towards religion in that work. But first, let us examine the background view of religion that is at work there.

1: The relationship between religion and philosophy

The first book of *De philosophia*, we are told, contained a discussion of Zoroastrianism, and its dualism of principles (ἀρχαί), distinguishing between a positive deity and a negative one, called Zeus or Oromasdes and Hades or Areimanius, respectively (Diog. Laert. I Proem. 8 [6]=*De phil.* Fr. 6a, Ross). Though these were accepted appellations for the deities in question at the time (as is attested by the epigraphical evidence), Greek authors, when discussing Persian gods, most frequently either 'merely give Greek divine

12) W. Jaeger, *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of his Philosophy*, trans. R. Robinson (Oxford, 1948), p. 131.

names (Zeus, Artemis, Aphrodite, Athena, Apollo etc.) and do not provide the Iranian names' or else 'only give the Iranian name and do not offer an interpretation'.¹³ Aristotle's explicit identification here of both of these Persian gods with their Greek equivalents is irregular, then, and may indicate that his discussion focused on the continuity between the traditions in which these gods figure. This discussion seems to extend further when, presumably in the same context, Aristotle mentions, and agrees with, the academic view that 'Zoroaster lived six thousand years before Plato', a view propounded by Plato's associate in the academy, Eudoxus, in order to establish the status of Zoroastrianism as 'the most glorious and most useful' (*clarissimam utilissimamque*) school of thought (surely, he must mean, prior to Plato) (Plinius, *N.H.* 30. 3=*De phil.* Fr. 6b, Ross). Similarly, in another fragment, Aristotle says that what initially drew Socrates to inquiry and *aporia* was the Delphic inscription 'Know thyself' (Plu. *Mor.* [*Adv. Colot.*] 118c=*De phil.* Fr. 1 Ross; *Diog. Laert.* 2. 5. 23 [7]=*De phil.* Fr. 2 Ross), which he attributes to the Pythian priestess, rather than to Thales (contra Chameleon) or Chilon (Clem. Al. *Strom.* I. 14. 60. 3=*De phil.* Fr. 3b, Ross). Both statements are most reasonably attributed to the *De philosophia*, in which the inscription in question is explicitly reported to have been discussed (see Porph. apud Stob. 3. 21. 26=*De phil.* Fr. 3a, Ross, in which Aristotle seems to trace the inscription to a time preceding the construction of the Delphic temple existing in his day).¹⁴

13) A. De-Jong, *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature*, Leiden (1997), p. 34 (see also the rest of the discussion in chapter one there).

14) For further discussion of this and other particular fragments see H. Flashar's commentary on the *De philosophia* in H. Flashar and E. Grumach (ed.), *Aristoteles Werke* Bd. 20, 1: *Fragmente I* (Berlin, 2004).

The historical picture that emerges is one of an original system (Zoroastrianism) followed in order by two further systems (Greek religion, followed by Socratic/Platonic philosophy), each of which is influenced directly by the previous one and, either directly or indirectly, by the first. The further systems alluded to in other fragments, like the Orphic tradition (Philop. *in. De. An.* 186. 21-6 and Cic. *N. D.* I. 38. 107=*De phil.* Fr. 7a-b Ross), Chaldean theology (Plu. *Mor.* [*De Is. et Osir.*] 370 c=*De phil.* Fr. 6c, Ross), Eleatic philosophy (Sext. *Emp. Math.* 10. [*Phyisc.* 2]. 45=*De phil.* Fr. 9, Ross) and the wisdom of the seven sages (Clem. *Al. Strom.* I. 14. 61. 1=*De phil.* Fr. 4, Ross; *Etymol. Magn.* 722. 16-17=*De phil.* Fr. 5, Ross), a discussion of the first of which John Philoponus explicitly attributes to the *De philosophia*,¹⁵ may have fit in with the threefold succession presented above, making for a fuller and more accurate theory of the development of Aristotle's immediate cultural and intellectual environment, which, in any case, must have been the focal point of the bulk of the work, as we shall presently make clear based on the evidence we will examine.

If we can gather any information from the above fragments about the groundwork assumptions Aristotle operates with in his *De philosophia*, then, it is that the two major components of the cultural background to his thought, that is to say (at least Greek) religion and (at least Socratic/Platonic) philosophy, are intimately linked, and should be treated as such. But what is the point of introducing the connection between religion and philosophy, unless the project of the work as a whole has to do with exploring that

15) The second item, i.e. a discussion of Chaldean religion, may be attributed to the *De philosophia* with high probability as well, given the ease with which it fits in with its contents and the difficulty in finding any other Aristotelian work to which it may belong. The third item, i.e. a discussion of Eleatic philosophy, on the other hand, could just as well come from one of the works mentioned by Diogenes in his list, such as *Against Melissus*, *Against Zeno* or *Problems from Democritus*.

connection? It has been frequently supposed in the literature that the *De philosophia* was divided into three books, based on a clearcut thematic distinction. Thus Jaeger, for instance:

[Aristotle] began with the historical development of philosophy (...) The second book was a destructive criticism of the Ideas. The third gave his own view of the world, it was a cosmology and a theology.¹⁶

Such claims are based on three surviving references to: (i) the discussion of Zoroastrianism explicitly assigned to the first book of *De philosophia* (Fr. 6, Ross [*supra*]), (ii) a criticism of Platonic Forms assigned to the second book (Syrian. *in. Metaph.* 159.33-160.5=*De phil.* Fr. 11a, Ross), and (iii) a discussion of divinity in the third book (Cic. *N.D.* I. 13. 33=*De phil.* Fr. 26, Ross). Jaeger acknowledges the possible existence of a criticism of Plato in the third book as well¹⁷ (in fact, we have explicit evidence that book III did contain a criticism of Plato, in the opening statement of Fr. 26 by Cicero: 'Aristotle, in the third book of his *De philosophia*, confuses [his readers] greatly in dissenting from his teacher Plato'),¹⁸ but one should nevertheless question Jaeger's proposed thematic division, given such slim evidence, lest it is taken necessarily to mean that each of the topics mentioned were dealt with by Aristotle separately. For all

16) W. Jaeger, *op. cit.*, p. 128, p. 138. cf. I. Bywater, 'Aristotle's Dialogue On Philosophy', *Journal of Philology* 7.13 (1876), pp. 64-87 at p. 64: 'The evidence suggests that the first part of the book must have treated of early philosophy, and the anticipations of philosophy in the pre-speculative ages of culture; that the second contained a criticism of Plato; and that the third dealt largely with questions relating to Natural Theology.' See also H. Flashar and E. Grumach (ed.), *Aristoteles Werke* Bd. 20, 1: *Fragmente I* (Berlin, 2004), p. 131.

17) W. Jaeger, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

18) Several editors print: 'Aristotelesque in tertio de philosophia libro multa turbat a magistro suo Platone non dissentiens'. This 'non', however, is inserted by Manutius, and does not appear in any of the manuscripts. For further discussion of this fragment see below, pp. 45 ff.

we know, all three topics alluded to in the references to the particular books of the *De philosophia*, namely the connection between religion and philosophy, the criticism of Platonic Forms, and Aristotle's dissension from Plato on matters of divinity, could have fed into one another. Indeed, such an interrelation would make better sense of what the dialogue as a whole, rather than each of its parts, would have tried to achieve.

Next, then, I will suggest that Aristotle uses the relationship between Platonic philosophy and Greek religion (discussion of which is attributed to book 1) to form both a criticism of Plato's theory of Forms (attributed to book 2) and one of traditional religion, which in turn provides the basis for introducing, at least preliminarily, his own theology (the presentation of which is attributed to book 3). Indeed, I will propose that Aristotle does all of this in a single fragment, in which he develops his version of Plato's allegory of the cave. The upshot is that the role of traditional religion in the argument of the *De philosophia* extends well beyond attention to its historical place in the chain of events leading up to the advent of Greek philosophy. Traditional religion and Platonic philosophy, for Aristotle in the *De philosophia*, have some essential commonalities – commonalities, further, for which he holds they both ought to be criticized.

2: Aristotle's version of the cave allegory as a double criticism

In *De natura deorum* II. 37. 95-96 (= *De phil.* Fr. 13a, Ross), Cicero has his Quintius Lucilius Balbus quote Aristotle in support of his defense of Stoic theology:

'If, [Aristotle] says, 'there were people who had always lived under the earth in good and well-lighted houses, which were decorated with figures and paintings and furnished with

all the things of which those who are deemed happy have an abundance, but they had never gone above ground, but rather had learned by rumor/tradition [*fama*] and report [*auditio*] that there was a power/will [*numen*] and force [*vis*] of gods, and then at some time when the jaws of the earth opened up they could exit and escape from their hidden dwelling-places into these places which we inhabit: then when they had suddenly seen the earth and seas and the sky, when they had become acquainted with the greatness of clouds and the force of winds and had beheld the sun and had become acquainted not only with its greatness and beauty but also with its efficient power [*efficientia*], by which it produced day, pouring forth light through the whole sky, and when night darkened the lands they perceived the whole sky adorned and decorated with stars, and the variation of the moonlight as [the moon] waxes and wanes, and the risings and settings of all these objects and their courses which in all eternity are settled and immutable – when they saw these things, of course they would suppose both that there are gods and that these things, being so great, are the works of gods’.

Scholars tend to agree that this passage is Aristotle's own (transmitted by Cicero either in literal translation or in paraphrase), and to ascribe it, based mainly on its content, to (usually the third book of) his *De philosophia*. Apart from Syrianus' *In Metaph.* 159.33-160.5 already mentioned (*De phil.* Fr. 11a, Ross), many different sources (including Cicero's *De natura deorum*, as we have just seen [i.e. in *D.N.* I. 13. 33=*De phil.* Fr. 26, Ross]) unanimously attribute to Aristotle's *De philosophia*, and to his dialogues more generally, a recurring attack on Plato, and in particular on his theory of Forms.¹⁹ Given this evidence, as well as the obvious connection between our passage and Plato's allegory of the cave in *Republic* VII (there are also considerable differences between the two texts, which we shall deal with in what follows),²⁰ it seems reasonable to interpret Aristotle's text as (a) a direct criticism of Platonic Forms. Lacking evidence to the contrary, and given a reference to *De philosophia* in Aristotle's *Physics* (II.2, 194^a35-6), it also seems reasonable to seek an interpretation of it which would be (b) consistent with Aristotle's

19) Plutarch, *Adversus Colotem*, 1115B-C=*De phil.* Fr. 10b, Ross; Proclus, *Apud Philoponus*, *De aeternitate mundi*, p. 31. 17=*De phil.* Fr. 10a, Ross; Syrianus, *Commentarius in Metaphysica* 159.33-160.5=*De phil.* Fr. 11a, Ross; etc.

20) See p. 21 and pp. 33-8.

extant writings. I shall evaluate three possible readings of this fragment based on the two criteria above, i.e. (a) the inclusion of a criticism of Plato, and (b) consistency with the corpus of Aristotle's writings.

I. The acceptance of the traditional teleological argument for the existence of god(s)

As we have just seen, the context in which Cicero quotes Aristotle's version of the cave-allegory is his character Balbus' defense of Stoic theology, adhering to the traditional teleological argument for the existence of gods, according to which the utility (*usus*) or beauty of the world's structure shows that it must come about, not by chance, but rather by intelligence and divine providence (*sensu ... divinaque providentia*) (ND II, 34.87). This, of course, need not confine us to any particular interpretation of Aristotle's original text. While we may have no reason to question the reliability of Cicero's quotations, we have every reason to doubt the context in which they appear as an accurate representation of the philosophical views of their original authors.²¹ Nevertheless, it has been widely agreed, or rather presupposed, that the use of Aristotle's cave-allegory by Cicero (or Balbus) for a standard (say, Stoic) proof of the existence of gods follows Aristotle's original intention in writing it.²²

21) T.B. De Graff, by examining Cicero's references to surviving works (i.e. Plato's dialogues), concludes that he 'should be praised for having preserved to us the material of so many of the philosophical treatises extant in his day, but unhappily long since lost' ('Plato in Cicero', *Classical Philology* 35.2 [1940], pp. 143-53 at p. 143). In light of this achievement, she holds that Cicero must not be censured for 'his failure to treat more of the abstract passages [in Plato]' (ibid. p. 153). In addition to this shortcoming, one must also add Cicero's conscious use of his rhetorical skills to advance a given philosophical point by appealing to authoritative texts taken out of context.

22) 'Die dem platonischen Gleichnis innewohnende Spannung von Schatten - und Lichtsymbolik ist verpufft und zu einem Gottesbeweis nach dem *argumentum e gradibus* abgewandelt' (H. Flashar, 'Aristoteles, *Über die Philosophie*', in A. Bierl, A. Schmitt and

Unlike the inhabitants of Plato's cave, whom Glaucon initially (understandably) calls 'strange' (ἄτοποι), before Socrates explains to him in what way they 'resemble us' (ὁμοίους ἡμῖν: *Rep.* VII. 515^a4-5), the subjects of Aristotle's narrative are designed to resemble his readers in many respects even on a first, pre-allegorical reading. Proper lighting provides these people with standard vision, which would require no significant period of transition or repair when they arrive above ground. They occupy houses, have access to art, culture and even religion (based, as the Greek one was, on 'reports' in poets and other oral traditions passed on from generation to generation by priests to parents and parents to children). According to the interpretation proposed, Aristotle expects his cave-dwellers, once freed from their underground dwelling, to combine their prior knowledge of houses and decorative artifacts and the stories they have heard about gods as artisans with the natural phenomena to which they are now exposed for the very first time, and to infer that these phenomena must have been created by the gods they have heard of, in a similar fashion (i.e. intentionally, and for a particular beneficial purpose) to the artifacts

A. Willie (ed.) *Antike Literatur in neuer Deutung* [Munich/Leipzig, 2004], pp. 257-73 at p. 271) cf. H. Flashar and E. Grumach (ed.), *op. cit.*, 140; 'In one passage Philo describes how a man viewing with awe the works of the cosmos comes to the conclusion that these are the works of god (...) Cicero, *N.D.* II. 95-6 (=fr. 13) assigns such a proof for God's existence to Aristotle' (D.E. Hahm, 'The Fifth Element in Aristotle's *De Philosophia*: A Critical Examination', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 102 [1982], pp. 60-74 at p. 70); 'This passage has been preserved by Cicero, and certainly belongs to the proof of God's existence in the third book *On Philosophy* (...) What [Aristotle] gives us instead of [Plato's] Ideas is the contemplation of the wonderful shapes and arrangements of the cosmos, a contemplation which, intensified until it becomes religion, leads up to the intuition of the divine creator of it all' (W. Jaeger, *op. cit.*, pp. 163-4). See also I. Bywater, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-7; A.H. Chroust, 'Aristotle's *On Philosophy*', *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 29 (1973), pp. 19-22.

they have previously known.²³ As far as this goes, this reading is quite plausible, as we shall further see in sec. III.

However, it is difficult to see why Aristotle should approve of the argument this interpretation takes him to attribute to his cave-dwellers. First, (*a*) this argument is compatible with Plato's theory of Forms, which (according to the *Timaeus*) are (imperfectly) instantiated in matter by a divine demiurge, and it is therefore unclear how the former could be used for criticizing the latter. Accordingly, scholars who take Aristotle to accept the traditional teleological argument for the existence of gods formed by his cave-dwellers often assign the *De philosophia* to a period in which Aristotle 'was still a young acolyte of Plato'.²⁴ Second (*b*), the notion of divine providence and the anthropocentric and anthropomorphic aspects of traditional Greek religion in general are not only foreign to, but are explicitly rejected by, Aristotle's view in the extant corpus. In the *Politics*, Aristotle echoes Xenophanes' critique of the belief in such things by warning us not to model the shapes and life style of the gods on our own, in the way that led to the popular belief that they are ruled by a king (I.1, 1252^b24-7). In the *Poetics*, he tells us that Xenophanes may have been right in thinking that 'the things [said] concerning the gods', though of course widely believed, are 'neither what is better to say nor true' (1460^b35-1461^a1). In *Metaphysics* Λ. 8., he says that it is only insofar as traditional myths allude to the existence of divine 'first substances', that they are intelligible to us (as philosophers), with the rest of their content, e.g. regarding 'the human shape' of these substances,

23) I. Bywater, for instance, suggests attributing to Aristotle also the two lines in Cicero immediately preceding the fragment, in which an analogy is established between manmade artifacts and the universe as a whole (*op. cit.*, p. 83).

24) R.J. Hankinson, *Cause and Explanation in Ancient Greek thought* (New York, 1998), p. 125. The origins of this developmentalist approach are to be found in W. Jaeger, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-38.

amounting to a fabrication added 'with a view to persuading the masses and for its usefulness in supporting the laws and bringing about the general advantage' (1074^a38-^b14). Finally, in *EE* VII.15, he says that god is not a 'ruler that gives commands' (ἐπιτακτικῶς ἄρχων: 1249^b13-16).²⁵ This denial of any (humanlike) intentional conduct to divine beings is of course inconsistent with the traditional teleological argument for the existence of gods.²⁶ Thus, the interpretation of Aristotle as both presenting and approving of such an argument fails to meet either of our initial criteria.

II. The acceptance of a modified version of the teleological argument²⁷

A second (more plausible) reading would take the cave-dwellers' advancement from knowledge of artifacts, through knowledge of natural phenomena, to knowledge concerning divine beings, to represent Aristotle's views of the way in which philosophical knowledge of what he takes to be divine beings (e.g. the first unmoved mover) is acquired (thus meeting our criterion (b) – consistency with Aristotle's extant corpus). According to this reading, Aristotle's cave-allegory, much like Plato's, would be concerned with philosophical education, albeit one which would follow Aristotelian, rather than Platonic, philosophy as a model. In this way, it would be possible to view

25) On the basis of this text, M. R. Johnson concludes (in my view, correctly) that 'Aristotle explicitly repudiates the anthropomorphic conception of the gods, which ought to include the picture of gods as craftsmen', *Aristotle on Teleology* (New York, 2005), p. 262. Johnson also uses this text to show that Aristotle's suggested analogy between god or the unmoved mover and an army general in *Met.* Λ. 10, 1075a13-15 cannot possibly be taken to imply that this being acts 'in the way a providential or creator god might' (ibid. p. 275). More alleged evidence for divine providence in Aristotle will be criticized in n. 37.

26) This inconsistency surely would not bother those (e.g. Hankinson) who assign the *De philosophia* to the earliest period of Aristotle's writing.

27) I am grateful to Benjamin Morison for having suggested this interpretation to me.

Aristotle's version as a refinement of Plato's (thus satisfying criterion (a)). Aristotle's cave-dwellers are said to deduce the existence of gods as the efficient causes of natural phenomena, by extrapolating from the efficient causes of artifacts they are already familiar with. Since the prime mover, for Aristotle, apart from being a final cause in the sense of an object of desire (*Metaph.* Λ.7, 1072^a21–7), seems to also be the efficient cause of all natural beings (*Phys.* VIII.6, 258^b10–12), he may intend his cave-dwellers to infer the existence of just this type of being, an inference which he would then of course endorse himself.

However, it is not clear in what way artifacts can supply the paradigm on whose basis scientific knowledge of a first unmoved mover is supposed to be achieved, for Aristotle. First, his proof of the existence of this being, as it is presented in both *Physics* VIII and *Metaph.* Λ, proceeds from a consideration of (only) natural motion. Since animals are incapable of initiating their own motion/rest (VIII.2, 253^a11–19), though they are thought of as the most obvious case of self-motion in nature, Aristotle says, there is no self-motion in nature, which shows the eternity of motion (VIII.2, 252^b5–6), and, finally, in order to avoid an infinite regress, the existence of a first unmoved mover (VIII.6, 258^b10–12). Second, not only does the argument for this unmoved mover not require an appeal to artifacts, but it seems to work only when using natural beings as a paradigm. For Aristotle, as we have just said, the unmoved mover is not merely an efficient, but it is also a final, cause. But these two types of cause, Aristotle explicitly says in *Physics* II.7, only coincide in the natural realm ('for man begets man—and, generally speaking, [this is the case with things] in as much as, being moved, they move [something else] (and in as much as they do not [do so in this way], they are no longer

“of nature” [οὐκ ἐστὶ φυσικῆς: 198^a26-8]). Reading (II), which puts on a par the cave-dwellers' and Aristotle's own arguments for the existence of divine beings, then, seems not to meet our criterion of consistency with the corpus (*b*) after all. Moreover, since Aristotle's own formulation of the argument for the existence of the unmoved mover (in *Physics* VIII) uses as its basic (in fact, its sole) evidence, as we have just seen, the movement of living things, the arrival at this argument does not seem to require Aristotle's cave-dwellers to go aboveground at all. Observing themselves qua such moving things, they could have concluded, in the way Aristotle does, that such a mover necessarily exists, even prior to leaving their cave.

Finally, we have more reasons to think that it is the traditional teleological argument for the existence of a divine craftsman (or craftsmen), rather than a sophisticated version of the argument designed to arrive at the conclusion of the existence of an Aristotelian unmoved mover, that Aristotle is concerned with in the fragment from the *De philosophia*. If Philoponus' report of the ten books of Aristocles' 'περὶ φιλοσοφίας' indeed refers back to Aristotle's *De philosophia*,²⁸ then Aristotle describes in that work people's tendency to ascribe their own achievements, including the discovery of arts (τέχναι) aimed at 'beauty and elegance' (τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ἀστείου), to (a) god (εἰς θεόν), whom they conceive of as a 'wise craftsman' (σοφὸς τέκτων) (in *Nicom. Isagogen* I. I=*De phil.* Fr. 8b, Ross). The same is implied by Sextus Empiricus' discussion in *Adversus Mathematicos* 9 of the identification by the observers of celestial phenomena of god with 'the craftsman' (ὁ δημιουργός) of these phenomena, and by Philo's discussion in *Leg. Alleg.* 3.32.97-9 of the apprehension through an investigation of nature of 'the craftsman

28) See I. Bywater, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-70. For a different opinion see H. Flashar and E. Grumach (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 136.

of the universe – God' (ὁ ... τοῦ παντὸς δημιουργὸς – ὁ θεός), grasping him 'through his shadow, coming to knowing the artisan (τὸν τεχνίτην) through his works'. Both texts are included as fragments of Aristotle's *De philosophia* by most editors (and in Ross, as Fr. 12b and Fr. 13b, respectively).²⁹ For all we know, the cave-dwellers in Aristotle's version of the cave-allegory represent those people who would reach, under the envisaged circumstances, the same conclusions alluded to by Philoponus (or Aristocles), Sextus and Philo. He gives us no reason to think of his cave-dwellers as intellectually privileged or philosophically gifted.

These leads point in the direction of a traditional teleological argument for the existence of god(s), as opposed to an argument for the existence of an unmoved mover. And there is further evidence to this effect. Alexander of Aphrodisias, we are told by Elias in his commentary on the *Categories* (115. 3-5), claims that Aristotle's dialogues differ from his 'acroamatic' works (the works such as *Physics* and *Metaphysics*) in that Aristotle expresses (λέγει) his own positive views in the latter and the false views of others (τὰ ἄλλοις δοκοῦντα, τὰ ψευδῆ) in the former. Now, since the treatises of the extant corpus obviously contain discussions of Aristotle's predecessors and contemporaries, it seems plausible that Alexander does not mean to exclude all discussion of positive Aristotelian doctrines from the dialogues. The point seems to be rather, that just as the main objective of the acroamatic works is to establish Aristotle's own theories as truths, using criticisms of or comparisons with previous theories when necessary, the primary aim of the dialogues was to establish some of the theories of

29) I. Bywater thinks of Philo's argument not only as taken directly from Aristotle's *De philosophia*, but also as referring back to the very passage with which we are dealing (i.e. Aristotle's version of the cave-allegory) (*op. cit.*, pp. 83-4). For a more cautious assessment see H. Flashar and E. Grumach (ed.), *op. cit.*, 140 (and p. 141 for Fr. 12b).

Aristotle's contemporaries and predecessors as false, again using, whenever necessary, positive ideas from his own theories for that purpose. This, of course, gives us no basis to infer the impossibility of a reference to Aristotle's own idea of the unmoved mover in the *De philosophia*, or in any other dialogue. Indeed, as we shall see, such a reference is quite likely to have been made in the *De philosophia* according to one fragment in particular (i.e. Cicero, *DN* I. 13. 33=*De phil.* Fr. 26a Ross). However, it does seem improbable, if we accept Elias' report of Alexander, that Aristotle would introduce an entire simile in a dialogue for the purpose of arguing for this idea philosophically or, what amounts to the same thing, establishing his own model of philosophical education, which has been the starting point of the interpretation at hand.³⁰

30) B. Effe's position does not quite fit in with either of the interpretations presented in the two sections above, although it shares an essential feature with both of them. Effe takes Aristotle's version of the cave allegory to be an argument, most probably mounted against the Atomists, against the view that the ordered cosmos and the regularities within it are due to chance. The argument, according to Effe, is reminiscent of the arguments Cicero gives in the discussions surrounding his quotation of Aristotle's text (*Studien zur Kosmologie und Theologie der Aristotelischen Schrift "Über die Philosophie"* [Munich, 1970], p. 91): People, like the Atomists, are all too used to witnessing natural phenomena, and thus overlook the beauty and magnificence of the universe (ibid. p. 93). Had they, like Aristotle's cave dwellers, been exposed to nature for the first time only as adults, they surely would have arrived immediately at the certainty (*Gewissheit*) concerning a divine force at work (ibid. p. 92). This 'certainty', Effe maintains, is based solely on the experience or *pathos* generated by the encounter with the natural world, and this type of immediate knowledge is to be contrasted with the knowledge of God arrived at by discursive thinking (ibid. p. 101). Thus, Effe thinks that Aristotle endorses the conviction arrived at by his cave-dwellers (similarly to the interpretations we have considered in sections I and II), but he also seems to think that the conviction in question is not based on any kind of argument, e.g. the traditional teleological argument for the existence of gods or Aristotle's argument for the existence of a first unmoved mover (by contrast to the interpretations considered thus far). The ample evidence given above for the treatment in the *De philosophia* of the traditional teleological argument points against Effe's proposal. Moreover, since Effe himself thinks the context of the quotation in Cicero would reveal Aristotle's original intent (ibid. p. 89), it is curious that he bypasses Cicero's (or rather, Balbus') intention of proving the existence, not simply of a *göttliche Kraft*, but of providential, beneficent (and therefore anthropomorphic) gods (cf. e.g. *ND* II, 34.87), whose existence Aristotle rejects out of hand. Generally speaking, it is difficult

III. The rejection of the traditional teleological argument

A further reason against the interpretation of the fragment we are dealing with (*De phil.* Fr. 13a, Ross) presented in the previous section (II), according to which Aristotle writes his version of the cave-allegory as an illustration of what he takes to be the correct way of arriving at metaphysical knowledge, is the close affinity between Aristotle's exposition of the experience and reasoning of his cave-dwellers and the presentation of the traditional teleological argument for the existence of gods by authors in his immediate intellectual environment. Aristotle's readers would have recognized the traditional argument in the text as quoted by Cicero, for instance from Xenophon's Socrates' presentation of it to Euthydemus, which uses remarkably similar imagery (*Memorabilia* IV. 3. 3-5):

'Tell me, Euthydemus,' [Socrates] said, 'have you ever had the occasion to ponder how attentively the gods have afforded humans those things which they need? (...) Don't you know that what we primarily need is light, a thing which is provided for us by the gods? (...) And, since we need rest as well, the gods offer us night, the fairest time for rest (...) And, since the sun, being bright, illuminates the hours of the day and all other things for us, and night, due to its darkness, is indistinct, have they not kindled stars at night, which make visible for us the hours of the night, and through this we do many of the things we need to do? (...) The moon, furthermore, shows us not only the parts of the night, but also of the month. And since we need nourishment, do they not give it out of the earth and produce regulated seasons for this purpose, which prepare many and all

to see how the transition from the experience of natural phenomena to the 'certainty' regarding the existence of a divine being could be characterized as anything but an inference, especially since, as Effe recognizes, the cave-dwellers' conviction is based on their prior possession of a concept of 'god' and on their knowledge of human artifacts (ibid. p. 92). Surely, the cave dwellers come to be 'certain' of the existence of god(s) by comparing natural phenomena to human artifacts and human artisans to divine craftsmen, and this quite obviously relies on more than a *pathos* generated by the witnessing of nature and leading 'immediately to the certainty of an active divine force' (ibid. p. 101).

W. Blum, by contrast, seems to combine the interpretations presented in the previous two sections, as he reads Aristotle's allegory of the cave as possibly constituting a teleological argument for the existence of gods, while also associating it with Aristotle's notion of the unmoved mover, see *Höhlengleichnisse: Thema mit Variationen* (Bielefeld, 2004), pp. 58-9.

sorts of things – not just things we need, but also things in which we rejoice?' 'No doubt', [Euthydemus] said, 'these things too show a love for mankind'.

In this version of the teleological argument, Socrates' list of natural regularities matches that given by Aristotle in our fragment. The earth, moon, stars, and the sun, with its power of bestowing light and creating day, are all listed as things an exposure to which causes both the cave-dwellers and Euthydemus to conclude that there are gods. The only thing that Aristotle's version seems to lack is an explicit reference to that common feature by which the above phenomena are taken to be associated with godlikeness, i.e. the usefulness of these phenomena for man, which must be due to a certain *φιλανθρωπία* of the gods. But Aristotle could hardly expect his cave-dwellers not to reason similarly to thinkers in his immediate environment, on the basis of such similar data, especially given their prior knowledge of manmade artifacts and reported religion. This lends support to reading (I) in attributing to Aristotle's cave-dwellers the traditional teleological argument. We have already seen that the attribution of this argument to Aristotle himself fails to meet either of our criteria. It therefore remains to be seen whether these criteria might be satisfied by reading Aristotle's cave-allegory as attributing to his cave-dwellers the argument in question, for the purpose of rejecting it.

In effect, criterion (b) is already met by reading (III) by considering Aristotle's insistent criticism, in various places in his corpus (discussed in section (I)), of the anthropomorphic conception of gods in traditional Greek religion. It gains further support when one attends to other fragments attributed to the *De philosophia*, which, as Monte Johnson argues, suggest that, in that dialogue, Aristotle was not interested in defending the traditional teleological argument as much as in explaining what leads people to be

attracted to it, and 'what might cause people to think that there are gods in the first place'.³¹ One such fragment, taken from Sextus Empiricus, reports that, for Aristotle, the two chief sources (ἀρχαί) of the thought of gods (ἐννοια θεῶν) in humans are (i) occurrences surrounding the soul, especially the divination coming into being in sleep, and (ii) astronomical phenomena (*Adversus mathematicos*, 9. 20-23=*De phil.* Fr. 12a, Ross).³² We know that Aristotle would not be inclined to uphold a belief springing from source (i), since, in his *De divinatione per somnum*, he explicitly rejects prophetic dreams as god-sent, saying that such dreams would then have to be sent equally to commonplace people and even to non-rational animals, which is absurd (462^b20-2; 463^b12-13). Building on principles laid out in *De anima* and certain parts of the *Parva Naturalia* (most prominently *De somno* and *De insomniis*), he then provides a justification for the claim that some dreams can be prophetic, by constructing a naturalistic account of the use of dreams for preparatory purposes, viz. for predicting impending physiological conditions and for resolving actual conflicts in the dreamer's daytime life.³³ Aristotle's idea in Sextus' report must be, then, that people tend to derive their conception of gods based on what they take to be, and in actuality is not, divination on the basis of dreams. I take this idea to be compatible with the surviving evidence not only from *De philosophia*, but from

31) M. R. Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 261. Cf. Philo of Alexandria, *De allegoriis legum*, 3.32.97–9=*De phil.* Fr. 13c, Ross.

32) Interestingly, Xenophon's Socrates concludes his version of the teleological argument (quoted above) by mentioning divination (μαντική), which the gods grant us due to our inability to predict what the future holds (τὰ συμφέροντα προνοεῖσθαι, 3.12), as his last reason for believing that indeed there are gods.

33) I deal with this account in more detail elsewhere (M. Segev, *op. cit.*). For an early attempt to reconcile *De divinatione per somnum* with the fragments from Aristotle's *De philosophia*, see A.H. Chroust, 'Aristotle's *Protrepticus* versus Aristotle's *On Philosophy*: A Controversy Over the Nature of Dreams', *Theta-Pi* (1974), pp. 169-78.

other lost Aristotelian dialogues as well.³⁴ As for source (ii), the astronomical phenomena, though Aristotle thinks they are divine,³⁵ he also seems to denounce the standard belief in divinity to which they tend to give rise, as he is reported to have 'charged with great godlessness (ἀθεότητα)' those who have supposed that the sun, moon and the planets 'do

34) Take, for example, Cicero's portrayal in *De divinatione ad Brutum* I.25.53 of Eudemus' dream, usually attributed to Aristotle's dialogue *Eudemus* (Fr. 1, Ross). In the dream, Eudemus is told that (i) he would recover from the illness he had at the time, (ii) the tyrant Alexander would die, and (iii) Eudemus himself would return home. Aristotle is reported to have said that whereas (i) and (ii) were fulfilled, (iii) was not, at least not literally, since Eudemus ended up dying in battle at Syracuse. To make (iii) fit in with the rest, then, it was interpreted as meaning that Eudemus' soul had returned to its home after it left his body. Aristotle does not seem to 'indicate here his belief that the messages which Eudemus received in his dreams ... are bound to occur in the future' (A.H. Chroust, 'Eudemus or on the Soul: A Lost Dialogue of Aristotle on the Immortality of the Soul', *Mnemosyne* (1966), pp. 17-30 at p. 20), nor 'to show that by [the] fulfillment [of the dream] the deity itself confirmed the truth of Plato's doctrine of the heavenly origin of the soul and its future return thither' (Jaeger, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40). Rather, Aristotle's report here is fully congruent with his theory in *De divinatione per somnum*. Contents (i)-(iii) of Eudemus' dream in fact correlate with the three types of dream contents discussed by Aristotle in that treatise. Item (i) has to do with the dreamer's own bodily condition, a realm in which Aristotle explains prediction using dreams is in fact possible, since certain dreams function as 'natural signs' (σημεῖα πέφυκε) of physiological occurrences (463b30-1). The fact that Eudemus succeeded in predicting his own recovery, then, is not unbelievable on Aristotelian grounds. Item (ii) has to do with an external happening, of which Aristotle regards the prediction using dreams as entirely coincidental (463a30-b1). Eudemus' prediction of Alexander's death is equivalent to any other dreamer's prediction of a sea battle (463a32-463b11), and both are equivalent to a game of dice (463b12-22). Item (iii) has to do with an action to be carried out by the dreamer herself, of which a dream, according to Aristotle, may not only be a sign, but also a partial cause (463a21-3). Eudemus may have gone back home, on the basis of his dream, thus fulfilling it fully, if it were not for an intervening factor (death in battle). In this context, Aristotle himself says that many actions, though well planned (βουλευθέντα καλῶς) are prevented by stronger circumstances (*Div. Somn.*, 463b26-8). Cf. M. Segev, *op. cit.*, pp. 132 ff.

B. Effe, too, takes Aristotle's dialogues to be generally compatible with his rejection in *Div.* of the view that dreams are god-sent or can be used for divination in any other way that cannot be explained naturalistically. Effe, however, argues for this position by taking the description of Eudemus' dream (Fr. 1, Ross) to be a literary device, and by ascribing Sextus' report to a non-Aristotelian interlocutor in the *De philosophia* (Fr. 12, Ross), see B. Effe, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-87 esp. p. 80 and p. 85.

35) Cf. *De caelo* 292a19; Cicero, *De natura deorum* II. 15. 42, II. 16. 44=*De philosophia*,

not differ from artifacts' (τῶν χειροκμήτων οὐδὲν ... διαφέρειν: Philo, *De aeternitate mundi*, III.10-11=*De phil.* Fr. 18, Ross).

Thus, I concur with Johnson that 'there is no good evidence, direct or indirect, that Aristotle supported a 'teleological proof for the existence of god', whether in the lost work *On Philosophy*, or anywhere else', and that he was more plausibly interested in it in 'correct[ing] the traditional views',³⁶ which would mean that reading (III) enjoys the benefit of meeting our criterion (b). In presenting his cave-allegory in particular, Aristotle's point seems to be similar to Spinoza's criticism of the teleological argument in the appendix to part I of his *Ethics*: People are predisposed to infer the existence of gods, erroneously, from witnessing natural regularities which aid their own survival and well-being by supposing that this aid must have been conferred upon them by intentional, humanly-beneficial agents. Though divinity might (indeed, for both Aristotle and Spinoza, must) be found, one must seek it in a different way from this very particular kind of *a posteriori* reasoning (for Aristotle, in the way alluded to in sec. (II)). One important implication of Aristotle's criticism of the anthropomorphic aspects of religion, then, is that it does not leave room for viewing the gods as beneficent, as some scholars suggest.³⁷ Instead, by forming the criticism above, Aristotle commits himself to thinking

Fr. 21(a-b), Ross.

36) M. R. Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

37) Thus, R. Bodéüs argues that Aristotle distinguishes between (i) the proper content of traditional religion, which he accepts, and which includes the view of gods and benevolent and providential agents, and (ii) 'mythical additions', which are the (sole) object of Aristotle's criticism (*op. cit.*, pp. 81-6). For further discussion of this distinction see chapter II, pp. 56-8. Several texts in the extant *corpus Aristotelicum* may at first sight seem to suggest that Aristotle accepts the existence of providential and beneficent gods (see R. Bodéüs, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8 and chapter 5), but ultimately fail to do so. Thus, when Aristotle says, in *Topics* I. 11, 105a5-7, that those who wonder whether or not gods should be honored and parents loved must be punished, he affirms nothing but the importance of maintaining traditional religious practices, which may be due solely to

that it is precisely an anthropomorphic or anthropocentric tendency that has given rise to the very notion of divine intervention or benevolence at the center of traditional religion.

The question remains of whether the interpretation of the fragment as a rejection of the traditional teleological argument for the existence of gods could be used to criticize Plato's theory of Forms (our criterion (a)). Importantly, Aristotle does link his criticisms of traditional religion and Platonic forms in the extant corpus. In *Metaphysics* B. 2 he gives the following explanation of why the basic proposition of Platonic metaphysics (viz. that there are certain natures besides the perceptible objects which, though eternal, are the same as the latter in every other respect) is absurd (ἄτοπον):

For they say there is a human-being-in-itself and a horse-in-itself and a health-in-itself, with no qualification besides, and in so doing they resemble those who said that there are gods, but in human shape. For the latter were positing nothing but eternal human beings (ἄνθρωπους αἰδιούς), nor are the former making the Forms anything but eternal perceptible things. (997b8-12)

their necessary socio-political role. Similarly with *NE* IV. 3 1123b18. In *NE* VIII. 12, 1162a4-7, Aristotle again discusses gods alongside parents, saying that our *philia* for both is comparable. But this discussion does not imply divine beneficence either. The *philia* of human beings for gods is unreciprocated (cf. chapter III, pp. 116-7), and parents are here compared to gods solely with regard to their superiority (over children and over human beings, respectively). Aristotle does not mean to say, in going on to describe parents as being personally responsible for our greatest goods (our existence, nurture and education), that in this, too, they resemble the gods. Again, Aristotle's discussion in *EE* VIII. 2, 1248a25-ff of (one form of) 'good luck' (εὐτυχία) as being 'divine' (θεία) and as occurring 'through god' (διὰ θεόν) does not imply divine providence (the idea that εὐτυχία is due to love [φιλεῖν] by a god is criticized explicitly in the preceding discussion in 1247a28-9), since the god mentioned there is the 'principle of [all] movement in the soul', responsible, in the words of P. Van der Eijk, for 'a psycho-physiological mechanism' as opposed to 'incidental and momentaneous inspiration' (as is sometimes assumed) ('Divine Movement and Human Nature in *Eudemian Ethics* 8, 2', *Hermes* 117 [1989], pp. 24-42, at pp. 30-1). Finally, we shall see in chapter III that the famous conditionals in *NE* I. 9, 1099b11-18 and X. 8, 1179a22-9, both mentioning the standard opinion regarding the existence of providential gods, cannot be taken to affirm that opinion, and can even be used to reject it, when taken in context (pp. 95-8, pp. 114-16).

If, then, as reading (III) maintains, Aristotle's version of the cave-allegory is used to counter the standard teleological argument, by illustrating the flaws in reasoning from knowledge of manmade artifacts and religious tradition, and the perception of natural phenomena, to the existence of gods responsible for these phenomena, there is reason to believe that this strategy could be employed for advancing a counterargument against the reasoning from perceptible and intelligible objects to the existence of (Platonic) Forms.

Here is how the double criticism in question might work. In David Sedley's analysis of Plato's cave-allegory, the shadows of puppets in the cave, constituting the whole of the prisoners' experience, symbolize (i) the 'inadequate pretenses' of what the puppets themselves depict, namely (ii) 'whatever item outside the cave symbolizes the Form of [X]', or whatever mimics 'the true nature of [X] with sufficient success to merit the predicate "[X]"'.³⁸ The reflections and shadows of animals and other originals outside the cave stand for (iii) 'intelligible images of Forms', and the things whose images these are, are of course (iv) the Forms themselves.³⁹ We may expect the transition relevant to Aristotle's criticism here to correspond to the transition relevant to his criticism of the teleological argument, i.e. the shift between the two first stages outside the cave (in Plato, from (iii) to (iv)), which depends on the experience gained already inside the cave (in Plato, stages (i) and (ii)). To borrow the terminology of the analogy of the divided line,⁴⁰

38) D. Sedley, 'Philosophy, the Forms, and the Art of Ruling', in G.R.F. Ferrari (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 256-283 at p. 264. I use X instead of Sedley's preferred example of 'justice' to facilitate general application.

39) Ibid. p. 265.

40) I follow Sedley, and the traditional interpretation, in assigning stages (i)-(iv) to εἰκασία, πίστις, διάνοια and νόησις, respectively. M.F. Burnyeat takes both stage (ii) and (iii) to correspond to the objects of διάνοια, and more specifically to 'mathematical objects (perhaps conceived at different levels of abstraction)', 'Plato on Why Mathematics is Good for the Soul', *Proceedings – British Academy* 103 (Oxford, 2000), pp. 1-82 at p. 43. Cf. M.F. Burnyeat, 'Platonism and Mathematics: A Prelude to Discussion', in A.

Aristotle must be concerned here with the leap from the experience of objects of both εἰκασία and πίστις (or, taken together, of δόξα, as represented in the Line), which is confined to the sensible world,⁴¹ combined with the first class of objects of ἐπιστήμη, i.e. those grasped by διάνοια, to the recognition of the objects of νόησις, the Platonic Forms.

We may represent the relation between Plato and Aristotle's versions of the cave allegory in the following way:

	Inside the cave:	Outside:	
Plato:	Shadows (i) → puppets (ii) (objects of δόξα)	→ Reflections (iii) → (objects of διάνοια)	→ Animals and other originals (iv) → (objects of νόησις, i.e. Forms)
Aristotle:	Artifacts + tradition (<i>De an.</i>) Perceptible objects (αἰσθητά)	→ Nature → Intelligible objects (νοητά)	→ Gods

The distinction between stages (i)-(ii) and stage (iii) maps neatly onto Aristotle's discussion of perceptible objects (αἰσθητά) and intelligible ones (νοητά) in *De anima* III.

8. He says (431^b20 ff.):

Let us once again state that the soul is in a sense all things that are (τὰ ὄντα ... πάντα). For things that are, are either perceptible or intelligible objects (αἰσθητὰ τὰ ὄντα ἢ νοητά), and knowledge is in a sense knowable objects, and perception – perceptible objects.

Aristotle's statement here is predicated on his contention, explained in the previous sections of *DA* III, that thinking in fact necessitates previous acts of sense perceiving (and the mediation of these two activities through the operation of φαντασία). Accordingly, he goes on to say that there is nothing (in intelligible objects) besides (παρά), or separable

Graeser (ed.) *Mathematics and Metaphysics in Aristotle* (Berne, 1987), pp. 213-241.
41) D. Sedley, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

(κεχωρισμένον) from, perceptible objects. Intelligible objects are merely abstractions (τὰ τε ἐν ἀφαιρέσει) from, or else states and affections (ἐξεις καὶ πάθη) of, perceptible ones, and they inhere in perceptible forms (ἐν τοῖς εἶδεσι τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς τὰ νοητά ἐστι) (8, 432^a3-6).⁴²

With the elimination of anything apart or separable from perceptible objects, the transition into (Plato's) step (iv) is here explicitly rejected. Intelligible objects are, so to speak, the final stop of one's inquiry into the epistemological and ontological lessons to be derived from one's perceptual experience, and they are adequately explained on the basis of that experience (i.e. as either abstractions from or affections of the objects given by sense perception). Here we may finally apply Aristotle's version of the cave allegory to his criticism of Plato. The inference to the existence of gods using the teleological argument is analogous to the inference to Forms. In Aristotle's version of the cave allegory, the cave-dwellers, upon perceiving natural objects, wrongly infer that these must be explained by reference to something external to them, and thus posit gods. Plato, Aristotle would say, errs in thinking that intelligible objects must be explained by reference to something external as well, in this case positing self-standing Forms. In both cases, the error in reasoning results in a similar hierarchical structure, proceeding from the last stage to the first. For Aristotle's cave-dwellers, the existence of gods explains nature, but it also explains their experience inside the cave. The reports they have heard

42) That is, as R. Polansky notes, 'apart from those divine things that are completely separate from matter and are their own essences (see 429b11–12)', *Aristotle's De anima* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 497. However, note that 'though not presently discussed, and only alluded to, human theoretical understanding of gods must develop from first considering sensible substances and concluding from them the need for necessary and eternal beings. All human knowledge for Aristotle presupposes and derives from sense perception' (ibid. p. 498).

of the gods' will and force are of course confirmed by their reasoning, and the artifacts (paintings, statues) they have enjoyed in their cave turn out to imitate things already present in nature thanks to precisely these gods. For Plato, the Forms ultimately explain not only the 'intelligible images', but also the sensible objects, which also only have their being due to imitation. As alternatives, Aristotle proposes to explain the benefits humans find in their environment within the scope of natural teleology, and to reduce the transcendence to intelligible images to a manipulation of sense data through a psychological operation. These alternatives render both the traditional Greek gods, and Plato's Forms, artificial.

In conclusion, reading (III), according to which Aristotle's allegory of the cave is meant to reject the traditional teleological argument for the existence of gods, seems to have the advantage of expounding a criticism of Plato's theory of Forms (criterion (*a*)) as well as being consistent with the rest of the Aristotelian corpus (criterion (*b*)). By contrast, reading (I), on which Aristotle means in the fragment to endorse the traditional teleological argument, does not meet either criterion, and reading (II), on which Aristotle intends in this text to endorse a non-traditional teleological argument for the existence of god (i.e. his unmoved mover), fails to meet criterion (*b*). The upshot of the criticism of traditional religion relevant for our purposes, as it emerges from our interpretation of the fragment, is that, at least in so far as it employs the traditional teleological argument for the existence of god(s), religion is quite problematic as a source of knowledge about reality. For Aristotle, there seem to be errors fundamental enough in the approach of traditional religion to questions about the origin of the natural world and its mode of existence for us to doubt its reliability as a source of information in general. Aristotle

famously calls for the abandonment (indeed, destruction) of Platonic Forms, though devised and held by people 'dear to him', upon proving it (in his eyes) to be philosophically unsatisfactory (*NE* I.6, 1096a11-16). By the same token, Aristotle must think of traditional religion, or at least the relevant part of it, since proven unsatisfactory along with Platonic metaphysics, as dispensable, at least as a reliable source of information.

3: The value of religion in *De philosophia*

That traditional religion has proven uninformative, or unusable as a source of knowledge, for Aristotle, does not mean that he necessarily deems it worthless in principle. In what remains, I shall examine the rest of the references to religion in the *De philosophia*, and show that they hint at its possible value (as well as the possible value of its various practices and institutions), quite separate from any claim to providing truth. First, then, Synesius reports Aristotle as saying that:

... those who are being initiated into the mysteries do not need to learn something, but rather need to be affected in some way (οὐ μαθεῖν τι δεῖν ἀλλὰ παθεῖν), and to gain a certain disposition (διατηθῆναι) – to become adapted for some purpose. (*Dio.* 10. 48a=*De phil.* Fr. 15a, Ross)

Similarly, in Michael Psellus' report, Aristotle discussed the Eleusinian rites, in which:

He who is initiated into the mysteries is being formed (τυπούμενος), but not taught. (*Schol. Ad Joh. Clinacum* [*Cat. Des Man. Alch. Grecs*, ed. Bidez, 1928], 6.171=*De phil.* Fr. 15b, Ross)

If these remarks indeed should be derived from things Aristotle said in the *De philosophia* (and they commonly are), then they might serve as the basis for our reconstruction of Aristotle's positive view of religion (in his day) as it was presented in that work, taking into consideration the criticism we have already seen posed to religion there.

Traditionally, Aristotle's remarks in these fragments have been taken to indicate a contrast between public, civic religion and the secret practices of mystery cults in ancient Greece. Jaeger, for instance, takes Aristotle to be emphasizing (in Synesius' reported text) the 'spiritual' value, as opposed to the 'intellectual significance', of the contents of such cults. 'The cults of the old gods', he writes, 'lacked the personal relationship between the righteous man and his God, whereas the mysteries gave it the foremost place...'⁴³ Taken out of context, this would have been a reasonable, and rather intuitive, reading of the text. However, in context, it seems insufficient. The other references to religion that we have looked at so far in the dialogue consistently track a relation, not merely between different kinds of religious practice, but also, and more fundamentally, between religion as such and one further practice, namely philosophy (think of the very title of the dialogue). Applying this same relation to the present fragments seems plausible, and it is therefore preferable. Aristotle, on this interpretation, discusses the uninformative nature of religion generally speaking, which, as we have seen, he thinks it shares with certain strands of Greek philosophy. He does this by focusing on an example of a religious practice whose force is uncontroversially not in the gathering of any information, but rather in the

43) W. Jaeger, *op. cit.*, p. 160. Cf. I. Bywater, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

attainment of a certain state or condition which is thought to be somehow beneficial to whoever manages to reach it.⁴⁴

Next, Aristotle perhaps would strengthen his point by extrapolating from the case of Eleusinian mysteries to (Greek) religion in general. This surely would have proven much more difficult. Unlike mystery cults, civic religion in Greece did have an explicit claim to truth. Religious studies were a part of every citizen's education, the penalty for heresy against the taught content and conventional wisdom on the subject often being death. Still, the point of Aristotle's criticism of traditional religion, as we have seen, remains that the truths it proclaims cannot constitute its true value. Its value, if it has any, must rather be found, similarly to that of mystery cults, in some other kind of benefit that it shows itself capable of bestowing upon its practicing members. This seems to be Aristotle's general view in the lost works, and it is supported by his attitude towards such religious festivities as the Olympic games and especially the performance of tragedies at the Dionysia. In the *Protrepticus*, Iamblichus reports, Aristotle says:

44) B. Effe thinks that the distinction between μαθεῖν and παθεῖν in the fragments above (15a-b, Ross) corresponds to two kinds of knowledge of divinity, one arrived at by discursive thinking and one arrived at immediately through experience (*op. cit.*, pp. 94-101). However, whereas Aristotle certainly distinguishes the experience of being initiated into the mysteries from knowledge arrived at through reasoning, there is no reason to think that he sees the mystical experience in question as itself involving, or leading immediately to, knowledge of divinity, or indeed of anything else. Effe bases his conjecture primarily on his reading of a passage in Dio Chrysostom (*Or.* 12, 33), which gives an initiation rite as an example of an experience (παθεῖν) leading to an apprehension of god. But Dio does not refer in this text either to Aristotle's dialogues (as he does in *Or.* 53. 1) or to his corpus, and does not even mention the distinction between μαθεῖν and παθεῖν. Effe attempts to establish a connection between Dio's text and the *De philosophia* by appealing to the presumed similarity between Dio's text and Aristotle's version of the cave allegory in Fr. 13, Ross, in which, Effe thinks, the cave dwellers arrive at an immediate knowledge of god through their experience of witnessing nature for the first time (*ibid.* p. 101). But we have already seen that Effe's interpretation of Aristotle's version of the cave allegory is itself unfounded (see n. 30).

Therefore it is not at all strange, if it [sc. understanding] would not appear useful or beneficial. For we say, not that it is beneficial, but rather that it is itself good, [and] it is befitting to choose it, not for the sake of some other thing, but rather because of itself. For just as we leave home to visit Olympia for the sake of the spectacle itself (αὐτῆς ἕνεκα τῆς θείας), even if nothing further is destined to result from it (for the viewing of the spectacle [θεωρία] is worth more than much money), and [just as] we view the Dionysia not in order to receive something from the performers, but rather we even give [them something, i.e. pay them] (...) thus also the viewing or contemplation [θεωρία] of the universe must be preferred over all those things that are considered useful. (from Iambl. *Protr.* 52.16-54.5 Pistelli=*Protr.* Fr. 12b, Ross)

The value of watching both the pan-Hellenic sports events and the staging of tragedies and comedies at the Dionysia is here contrasted with monetary profit, under the assumption that there is something to be gained directly from exposure to such spectacles, and by which alone their value should be measured.

In another fragment, often attributed to *On Poets*, and discussing drama specifically, Aristotle clarifies just what he thinks makes such things as tragedy and comedy valuable. He says, as part of his criticism of Plato's *Republic*, that:

The rejection of tragedy and comedy is absurd, if indeed by means of them it is possible to moderately appease the affections (τὰ πάθη) and, in appeasing them, to have them working for educational purposes (πρὸς τὴν παιδείαν), once what was worn out in them has been treated. (Proclus, *in Remp.* I. 49. 13 [Kroll]=part of *De poet.* Fr. 5a, Ross).

Here, Aristotle finds the experience of attending a staging of a dramatic play at a religious festival (often on a religious theme) valuable, not due to any significance of its contents, but rather, as was the case for initiation rites, because of the (emotional) condition produced by it, a condition which is in turn capable of rendering the individual more suitable for a certain purpose, in this case learning. This is of course in line with Aristotle's view of tragedy in the *Poetics*, according to which myth as used by the poet is

not meant to instruct, but to imitate action, thereby inciting the viewer's emotions (9. 1451b27-33; 1452a3-12).⁴⁵ In contrast to Plato, who thinks poetry should convey true information concerning divinity, and accordingly imposes restrictions on poets in his ideal *polis* (*Republic* II, 377b-383c), 'for Aristotle', as Robert Parker puts it, 'it really does not matter what the dramatist says about the gods' (*Poetics*, 25. 1460b35-7).⁴⁶ The particular religious content of the work 'really does not matter', however, not simply because, for Aristotle, 'the theology of tragedy is so much a matter of poetic tradition',⁴⁷ but rather because the significance of the work lies, for him, in its effectiveness in reaching the emotional condition he associates with being better able to learn (so that the particular content of the work does not matter as long as it achieves this aim).

Importantly, the significance Aristotle finds in such things as tragedy is not in line with the benefits which an ordinary Greek would have attended a religious festival in expectation to achieve. Ordinarily, the participation in such events was considered an essential part of one's religious education and ongoing engagement with one's worshipping. In many cases, for example, a representation in a tragedy of a cult associated with a certain deity would have been perceived by the audience, not as a 'literary construct', but rather as 'an exploratory construct, through which aspects of their cult are articulated, problematized and explored'.⁴⁸ It is undeniable, then, that at least

45) See R. Bodéüs, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

46) R. Parker, 'Gods Cruel and Kind: Tragic and Civic Theology' in *Greek Tragedy and the Historian* ed. C. Pelling (Oxford, 1997), pp. 143-160 at p. 148 (reference to source in original footnote).

47) Ibid.

48) C. Sourvinou-Inwood, 'Tragedy and Religion' in *Greek Tragedy and the Historian* ed. C. Pelling, (Oxford, 1997), p. 175. Sourvinou-Inwood discusses here the case of the Tauric cult of Artemis as presented in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*, which would have represented for an Athenian audience their own local (i.e. Attic) cult of Artemis worshippers. For a competing view see J.D. Mikalson, *Honor Thy Gods: Popular*

some dramatic performances were valued by their audience at least in part on the basis of the religious information they conveyed, and that the point of Aristotle's remarks must be that audiences are often wrong in their valuation. The popular notion of an informative significance of religious drama did not escape philosophers in Aristotle's immediate vicinity. Plato's lawgiver in the *Laws* describes how, apart from such things as the myths told to young children, it is also the 'spectacles (ὄψεις) which the youth see and hear with the utmost pleasure when presented at sacrifices' that convince those youth of the very existence of gods (X. 887c7-e7). Far from reflecting a consensus, then, Aristotle's thesis that such aspects of Greek culture as religious festivals and the religious contents exhibited at them are not valuable insofar as they provide information, but have their value elsewhere, would have required a concentrated effort in order to be established. Interestingly, however, advancing this thesis seems necessary for Aristotle in order to show that traditional religion stands a chance of remaining relevant and valuable even in the face of the criticisms he mounted against one of its most basic underlying arguments in the *De philosophia* – a criticism which in itself surely appeared quite idiosyncratic and controversial at the time he was writing.

In other words, one reason for interpreting Aristotle's remarks about specific religious practices in the *De philosophia* (and other related lost works) as part of a general effort to reduce the value of traditional religion to advantages independent of its particular content, is that the truth of that content has been considerably undermined, as we have seen, by Aristotle's criticism of the traditional teleological argument for the existence of god(s). Aristotle himself associates this argument with the very source of

Religion in Greek Tragedy (Chapel-Hill/London, 1991).

human belief in divinity, on which traditional religion is of course based. It is only fitting, then, that he should warn us, probably in the same work, against making immodest claims about our knowledge 'concerning divine affairs' (*de diis*), such as the 'constellations, the stars and the nature of gods (*de sideribus, de stellis, de deorum natura*) (Seneca, *Q.N.* 7.30=*De phil.* Fr. 14a, Ross). Aristotle's own references to such matters, in the remaining fragments of the *De philosophia*, do not overlook this warning, as far as I can see.

Aristotle's own opinions concerning divinity would have entered the *De philosophia* 'through the backdoor', so to speak, as points of agreement with other philosophers, whose views were otherwise an object of extensive criticism in that work (most obviously, Plato). In *De caelo* I.9, Aristotle says that his own view concerning the divine finds support 'in popular philosophy' (ἐν τοῖς ἐγκυκλίοις φιλοσοφήμασι), which often expresses the view that 'the divine, everything that is primary and highest, is necessarily unchangeable (ἀμετάβλητον)' (279a12-b3). The reasons employed by popular philosophy to establish this view, he adds, are that (a) there is nothing stronger than the divine which would be capable of changing it, since that would be more divine, and (b) the divine lacks nothing (and therefore, presumably, has no conceivable reason to change itself). Simplicius, in his commentary on this text, explicitly attributes a further discussion of this argument to the *De philosophia*, and refers the 'popular philosophy' responsible for the original argument back (at least) to Plato's *Republic* II. 381b-c (*in De Caelo* 289. 1-15=*De phil.* Fr. 16, Ross). Since Aristotle certainly accepts this argument, it is likely that, in *De philosophia*, it figured as one of the Platonic tenets concerning divinity to be retained after the criticism of Plato had been completed.

While agreeing with Plato on the unchangeability of the divine (as well as on the argument to be used for showing it), Aristotle in the *De philosophia* must have criticized not only Plato's theory of Forms, but also his views on theological issues, as we learn from Cicero's representative of Epicureanism (Gaius Velleius) in *De natura deorum* I. 13. 33 (= *De phil.* Fr. 26a, Ross). According to this report, Aristotle, in the third book of the dialogue, 'confuses [his readers] greatly (*multa turbat*) in dissenting from his teacher Plato' by introducing the following points:

[a] At times he attributes all divinity to mind (*mens*), [b] at times he says the world itself is a god, [c] at times he appoints another [god] (*alius quidam*) in command of the world, and assigns to it parts so that it rules and maintains the world's movement by a kind of backwards turning (*replicatio*). [d] Then he says the heat of the heavens (*caeli ardor*) is a god, not grasping that the heavens are part of the world, which he has himself elsewhere designated as a god ...

I agree with Jaeger both that Cicero's Epicurean's criticism of Aristotle here must be based on a superficial judgement of the text (though it is also probably deliberately superficial), and that, despite the superficiality, the direct reference to Aristotle and the *De philosophia* most probably indicates a genuine report.⁴⁹ It is also possible that some reference to Aristotle's notion of the unmoved mover is in play here, though this is a highly contested issue.⁵⁰

49) W. Jaeger, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

50) A. P. Bos surveys the controversy. According to him (*Cosmic and Meta-Cosmic Theology in Aristotle's Lost Dialogues* [Leiden, 2003], pp. 186-190): H. von Arnim, 'Die Entstehung der Gotteslehre des Aristoteles', *SB. Akad. W. Wien*, 212.5 (1931), pp. 3-80; repr. as 'Die Entwicklung der Aristotelischen Gotteslehre' in F.P. Hager, *Metaphysik und Theologie des Aristoteles* (Darmstadt, 1969), pp. 1-74; W. K. C. Guthrie, 'The Development of Aristotle's Theology', *The Classical Quarterly* 27 (1933), pp. 162-171; J. Moreau, *L'âme du monde de Platon aux Stoiciens* (Paris, 1939; repr. Hildesheim, 1965), p. 118; H. Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy* (Baltimore, 1944); J. Pépin, *Théologie cosmique et théologie chrétienne* (Paris, 1964), pp. 135-72 and 216 ff.), for example, all reject, for different reasons, Jaeger's identification of *alius quidam* in the

In any case, we have no reason to assume that the confusion alluded to by Cicero does not track something quite real in Aristotle's text. If we wish to make use of Cicero's report, we cannot ignore its details, and its details do supply a rather confusing account, according to which Aristotle presents at least four possible candidates for being a god, some of which are positively incompatible, not only with one another, but also with Aristotle's views as stated elsewhere. Jaeger proposes to eradicate the confusion by changing the details of Cicero's exposition. Instead of saying that the heavenly heat (i.e. aether)⁵¹ is a god, which is precisely what Cicero reports (*caeli ardorem deum dicit esse*), Jaeger would have Aristotle merely describe it 'as a divine body, or as a more divine body, as he does in the treatises – he certainly did not call it God', and, when Aristotle is reported to have said that 'the world itself' (*mundum ipsum*) is a god, Jaeger would have him refer (unbeknownst to Cicero) only to 'the heavens, the mere periphery'.⁵² But saving Aristotle from inconsistency cannot be carried out with any degree of success at the cost of disregarding the evidence about his views. Rather, it is quite conceivable that the inconsistencies in Aristotle's text are enunciated by Cicero's Epicurean quite legitimately, and that the confusion Aristotle has caused in allowing them is a deliberate move on his part.

fragment with the unmoved mover. B. Effe, *op. cit.*, p. 161 and B. Dumoulin, *Recherches sur le premier Aristote* (Eudème, de la Philosophie, Protreptique) (Paris, 1981), pp. 44-52 return to Jaeger's position on this question.

51) Hahm, *op. cit.*, argues against the identification of *caeli ardor* in this fragment with aether. He ultimately suggests fire as an alternative, wishing to preserve a 'four-element cosmology' in Aristotle's *De philosophia* (see esp. p. 71). For a criticism of this view see Bos, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-4.

52) Ibid. Similarly, B. Effe takes Aristotle's description of the whole cosmos as a god, reported by Cicero (or his Epicurean speaker Velleius) in the fragment we are dealing with, to be a mere 'hyperbole', intended to attribute to the cosmos a divine status, but not the actual status of a god (*op. cit.*, p. 159).

After (possibly while) rejecting the traditional anthropomorphic conception of divinity (using his version of Plato's allegory of the cave), as well, presumably, as rejecting some of Plato's (and perhaps other philosophers') theological views, while accepting others, Aristotle might have offered possible candidates for being a god. He might have done so noncommittally, proposing (for example) the four items appearing in the fragment discussed above taken from Cicero (Fr. 26a, Ross), all of which he would have considered more plausible than those already rejected, but some more plausible than others. It is likely, for instance, that part of the work discussed aether as the fifth element, as we learn from four more fragments taken from Cicero,⁵³ and one from the Clementine *Recognitions*,⁵⁴ in the course of which Aristotle may have proposed it as a possible candidate, emphasizing its special status (already established, for instance, in Plato's *Timaeus*) among the material elements. After all, it was 'an old belief that the aether was either the seat of divinity or itself God'.⁵⁵ This candidate may subsequently have been rejected on the grounds of the absurdity in singling out one element of the world as a god after having claimed either that the world as a whole is a god (as Cicero's Epicurean points out) or rather that the things made of this substance (namely the celestial bodies) are gods. The requirements X would have to meet in order to qualify as (a) god would have been made clearer through this process of elimination, with something like the unmoved mover getting the upper hand as the discussion advanced. Supposing, however, that the prime unmoved mover, even if hinted at or even mentioned, has not been fully

53) Cicero, *Academica* I. 7. 26; *Tusc.* I. 10. 22, I. 17. 41, I. 26. 65-27. 66=*De phil.* Fr. 27A-d, Ross.

54) Clem. Rom. *Recogn.* 8. 15=*De phil.* Fr. 27e, Ross.

55) W.K.C. Guthrie, *op. cit.*, p. 163: 'In Euripides', for example, 'the aether appears now as the home of Zeus, now as Zeus himself' (Ibid. Cf. Fr. 487, 877 Nauck.)

introduced as a positive philosophical doctrine in the *De philosophia*, as we have,⁵⁶ we may conjecture that a full discussion of it, as opposed to an elimination of other candidates leaving it as a frontrunner, has been postponed, most probably until another work (e.g. *Metaphysics* Λ.7) where it may be shown in detail why it is the most deserving of the title 'God' (ὁ θεός).

Thus, Aristotle's recommendation to exercise modesty in dealing with matters of religion amounts to an adherence to rigorous philosophical argumentation, according to his standards and reaching his own conclusions and worldview. Since we have no evidence of an elaboration of this view in the *De philosophia*, and indeed since we do have some evidence to the contrary, it would be safe to assume that that dialogue functioned as a preparatory work for the introduction of Aristotle's positive take on theological issues (*inter alia*). This preparatory work, however, goes a long way in teaching us about Aristotle's assessment of religion, philosophy, some of the leading streams and figures in both systems, and the relation between all of the above. A basic correlation that Aristotle finds between Platonic metaphysics and traditional religion leads him to form a single criticism of both, which, for him, renders the claim to truth of either at the very least questionable. He then proceeds to a more detailed account of both systems. Focusing on his account of religion, we have seen that, for Aristotle, though lacking informative value, it is valuable in so far as some of its practices can be shown to be effective means of attaining various genuine benefits, such as a favorable or useful emotional state, and in particular one which is conducive to rational activity (learning).

56) See pp. 26-7. Cf. Elias in *Cat.* 115. 3-5.

Chapter II: Traditional Religion and its Natural Function in Aristotle

1: The problem. A necessary function for a false religion

Aristotle is quite clear on the extent to which he thinks the content of traditional religion should be taken seriously by philosophers. For example, he says in *Metaphysics* Λ. 8:

It has been transmitted to us through the ancients and very-old ones, and has been passed on to future generations, in the form of a myth, that these [sc. the highest substances, acting as primary movers of the heavenly bodies]⁵⁷ are gods, and that the divine encloses the whole of nature. The rest has been added, mythically, with a view to persuading the masses and for its usefulness in supporting the laws and bringing about the general advantage. For they say that they [sc. the gods] are man-shaped or resemble certain other animals, and [they add] other things, which are consequent on or similar to those already said. If one were to take the first point by itself, separately from those [additions], namely that they think the first substances are gods, they would be thought to have spoken excellently (lit. divinely), and though every art/science (τέχνη) and philosophy have probably been discovered as far as possible and destroyed again and again, these opinions of theirs have been preserved like remains up until now. The ancestral opinion, that we have obtained through the first ones, is clear to us only to this extent (ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον). (1074a38-b14)

Here Aristotle says that one needs to strip the tenets of popular Greek religion⁵⁸ of all their anthropomorphic and mythical features in order to uncover the basic, true and philosophically significant theses which they conceal – in this case, that there necessarily are eternal unmoved movers of the heavenly bodies, which are substances, and that these

57) Taking οἱτοί at 1074b3 to refer to the unmoved movers of heavenly bodies, as opposed to the heavenly bodies themselves, with J. Palmer, 'Aristotle on the Ancient Theologians', *Apeiron* 33.3 (2000), 181-205 at 198-200.

58) Whether or not Palmer is correct in attributing the tradition in question, not to Aristotle's immediate predecessors, but rather to those living 'in the period before the most recent cataclysm' (ibid. 198), Aristotle must have thought of this tradition as being at least mediated by popular Greek religion and its particular (say, mythical) modes of presentation, which is the main object of the criticism here.

beings are gods, i.e. eternally existing tremendously powerful beings, exactly as Aristotle's philosophical analysis in *Λ*. 7 and the prior part of *Λ*. 8 has established. Such philosophical truths, then, for Aristotle, are independent of the content of traditional religion (though our learning of them might depend on the exposure to such content, or even on religious belief, to some extent, e.g. given our particular cognitive mechanism). Moreover, the content of traditional religion, constituted by anthropomorphic, mythical depictions of divinity, is not only separable from philosophical truth. For Aristotle, there is simply nothing true in mythical stories about the gods or in religious beliefs, even though there is truth in the ancient wisdom on which some of them are based. Throughout his corpus, he is committed to a Xenophanean critical view of conventional religious beliefs:⁵⁹

All people say that the gods are ruled by a king for this reason, namely that some of them to this day are, and others in the distant past were, themselves ruled by a king. Just as human beings make the shapes [of the gods] similar to their own, thus [they] also [do this in the case of] the gods' ways of life. (*Politics* I. 2, 1252b24-7)

Here, Aristotle applies his criticism to a particular conviction at the center of popular Greek religion. The designation of Zeus as the king of the gods is of course found in Hesiod (e.g. *Theog.* 886: Ζεὺς δὲ θεῶν βασιλεύς), as well as in other ancient Greek epic poems.⁶⁰ Aristotle himself attributes the description of Zeus as 'ruling as king and governing' (βασιλεύειν καὶ ἄρχειν) to 'the poets' (οἱ ποιηταί) (*Metaph.* N. 4, 1091b4-6),

59) A partial list of direct corollaries would include: *Met.* B. 2, 997b8-12; *NE* I. 12, 1101b19-20; *Poetics* 1460b35-1461a1; *EE* VII. 15, 1249b13-16. Cf. chapter I, pp. 22-3.
60) Hesiod: *Theog.* 71, 923; *Works* 668. *Cycle: Theabais*, fr. 3 [Kinkel]; *Cypria*, fr. 6 [Kinkel]. *Hymn to Demeter*, 335. Interestingly, G. M. Calhoun notices that Homer does not share in this convention, choosing to designate Zeus as ἄναξ rather than βασιλεύς ('Zeus the Father in Homer', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 66 [1935], 1-17).

and, by undermining its legitimacy, he repudiates the contents of the religious tradition associated with, and to a large extent informed or even constituted by, the works of such people.

When Aristotle goes on later in the *Politics* to describe his ideal *polis*, however, he makes it clear that traditional religion will have a large role to play in it. He reserves in the ideal city a place for a class of retired citizens who would function as priests (VII. 9, 1329a26-34), he allocates a fixed part of the city's budget to 'costs related to the gods' (VII. 10, 1330a8-9), and he discusses the way in which buildings assigned to the gods should be erected (VII. 12, 1331a22-30; 1331b16-17). Indeed, even certain practices that are otherwise strictly prohibited in Aristotle's ideal *polis*, such as the display of statues or pictures representing unseemly acts, gain a special permission by him in the religious context (VII. 17, 1336b14-19). Thus, although Aristotle explicitly says that the content of the religion of his day is flawed, he does not seem to think (unlike Plato) that it needs to be revised in order to be accepted in a philosophically adequate state, even in the one established under the most favorable political circumstances possible. One may wonder what good Aristotle thinks could come out of institutionalized rituals, sacrifices and prayers dedicated to gods when he clearly thinks the only gods there are are not responsive to us and do not intervene in our individual daily lives in any conceivable way.⁶¹

This raises the question of whether and to what extent Aristotle is consistent in declaring traditional religious ideas false while also giving them and religious practices a positive place in his ideal *polis*.⁶² The issue gets further complicated by the fact that

61) See R. Mayhew, 'Aristotle on Prayer', *Rhizai* 2 (2007), 295-309 at 296.

62) In order to eliminate the inconsistency above, *inter alia*, S. Salkever goes as far as

Aristotle does not merely admit traditional religion into his ideal *polis*, but in fact does so because he views this religion and its institutions, or the 'supervision concerned with religious affairs' and maintained by priests, as integral parts of political organization, conditionally necessary for any *polis* to exist as such (*Pol.* VI. 8, 1322b18-22; VII. 8, 1328b2-13).⁶³ Thus, even though, as we can see already from what he says in the passage from *Met.* Λ. 8 quoted above, Aristotle explicitly mentions at least one way in which traditional religion might be useful for the *polis*, despite the total falsity of its content, he must do more than this, in order for his view to be consistent. He must, that is, supply a function for the performance of which traditional religion is absolutely necessary, so that we may see for just what reason the *polis* simply cannot do without it.

It seems from the passage quoted at the beginning from *Met.* Λ. 8 that Aristotle finds traditional religion politically useful for controlling certain people ('the many') by getting them to believe in its false content, with a view to supporting the laws and bringing about the general advantage (1074b5). He elaborates on this idea in the *Politics*, and adopts it for himself, when he says, in the context of a discussion of the ideal *polis*, that it would

suggesting that the '*polis* of our prayers' discussed in book VII of the *Politics* is in fact the *polis*, not of Aristotle's own prayers, but rather of those of a 'real [but unphilosophical] man ... fully committed to political life', who 'understands human virtue quite differently from Aristotle' ('Whose Prayer? The Best Regime of Book 7 and the Lessons of Aristotle's *Politics*', *Political Theory* 35.1 (2007), 29-46 at 32, see 36-38 for the discussion of religion). Unfortunately, this hypothesis rests on a thoroughly unnatural dichotomy between the discussion of chapters 4-12 of this book and that of the surrounding chapters (1-3, 13-15); Salkever interprets the book as a 'dialogue between the prayer of the noble citizen ... and the quite different voice of the theorist', respectively (ibid. 34).

63) Hereafter, conditional (or 'hypothetical') necessity is used to indicate the necessity of a certain thing in order for some goal or end to be accomplished (*PA* I. 1, 639b26-30). By sharp contrast, material necessity is the necessity, which Aristotle also finds to be regularly operative in nature, by which a certain thing invariably follows upon or is caused by a further thing or circumstance, without thereby implying the progression towards any end or goal (e.g. *GA* II. 4, 739b26-30).

be easy for the legislator to get pregnant women to exercise daily, which is required for their health, by 'ordering them to take a daily walk to a place where they may worship the gods who are in charge of watching over birth', e.g. Artemis (VII.17, 1335b12-16).

Though Aristotle tells us that it would be easy (ῥᾴδιον) for the *polis* to make use of the false content of traditional religion in order to deceive the masses, thereby controlling their behavior and securing social stability, he does not say that traditional religion is necessary for that end. It may be equally possible to convince pregnant women to exercise daily by administering health education programs, or by propagating stories similar to, but other than, the myths about goddesses such as Artemis. In more difficult cases, say the prevention of criminal behavior, one might think that another task (ἔργον) in the *polis*, which Aristotle explicitly says is necessary for maintaining obedience (i.e. ὅπλα: 1328b7-10), could also be sufficient for that end. Punitive measures by the state, that is, may ensure adherence to the law, so that religion would not be required for that purpose.

Moreover, in Aristotle's ideal *polis*, the entire citizenry would consist, if not of actually wise people (*sophoi*), then at the very least of virtuous people of practical wisdom (*phronimoi*).⁶⁴ Aristotle expects such people to reject anthropomorphism with regard to divinity, as he makes clear by speaking openly to the audience of his *Ethics*, people of good upbringing who are now on their path to becoming *phronimoi*, about the vanity of speaking about gods as engaging in any action attributable to human beings, with the exception of theoretical contemplation (*NE* X. 8, 1178b7-23). Since such mature citizens, too, would be required to participate in traditional religion (oftentimes in settings

64) See p. 82 ff. Cf. *Politics* VII. 1, 1323b1-2; 2, 1324a24-5; 14, 1333a40-b5. See also C. D. C. Reeve (trans. comm.), *Aristotle: Politics* (Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1998), lxxii.

excluding the presence of those non-citizens whom the city would control by getting them to believe in the content of that religion), one would expect Aristotle to find a direct benefit in traditional religion for the lives of those people – one which is not confined to the advantage of living in a safe society as a result of the deception of some portions of its population.

In what follows I will argue that in order to locate the necessary natural function of traditional religion to which Aristotle's political theory is committed, we must uncover a usefulness for it in enabling the achievement for his citizens of what he considers the top human goal, the attainment of the knowledge of first philosophy, which, as he says, is the most worthy of being engaged in by god(s) and has god(s) as its object(s) (*Met.* A. 2, 983a4-7). Roughly, my interpretation of the place of and need for traditional religion in any naturally constituted *polis*, on Aristotle's theory, is as follows. The *polis* is a community which has reached 'the limit of complete self-sufficiency' and exists 'for the sake of living well' (*Pol.* I. 2, 1252b27-30). It therefore aims at the flourishing lives of its members, and this includes, indeed as a top priority, the accommodation of philosophical pursuits, culminating in the contemplation of god(s).⁶⁵ Since Aristotle takes philosophical inquiry about X to commence from 'wondering' about X (*Met.* A. 2, 982b12-17: θαυμάζειν – roughly, finding X wonderful or marvelous, but puzzling), he should think that the starting point for achieving 'first philosophy', concerned with (the) god(s), is 'wondering' about god(s). Engendering 'wonder' about gods in those citizens of the *polis* that would turn out to be capable of acquiring philosophical knowledge, in turn, should

65) See J. M. Cooper, 'Political Community and the Highest Good', in J. G. Lennox and R. Bolton (eds.) *Being, Nature and Life in Aristotle* (Cambridge, 2010), 212-264 at 241 n. 40.

be carried out by the office concerned with 'the supervision of matters relating to the gods', that is to say the priesthood maintaining religion. That it should be traditional religion in particular that is necessary for the above end is explained by the fact that Aristotle thinks, quite reasonably, of humans, and in fact animals more generally, as being psychologically hardwired to take pleasure in (learning of) 'things that are akin' to themselves (in this specific case, anthropomorphic gods) (*Rhet.* 1371b12-15). The function of traditional religion for learning, via the production in the learner of 'wonder' (θαυμασία), though not mentioned explicitly by Aristotle, is strongly corroborated by later authors directly engaging with and making use of his theory (e.g. Strabo, as we shall see). Attributing it to Aristotle solves the problem of how he may think of traditional religion both as having a false content and as being a natural, conditionally necessary part of the *polis* as such.

In the next section, I shall show that, on Aristotle's theory, traditional religion, though its content is false, must have a necessary function in any naturally existing *polis*, such as the function I am proposing, despite possible and actual views to the contrary. Then, in section III, I will expound my positive proposal. In section IV, I consider a possible objection, according to which the content of traditional religion, being false, cannot have a natural use, let alone one whose result would not be regularly achieved, as for Aristotle it would not be. I reply by drawing attention to Aristotle's discussion of money (in the *Politics*), which, he thinks, is an unnatural convention which nevertheless has a natural use in the not commonly encountered process of natural wealth acquisition. By analogy, Aristotle would be quite consistent in attributing to the content of traditional religion a natural role in a teleological process, even if that content is itself unnatural and the goal

of the process in question would only be seldom achieved. In section V, finally, I return to the use, mentioned above, of religion for maintaining social stability, and introduce its possible use for moral education. I argue that these uses do not secure this phenomenon a necessary function, as, for Aristotle, it must be seen to have.

2: Avoiding the problem. True religion; religious reform; unnecessary religion

The initial problem we face arises because of the seeming inconsistency among Aristotle's apparent views that (a) the content of traditional religion is false; (b) traditional religion is to be kept as is (unreformed) in any naturally existing *polis*, even in the ideal city; (c) traditional religion, and its institutions, are in fact conditionally necessary for the *polis* as such, that is, for any self-governing society that is politically organized according to nature. Eliminating any one of these three items would enable us to avoid the problem. However, the strategy of arguing that Aristotle was in fact not actually committed to all three is doomed to fail. (i) It has been argued that Aristotle's criticism of the anthropomorphic nature of Greek religion is restricted to the works of the ancient poets and theologians, which leaves room for Aristotle to view some traditional religious views concerning the divine, i.e. 'those that everyone shares and those of highly regarded minds' (corresponding to the two types of *endoxa* discussed in *Topics* I. 14), as a respectable source of truths on such matters (contra (a)).⁶⁶ One immediate problem with

66) R. Bodéüs, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-14. In fact, Bodéüs thinks of the traditional views in question as 'the primary basis for all knowledge about the gods' nature' (ibid. p. 113). He argues that the *endoxa* Aristotle accepts as truths regarding matters of religion are not even affected by (if anything, they themselves affect) his own metaphysical theory (which, for Bodéüs, does not deal with gods at all, but rather only with beings that are in some way analogous to gods; see ibid. pp. 26-9), giving them a privileged status as

this proposal is that we simply have no means of distinguishing the (false) 'theological' views of the ancient poets concerning the gods from the (supposedly true) 'consensus' of the many or of the wise. When Aristotle says, as we have already mentioned, that the portrayal of gods as ruled by kings is due to a projection onto them of people's personal experience with being ruled thus (*Pol.* I. 2, 1252b24-7), he clearly criticizes this belief for its underlying anthropomorphism (i.e. the idea that gods are of such a nature as to be capable of living in a monarchical political system, similarly to humans), which is present in the portrayal of these gods in practically every extant epic poem. However, Aristotle attributes this belief to 'all people' (πάντες), which is his usual way of indicating a universal belief.⁶⁷

Furthermore, far from accepting the consensus view about gods, Aristotle directly criticizes the opinions of 'the many' concerning the gods. In the *Poetics* 1460b35-1461a1, he says that though the things said concerning the gods (τὰ περὶ θεῶν) may be 'neither what is better to say nor true', as Xenophanes thinks, they are 'nevertheless certainly in accordance with opinion' (ἀλλ' οὖν φασι). The context of this statement is a discussion of the descriptions found in poetry, and so this passage makes it clear (as does the one about Zeus as King of the gods) not only that Aristotle does not accept as authoritative the beliefs of the many or of the wise concerning religious matters, but that he thinks of these beliefs as closely connected, if not identical, to the religious content found in the ancient poets. Aristotle does not distinguish between different classes of contents in traditional religion, let alone does he recognize a hierarchy of such classes, and he ought not to have

sources of true information concerning the gods over both theology (understood as the practice of poets) and 'theoretical philosophy' (ibid. pp. 185-7).

67) As Bodéüs himself says, *op. cit.*, 113.

done so, given the obvious overlaps and mutual influence (indeed, possible identity) there must have been between the ideas presented in poetry and theology and those making up the 'consensus' view. When we discuss Aristotle's views of traditional religion, then, we must understand this term as including the entirety of these ideas.

It has also been argued, and sometimes assumed, that, though Aristotle may view the traditional religion of his day as flawed and largely false, (ii) the religion he envisages for his ideal polis would in fact be congruous with his own philosophy. The religion of that city, in other words, might either be a compromise with traditional religion, incorporating the worship of what both Aristotle and traditional religion agree are gods, say the 'sun and moon',⁶⁸ or even be limited to the worship of gods understood entirely in Aristotelian terms.⁶⁹ On this proposal, we should deny (b) above, i.e. that Aristotle endorses the incorporation into every naturally constituted city of traditional religion as is, including his ideal city. But there is simply no good evidence for supposing that Aristotle recommends any such reform.⁷⁰ Indeed, the case discussed above of legislating a mandatory daily worship by pregnant women of 'the gods who are in charge of watching

68) R. Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy* (Oxford, 2002), p. 204. Cf. R. Kraut (trans. comm.), *Aristotle: Politics Books VII and VIII* (Oxford, 1997), 102.

69) D. Winthrop argues that Aristotle's intention in the *Politics* is 'to suggest the desirability of reforming religion in such a way that the gods worshipped resemble as much as possible the Aristotelian *nous*', in 'Aristotle's *Politics*, book I: A Reconsideration', *Perspectives on Political Science* 37 (2008), 189-199 at n. 30.

70) In support of his proposed reform of traditional religion in Aristotle's ideal *polis*, R. Kraut only cites *Met.* A. 8, 1074a38-b14, which he thinks discusses 'a traditional part of religion that Aristotle treats with respect', namely the divinity of the 'heavenly bodies' (*Aristotle: Political Philosophy* [Oxford, 2002], p. 204 and n. 26; cf. *Aristotle: Politics Books VII and VIII* [Oxford, 1997], p. 102). But, not only does this passage not recommend the abolition of traditional religious ideas in any political context, but it specifically introduces the traditional anthropomorphic depictions of divinity as useful for political purposes, as we shall further see in section 3 below. Winthrop cites the same text, as well as *Pol.* III. 1286a9-1288a6 (*op. cit.* n. 30). It is unclear why the latter text would support religious reform.

over birth' (*Pol.* VII. 17, 1335b15-16), occurring in the context of the *ideal polis*, suggests that Aristotle wishes to retain even in that city the same old religious traditions along with its anthropomorphic ideas of the gods whose truth he denies. Aristotle envisages the citizens of the 'city of our prayers' as honoring exclusively neither 'the most basic causes of their world'⁷¹ nor the prime mover of the heavens, but as worshipping, say, Artemis.

Finally, (iii) one cannot deny, or treat as a temporary aberration, Aristotle's quite explicit view that traditional religion is necessary for any *polis* to exist as such. First, he includes in his list of 'necessary supervisions' (*ἀναγκαῖαι ἐπιμέλειαι*) in a *polis*:

The [supervision] that is concerned with the gods. For instance, priests, supervisors of matters concerning the holy places, the preservation of existing, and the fixing of ruined, buildings, as well as those of the other [duties] inasmuch as they pertain to the gods' (*Pol.* VI. 8, 1322b18-22).

Later on, he elaborates on this idea by saying that 'necessary supervisions' are those things which 'a *polis* cannot exist without', again including among such things 'the supervision relating to the divine (*τὴν περὶ τὸ θεῖον ἐπιμέλειαν*), which they call a "priesthood" (*ἱερατεῖαν*)' (VII. 8, 1328b2-13). This elaboration makes it clear that the necessity Aristotle attributes to establishing religious offices in the city is conditional necessity,⁷² i.e. that possessing these offices is necessary in order for any city to achieve its natural purpose of enabling its citizens to lead a happy, naturally fulfilled life. This explains why these offices are necessarily present in *any polis*, including Aristotle's ideal city, which is in fact the subject matter of the discussion in which the elaboration occurs. Evidently, for Aristotle, a *polis* simply cannot exist, as such, in the absence of institutionalized religion, which, based on our assessment of point (b) above, remains

71) R. Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy* [Oxford, 2002], 204.

72) See n. 63.

unreformed and thus includes anthropomorphic and other mythical elements. In *Pol.* IV. 4, where Aristotle enumerates the necessary parts (ἀναγκαῖα μέρη) of the *polis*, which he says are analogous to the things that are 'necessary for every animal to have (e.g. some of the sense organs and the part that processes and receives food)' (1290b26-9), he skips from item [5] on the list to item [7], omitting item [6] (1290b39 ff.); see paragraph below. C. D. C. Reeve contends that 'the unidentified sixth part may be the class of priests (listed as an important part of any city at 1328b11-13)',⁷³ which seems correct if we compare the other items on the list to the list of necessary tasks (ἔργα) in the *polis* which Aristotle sets out at VII. 8, saying that among these the parts of the *polis* (as already set out in IV. 4) would necessarily be found. Following that suggestion, we may correlate the items on the two lists as follows:

<u>Necessary parts of the <i>polis</i> (IV. 4, 1290b39-1291b1)</u>	<u>Necessary tasks in a <i>polis</i> (VII. 8, 1328b2-15)</u>
[1] Farmers	[1] Food supply / [4] Supply of wealth
[2] Vulgar handicraftsmen (βάνανσοι)	[2] Crafts
[3] Traders	[1] Food supply / [4] Supply of wealth
[4] Hired workers (θῆτες)	[2] Crafts ⁷⁴
[5] Warriors	[3] The use of weapons
[6] ?	[5] Supervision of religious matters
[7] The rich	[4] Supply of wealth
[8] Public servants / Statesmen	[6] Deliberative / judicial judgement

73) C. D. C. Reeve, *op. cit.*, 108, n. 33.

74) Farmers, vulgar handicraftsmen, traders and hired workers are the 'four main parts of the multitude' (μέρη τοῦ πλήθους: VI. 7, 1321a5-6), and their tasks are closely associated (cf. III. 5, 1278a11-13; VI. 4, 1319a26-8).

As we can see, the only item on Aristotle's list of necessary tasks in the *polis* missing a correlate on his list of the city's parts is the supervision of matters pertaining to the gods, whence we conclude that the missing item on the latter [6] is the class of priests. Thus, the institutions responsible for the maintenance of traditional religion, in Aristotle's view, are not merely beneficial for the *polis*. They are necessary for its proper functioning, and the people maintaining them (i.e. priests) are considered natural, and conditionally necessary, parts of the *polis*.

Now, Aristotle regards the art of warriors, as well as that of farmers and traders, all of which form natural parts of the *polis* on his list, as being 'in accordance with nature' (even prior to becoming such parts, viz. prior to the advent of the *polis*) (I. 8, 1256a29-b6; b23-6). There is every reason to assume, then, that Aristotle generally regards the (proper) practice of any natural part of the *polis* as being itself natural, and that this must apply to the maintenance of traditional religion by priests as well. Traditional religion, whose content is totally false, for Aristotle, is, in its unrevised form, in his view, a natural, conditionally necessary part of any *polis*, including the ideal one. Aristotle, in turn, must attribute to it a function that would accord with these facts.

3: The necessary function of traditional religion

In the following sections, I shall argue that the most promising candidate for being the natural function of traditional religion in Aristotle, heeding the qualifications just mentioned, is the use of such a religion for the process of learning first philosophy. The knowledge of first philosophy is the central and most fundamental achievement in

Aristotle's theory of happiness, and any naturally existing *polis* must enable its citizens to attain it. As we shall see, traditional religion contributes to this goal directly, by generating in citizens a sense of 'wonder' about gods, thereby prompting them to inquire philosophically into divinity. Since such an inquiry, if carried out properly, ultimately leads to knowledge of first philosophy (whose objects are the true gods of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*), and since the sense of 'wonder' about gods afforded by traditional religion is in fact necessary in order for that inquiry to begin, this use of traditional religion should constitute its natural function in Aristotle's theory (we shall also see, in section 5, why other possible uses of traditional religion fail as alternatives).

In order to see how such a function might fit in with Aristotle's theory, we need to look more closely at the passage of *Met.* Λ. 8 with which we began (quoted in full above, p. 49), i.e. 1074a38-b14, in which Aristotle gives a conjectural history of the apprehension by certain very ancient persons of the fact that the unmoved movers of the heavens are gods, and the subsequent additions of anthropomorphic and mythical depictions of these gods for political purposes. At a first reading one might take this passage to make a general claim about the genesis of traditional religion, with its anthropomorphic and mythical conception of the gods, as being orchestrated by the 'ancients and very-old ones' (ἀρχαῖοι καὶ παμπάλαιοι) that Aristotle refers to, or by the legislators subsequent to them, for the purpose of regulating 'the many', viz. the mass of little-educated workers. However, it is not said explicitly that either these 'ancients' (by which Aristotle clearly means to refer only to a select group of thinkers in very ancient times), or (*a fortiori*) the statesmen making use of their teachings for their own political purposes, are in fact responsible for the invention of either anthropomorphic or

mythological depictions of divinity. Nor should we suppose that this is what Aristotle has in mind, since he seems to think (and quite plausibly) that such depictions are, most basically, a result of a human cognitive tendency. Thus he says, as we have seen, that it is all people (πάντες/οἱ ἄνθρωποι) that make the shapes and the lives of their gods similar to their own (ἐαυτοῖς ἀφομοιοῦσιν) (as opposed to simply believing the stories related to them about humanlike gods) (*Pol.* I. 2, 1252b24-7).⁷⁵ Hence, even though the passage from *Λ.* 8 implies that the traditional religion of the Greeks and other civilizations in Aristotle's day are based on the mythical interpretation of the statements made by the 'ancients', anthropomorphic and mythical depictions of divinity should precede the advent of such traditions, on the account he means to be offering. Such conceptions and depictions, it appears, are in Aristotle's view primordially present in human communities. The very ancient thinkers and the legislators subsequent to them merely build upon those religious (or proto-religious) foundations.

It is important to note, in this regard, that Aristotle attributes neither the idea that there are gods, nor the idea that gods are anthropomorphic (and in some cases zoomorphic), to his 'ancients', but rather only the idea that things of a specific kind (namely the movers of the heavenly bodies) are gods, and perhaps (the propagation of) the idea that these are anthropomorphic. If so, then it is quite possible for the opinion that there are gods, and that gods are anthropomorphic, to precede any original statement made, and any truth arrived at, by the particular 'ancients' Aristotle is concerned with in

75) Cf. p. 50, 72. In the first chapter, we have seen how a more elaborate version of the same point about the human tendency to infer the existence of anthropomorphic gods (and a criticism thereof) might be derived from the surviving fragments of *De philosophia*, in particular its version of Plato's allegory of the cave (Cicero *N.D.* II. 37. 95-6=*De phil.* Fr. 13a Ross).

the passage. Whether the 'ancients' themselves believe in such traditional gods, or rather are simply aware of their existence in the collective consciousness whose faults they already recognize, their philosophical endeavors lead them to recognize a new fact, of which neither they, nor presumably others in their environment, have previously been aware. They come to recognize, that is, the existence of eternal, incorporeal unmoved movers responsible for the motions of the heavenly bodies, and they do so, in all likelihood, through rigorous philosophical reasoning later repeated by Aristotle and his school.

Next, these 'ancients' would have been in a position to make the statement which has subsequently been 'passed on to future generations' (παραδέδοται ... τοῖς ὕστερον), and which to Aristotle they 'seem to have uttered in a godlike manner' (θείως ἄν εἰρησθαι νομίσαιεν), namely that these things, of whose essence they have learned through philosophizing, are gods. In making this statement, to repeat, they are not introducing 'god' as a new term, but rather they are showing, on philosophical grounds, that the subjects of their reasoning (the unmoved movers of the heavens) are worthy of being called 'gods', the title itself being readily available and clear. This should not come as a surprise, as it is exactly what Aristotle has done himself in the preceding chapter in the *Metaphysics* (Λ. 7), where, after showing that the prime mover must be (a) eternal and (b) a living thing, he concludes that this being must be (a) god, using a readymade definition of 'god' as 'the best, eternal living thing' (ζῷον αἰδίων ἄριστον: 1072b28-9).⁷⁶

76) I discuss this point at length in chapter III, section 1 (p. 100-ff). Cf. S. Menn, 'Aristotle's Theology', in *The Oxford Handbook of Aristotle* ed. C. Shields (Oxford, 2012), 422-464 at 423 and 452 n. 4; J. DeFilippo, 'Aristotle's Identification of the Prime Mover as God', *The Classical Quarterly* 44.2 (1994), 393-409 at 404. I also show, in that chapter, that the addition of the predicate 'best' (ἄριστον) in the definition is redundant, since Aristotle elsewhere defines 'god' as an 'eternal living thing', and clearly means for

Aristotle's proof of the existence of the unmoved mover(s) can stand without even using the term 'god', as it indeed does in *Physics* VIII. Similarly, his characterization of the unmoved movers of the heavens as eternal, living things, as we have just seen, can in principle be made without appealing to the fact that possessing these properties is sufficient for these entities to count as gods given what we ordinarily mean by this word. These facts hold also for his 'ancients', who seem to simply be precursors of Aristotelian philosophy.⁷⁷

However, the basic statement made by the 'ancients' (and by Aristotle), namely that the unmoved movers of the heavens are gods, is not insignificant. Though 'god' means (according to the traditional definition adopted by Aristotle) 'eternal living thing', by calling certain non-anthropomorphic entities 'gods', as opposed to just saying that they are eternal living things, one immediately contrasts these beings with gods as ordinarily conceived. Why even retain, one might ask, the charged word 'god', with its potentially misleading connotations of mythological and anthropomorphic fictions, in our philosophical account of eternal living things such as the unmoved movers of the heavens? One answer is that the 'ancients', after arriving at their philosophical apprehension, need to preserve the link between mythological and metaphysical gods, since they then reapply the anthropomorphic portrayal of the gods to their newly discovered substances, and do so 'with a view to persuading the masses and for its usefulness in supporting the laws and bringing about the general advantage' (1074b3-5).

the predicate 'best' to be subsumed under that definition (cf. *Topics* III. 1, 116b13-17; IV. 2, 122b12-17).

77) See also T. K. Johansen, 'Myth and Logos in Aristotle', in *From Myth to Reason? Studies in the Development of Greek Thought* ed. R. Buxton (Oxford, 1999), 279-94 at 291.

However, since the 'ancients' are not inventing, but only reintroducing, both the word 'god' and the anthropomorphic ideas underlying it, for their political purposes (assuming that it is in fact they who, according to Aristotle's story, make such use of anthropomorphic depictions of divinity, and not instead people subsequent to their time, as may well be the case), it is possible that these ideas bear a previous advantage, which may have even benefitted the 'ancients' themselves (as well as, later on, Aristotle himself), in encouraging and motivating their original inquiry into first causes, whereby they came to recognize the unmoved movers of the heavenly bodies and spheres as the ultimate causes and principles of being. It is true that these unmoved movers, for Aristotle, would exist as they are, and would be intelligible as such, regardless of there being myths depicting anthropomorphic deities. But, as we shall see presently, being exposed to gods in their ordinary, anthropomorphic form might still be helpful for arriving at the philosophical knowledge of such facts, just as it may also be helpful for controlling the masses. Indeed, it is possible that for human beings, given their particular psychological apparatus, arriving at the philosophical knowledge in question would be conditioned on being first exposed to traditional gods.

Interestingly, this last idea gains support by post-Aristotelian authors in antiquity. Strabo, for instance, discusses at length the use of anthropomorphic and mythical ideas of the gods for arriving at theoretical knowledge alongside their use for persuading 'the many'. He writes (*Geographica*, 1.2.8):

It was not only the poets who accepted the myths, but the *poleis* and the lawgivers also did so, and long beforehand, for the sake of their usefulness (τοῦ χρησίμου χάριν), having glimpsed into the natural condition of the rational animal. For man is a lover of knowledge (φιλειδήμων), and the beginning of this is being a lover of myths (φιλόμυθον). It is thence, then, that children begin to attend to, and to further partake

themselves in, discourse. The reason is that the myth is a sort of a new language (καινολογία), telling [them] not of established facts but of other things besides ... And whenever you add the wonderful (τὸ θαυμαστόν) and the portentous, you increase the pleasure ... At the beginning, then, it is necessary (ἀνάγκη) to make use of such bait, and as [the children] come of age [one must] guide [them] towards learning of true facts, once the intelligence (τῆς διανοίας) develops and is no longer in need of 'flatterers'. But every ignorant and uneducated man is in a sense a child, and is likewise a lover of myths ... And since the portentous is not only pleasurable but also dreadful, there is a use for both forms [of myth] with a view both to children and to adults ... For, it is impossible for a philosopher to lead a crowd of women, or any vulgar multitude, towards reverence, piety and belief by using reason (λόγῳ), but he must do so through religious fear (δεισιδαιμονία), and this in turn cannot be achieved without myth-creation and talking marvels.

Strabo's reliance on Aristotle in this passage has been acknowledged by scholars, with regard to several points. His ascription to myths of usefulness for controlling the uneducated is similar to Aristotle's point about the persuasion of the masses in our passage from *Λ.* 8.⁷⁸ The point about man being, owing to its natural condition, a lover of knowing (φιλειδήμων) has been likened to the famous opening statement of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, according to which all humans by nature desire to know (εἰδέναι: *A.* 1, 980a1).⁷⁹ The reference to the 'wonderful' (τὸ θαυμαστόν) for the initiation of learning true facts, and the comparison in this context between the lover of knowledge and the lover of myths, has been rightly compared with an almost identical formulation of these ideas in Aristotle's *Met.* *A.* 2, 982b12-19.⁸⁰ To these we might add the similarity between Strabo's point about using fear, as opposed to argumentation/reason (λόγος), to guide the

78) M. J. Hollerich, 'Myth and History in Eusebius's "*Dea Vista Constantini*": "*Vit. Const.* 1.12" in its Contemporary Setting', *The Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989), 421-445 at 428.

79) R. Renehan, 'The Private Aristotle: Two Clues', *Hermes* 123 (1995), 281-92 at 289.

80) D. Quinn, '*Me audiendi ... stupentem*: The Restoration of Wonder in Boethius's *Consolation*', *University of Toronto Quarterly* 57 (1988), 447-470. Aristotle and Strabo both use the same word for 'lover of myth' (φιλόμυθος), and use similar words for 'wonder', 'wonderful', 'wondering', all cognate with θαυμασία, to express their respective ideas.

behavior of 'the vulgar multitude' and Aristotle's similar account in *NE* X. 9 1179b10-13; b20-6.

The conclusion to draw from the comparison between Strabo and Aristotle is that Strabo's idea of the political use of mythology, not only for persuasion of the masses to right behavior, but also for eventual learning by educated citizens of true facts, is also due to Aristotle. Possibly, Strabo had access to a relevant lost work in which the point was made.⁸¹ Indeed, two other stretches of text in Strabo are standardly included in the editions of Aristotle's fragments, though neither of them mentions Aristotle by name.⁸² It is important to note that Strabo's point builds on Aristotle's description (in *Λ*. 8) of the political use of mythical, anthropomorphic depictions of the gods, as opposed to 'myth' generally speaking, so that it is not just any wonder aroused in children via myths, but specifically wonder about divinity aroused through making the gods seem humanlike, that would be relevant for the role of myths in the educational process, at the end of which, as I am proposing, the student is to learn, not just any odd fact, but rather the facts of 'first philosophy' dealing with the true nature of those existing entities that are worthy of being called 'gods'. Strabo omits this feature of Aristotle's account, since in writing his geography he is interested in the use of myths not for philosophical, but rather for historical and geographical, instruction, though his point about Homer's addition of false myths to actual occurrences for educational purposes (πρὸς τὸ παιδευτικόν) does presuppose that it is in order to learn of those facts that the myths are used, so that getting

81) M. F. Burnyeat even argues, following F. Blass, that the passage we have been considering from *Met.* *Λ*. 8 (1074a38-b12) was in fact copied by Aristotle from another, more polished, work: '*A Map of Metaphysics Zeta* (Pittsburgh, 2001), 141-5; cf. F. Blass, 'Aristotelisches', *Rheinisches Museum* 30 (1875), 481-505. W. D. Ross criticizes this view, drawing on W. Jaeger (ad 1073a3-b17).

82) Cf. Strabo 14.5.9=*Protrepticus* Fr. 16C Ross; 1.4.9=*Alexander* Fr. 2b Ross.

the audience to wonder about a different subject matter would not be effective (or as effective) for that purpose (1.2.9).

Aristotle's own discussion of the relevance of 'wonder' (θαυμάζειν) for philosophizing in *Met. A. 2* corroborates this last point. For, as he says there, it is by wondering first at 'the strange things ready to hand' (τὰ πρόχειρα τῶν ἀτόπων) that humans began, and still begin, to inquire, advancing gradually towards wondering about 'greater matters, e.g. about the conditions of the moon, and concerning the sun and the stars, and about the genesis of the whole world' (982b12-17).⁸³ It is wonder issuing from each particular issue, then, that prompts one to inquire into that issue, until one reaches a satisfactory account. The last issue mentioned above, the 'genesis of the whole world', is linked to the ordinary conception of divinity, since Aristotle says that 'god seems to all people to be among the causes and a kind of a first principle' (δοκεῖ ... πᾶσιν: 983a8-9). Since, as he says in what immediately follows (983a4-7), the most honorable science is that which both is fitting for god(s) to have and has god(s) as its object(s), Aristotle must deem the wonder aroused in a person concerning the god(s), which would then be a starting point for their inquiry into the nature of god(s), crucially important. Now, Aristotle makes it clear that myths, such as those appearing in Homer, are fraught with 'the wonderful' (τὸ θαυμαστόν), even more so than in tragic plays (*Poet.* 1460a11-14; cf. *Met. A. 2*, 982b19). Since he also thinks that (a) wondering about something implies the desire to learn (of that thing) (*Rhet.* 1371a30-2), and presumably therefore that the greater the wonder the stronger the desire would be, and that (b) one naturally enjoys more that which is akin to oneself ('e.g. a human being [is pleasant] to another human being, a

83) Cf. Plato, *Theaetetus* 155d.

horse to another horse, and a young person to another young person') (1371b12-15), it follows that the surest way of engendering a genuine enthusiasm about the gods which would in turn be followed by a philosophical investigation of them, is through anthropomorphic, mythical depictions of divinity. It is not a far cry from this to suggest that it is at least partly for this reason that (i) Aristotle's 'ancients' (or their heirs) made use of such depictions, and (ii) traditional religion needs to be kept in every *polis*. Put in this light, Strabo's point that myths are used in the *polis*, not just for maintaining social stability, but also for the educational purposes of those citizens who are expected not to accept and hold traditional religious beliefs in adulthood, even if not directly borrowed, seems to provide us with a legitimate, and defensible extension of Aristotle's view.⁸⁴

Moreover, not only is the usefulness of traditional religion for the process of learning philosophical truths in line with Aristotle's theory, but there seems to be every reason to accept it as the natural function for which Aristotle deems traditional religion conditionally necessary in the *polis*. Persuading subjects to obey the laws of the city, though it might require instilling fear in them, does not in principle require that this fear be a fear of the gods. Though religion may facilitate such persuasion, then, it does not seem to be necessary for it (simple threat of punishment by the state might be enough).

84) J. Chuska touches briefly on the relation between the 'wonder' in religion and in philosophy (*Aristotle's Best Regime: A reading of Aristotle's Politics* VII. 1-10 [Lanham, 2000], 202). But, instead of considering the usefulness of the former for the latter, he emphasizes the 'tension' between the two. He then proposes as reasons for keeping religion in Aristotle's ideal city several *ad hoc* uses, e.g. occupying retired citizens and enabling an economic reform. He also gives as such reasons the honoring of the Aristotelian god, and the use of such a god in supplying a model for contemplation (205-9). As Chuska himself recognizes, these last two uses would require 'enrolling a new deity into the pantheon of the usual Greek gods' (203). Thus, these are not uses of traditional religion, but of a reformed religion, which neither is indicated by, nor facilitates the understanding of, Aristotle's texts, as we saw in section 2.

By contrast, ensuring that people learn about the gods does require instilling 'wonder' about the gods in them. Since this requires anthropomorphic depictions of the gods (because people naturally take pleasure in what resembles them), and since such depictions constitute the content of traditional religion, this religion, with its institutions responsible for administering and distributing that content, turn out to have a key role in enabling people with the appropriate potential to gain philosophical knowledge about what for Aristotle are actually existing gods. Strabo, for his part, explicitly flags the necessity (ἀνάγκη) of using myths in order to get people to learn, and this idea seems at this point to be quite close to Aristotle's own theory.⁸⁵

Finally, the aim of the process just described, namely the attainment of knowledge of first philosophy, is, for Aristotle, of crucial importance for both individual and civic flourishing. For the flourishing of a *polis* is determined by the flourishing of its citizens (*Pol.* VII. 2, 1324a5 ff.), and the most flourishing human life is that of a philosopher (*NE* X. 7), in which the highest good pursued is the exercise of the metaphysical knowledge of the true gods, the Aristotelian unmoved movers of the outer sphere and the other movers of the individual heavenly bodies, the planets and the stars. Indeed, according to Aristotle, the *polis* exists for the sake of the good life of its citizens (*Politics* I. 2, 1252b29-30), understood as their *eudaimonia* (cf. III. 9, 1280b29-1281a2; VIII. 2, 1324a5-13), and an organized community with a government is not even worthy of being called a *polis* unless it is aimed at enabling its citizens to lead flourishing lives (III. 9, 1280a32-4; IV. 4, 1291a8-10), each according to his or her potential. Traditional religion,

85) It is true that Strabo also says that one must use myths in dealing with 'the vulgar multitude' (1.2.8). Crucially, however, he does not extend the use of myth in this context (as Aristotle does in *Λ.* 8) to maintaining social stability, but rather confines it to the maintenance of 'reverence, piety and belief' through 'religious fear' (δεισιδαιμόνια).

by enabling those citizens who are capable of it to attain the highest kind of knowledge achievable, and thus the highest type of *eudaimonia*, is therefore necessary for the very existence of the *polis* as such.

4: The teleological account of religion

At this point, one might raise an objection to attributing to Aristotle any natural function for traditional religion, as well as an objection to the particular function I have proposed in what preceded. First, then, one may ask how, given Aristotle's conception and criticism of traditional religion, he could regard its existence in the *polis* as part of a natural social phenomenon (for, surely, there could be no religious institutions without a religion for them to attend to). Aristotle generally attributes the frequent correctness of common beliefs to a natural instinct of human beings for what is true (*Rhet.* 1355a15, *EE* 1216b31). The content of traditional religion, by contrast, is based, he thinks, on the false anthropomorphic depiction of divinity arising from a cognitive proclivity of 'all people' (πάντες/οἱ ἄνθρωποι) (*Pol.* I. 2, 1252b24-7) to envisage gods as humanlike but extraordinarily powerful beings, which in time gives rise to civic religion, in which further false religious myths are added for political purposes. This content cannot, then, in Aristotle's view, be attributed to any human natural instinct for truth. It would most likely result, in his opinion, from the conventional opinions of the many, to be contrasted with the natural insight of the wise (*S.E.* 173a29-30). The content of traditional religion, then, turns out to be unnatural in the sense of being merely conventional, a fact which might seem to prevent it from being used naturally by the *polis* (through the relevant

natural part of the *polis*, viz. the priests) for its purposes. It is perhaps this objection that has led to the attempts, rejected in section II, at avoiding the need to discover a natural function for traditional religion in Aristotle's view, a function in enabling the *polis* to reach its natural end, even given his evident criticisms of its content.

Second, since it seems safe to assume that the successful use of traditional religion for learning philosophy would not occur regularly, or even frequently in any city, and at any rate not more regularly or more frequently than other uses (since often, and as Aristotle is well aware, the content of traditional religion would simply be taken by the majority of the population at face value), one might ask whether Aristotle could justifiably say that it is the use of religion to stimulate philosophical questioning about what gods are truly like, and so which existing entities properly count as gods, that constitutes the natural function of the phenomenon. It seems, *prima facie*, more reasonable to think that traditional religion has a natural function because its content, even if false, would most likely be usually taken to be true. In fact, however, the function we have been considering can be shown to be perfectly consistent with the principles of Aristotle's political and teleological theories, and both objections can be rejected. It is true that Aristotle does not give an explicit teleological account of how and why religious institutions are needed in any *polis*. So in order to see why the principles of his teleological politics do endorse a natural use in the *polis* of traditional religion for the sake of its role in bringing citizens with the appropriate potentials to a philosophically correct understanding of the nature of (actually existing) god(s), we can compare the 'supervision of religious matters' by the priests on behalf of the city to another task that

Aristotle claims is necessary for any city to undertake and which he does discuss in detail – the acquisition of wealth.

Aristotle discusses the art of 'wealth acquisition' (ή χρηματιστική) in *Politics* I. 8-10, and in particular its relation to the art of 'household management' (ή οικονομική) and the question regarding its naturalness. First, he makes the point that the art of wealth acquisition is not the same thing as the art of household management: the latter is concerned, not with providing resources, but rather with using them (I. 8, 1256a10-13). However, Aristotle says, whether wealth acquisition is a natural part of household management is a highly contested issue (1256a13-14). Aristotle's own answer is that wealth acquisition in fact takes two forms, one natural and one unnatural, and it is only the first, natural form that can be considered a natural part of household management. Wealth acquisition is called natural when it is directed at the procurement of 'true wealth' (ἀληθινὸς πλοῦτος), consisting in the external and instrumental goods of the kind (e.g. food) and amount necessary for the self-sufficiency of the *polis* and so the flourishing life of its individual members (1256b30-1, 1257a34-5). It is also limited to this kind and amount of goods (1256b35-7). The *polis*, according to Aristotle, assures the regular supply of necessary goods for its members by (gradually) developing an economic system. First, there arises a barter or exchange (μετάδοσις) of commodity for commodity (C-C)⁸⁶ among individual households (I. 9, 1257a15-30). Aristotle says that this practice is natural, and its result does not itself count as wealth acquisition. However, barter, when practiced regularly, gives rise to wealth acquisition over time, since it leads to the need

86) The abbreviations used hereafter (C-C, C-M-C, M-C-M and M-M [where C stands for 'commodities' and M for 'money']) are used by S. Meikle ('Aristotle on Money', *Phronesis* 39.1 [1994], 26-44), and date back to Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*. My translation of key technical terms in Aristotle's economic theory is based on C. D. C. Reeve, *op. cit.*

for exchanges exceeding the local context, and so requires the transportation of natural goods, not all of which are 'easy to carry' (εὐβάστακτα) over long distances, and this inevitably leads to the invention and use of money (1257a28-41). The exchange of necessary goods through the mediation of money (C-M-C), on Aristotle's theory, is the first form of 'wealth acquisition' (ἡ χρηματιστική), and is the only natural form of it.

As we would expect, what makes certain kinds of wealth acquisition unnatural, for Aristotle, is, most basically, their being directed at the acquisition of unnatural wealth. In *Pol.* I. 9, 1257b1 ff., he introduces a new kind of wealth acquisition, commerce (ἡ καπηλική), which is, broadly speaking, the use of money to buy commodities which are then resold with the aim of obtaining a greater sum of money (M-C-M). Unlike natural wealth acquisition, aimed at the acquisition of natural goods in just the quantities needed to maintain a natural life of moderation and justice, commerce is aimed at profit through the accumulation of money, which Aristotle says seems to be wholly conventional and unnatural (φύσει δ' οὐθέν), since it does not directly contribute to the acquisition of necessities, as is exemplified by the myth of king Midas (1257b10-23), who accumulated and hoarded gold. Elsewhere, Aristotle alludes to the etymology of the Greek word for money (νόμισμα) to argue that it is due, not to nature, but to convention or law (νόμος) (*EN* V. 5, 1133a28-31).⁸⁷ Money, if it is to count as wealth at all, then, is to be distinguished from natural wealth (*Pol.* I. 9, 1257b19-20), and therefore commerce, whose aim is to obtain and accumulate money, is also unnatural.

It is rather curious, and a source of many interpretative confusions, that Meikle, a leading contemporary interpreter of Aristotle's economic theory, speaks of money on

87) See F. D. Miller, *Nature, Justice and Rights in Aristotle's Politics* (Oxford, 1995), 78.

Aristotle's view as having its own (canonical) nature (i.e. nature as spoken of in the *Physics* II sense of an internal principle of change and of being at rest). He says:

... it is ... typically Aristotelian to find out what something really is by looking for its mature form: 'what each thing is when fully developed we call its nature, whether we are speaking of a man, a horse or a family' (*Pol.* I, 1252b32 f). This method would lead to the conclusion that it is in the nature of money to become an end.⁸⁸

Meikle contrasts this 'nature as an end' with the usage of money as a means, e.g. for buying necessities through natural wealth acquisition, and his conclusion is inevitably that 'Aristotle is in two minds about money', and is thus 'inconsistent'.⁸⁹ Any apparent inconsistency dissipates, however, once we attend to the fact that, for Aristotle, money is in fact entirely due to convention, and does not exist by nature. On his view, natural wealth acquisition employs money as a tool, but nevertheless it remains a natural activity due to the naturalness of its end (obtaining natural wealth, like food, and in general whatever material things are needed for living well a decent daily life). Commerce, by contrast, is unnatural, because it is engaged in with a view to obtaining what is unnatural (i.e. money), and in fact an unlimited amount of it (I. 9, 1257b24-30; cf. II. 7, 1267a41-b5), rather than merely using it as a tool for the procurement of what is natural and is needed for a flourishing life.

Money, for Aristotle, is only usable as such for exchange. This feature distinguishes money from material goods such as those used for barter prior to the introduction of money, as is shown by the following passage from *Politics* I. 9, 1257a5-13:

The use of every possession is twofold, both uses being [uses of the possession] *per se* (καθ' αὐτό), but not *per se* in the same way. Rather, one is proper to the thing and one is

88) S. Meikle, *op. cit.*, 34.

89) *Ibid.* 38.

not, e.g. the wearing, and the exchange, of a shoe. For both are uses of a shoe, for the person who gives a shoe to him who needs it in exchange for money or food [is making use of] the shoe *qua* shoe. But [this is] not the use that is proper to it. For it has not come into being for the sake of barter.

Here, Aristotle claims that there are two different uses of a given commodity as such, its proper use and a use that is not proper to it, the proper one being its use to satisfy the need for which it is specifically designed. Selling a shoe to someone who would use it for the specific purpose for which it was made, i.e. wear it, for instance, would be using the shoe *qua* shoe. It would not be a proper use of the shoe, however, since shoes are meant to be worn, not to be used in exchange. Now, the non-proper use of shoes, say in exchange, can be a natural use, as long as it serves a natural purpose. Barter (C-C) is 'not contrary to nature' (1257a28-9), though the commodities exchanged have their own uses, separable from their exchange value. It is only the end in view of which the use of such things is made that determines whether or not it is natural, or, for that matter, unnatural. Whether or not a given use of money *qua* money is natural would be determined, much as in the case of shoes, then, by the end pursued. Like shoes, the use of money for exchange is a use of it as such but, in fact, it is the only use of it as such, since money just is a conventional means for exchange: it is, in other words, only valuable in so far as people agree to exchange it instead of exchanging goods directly. Money may also be used as such, that is to say in exchange, both for acquiring natural wealth and for accumulating more money. But whereas the former use of money as such is natural, the latter is not.

Naturally, Aristotle expects to see in his ideal *polis* commerce being forsaken in favor exclusively of natural wealth acquisition (VII. 6, 1327a25-31). He views this option as feasible. Aristotle's '*polis* of our prayers' is importantly only ideal in the sense of being

the best possible city, and is therefore perfectly capable of realization, in his opinion (VII. 4, 1325b39).⁹⁰ Its economy is based on the procurement of necessary goods (τῶν ἀναγκαίων: 1327a27) by its citizens' selling other such goods of which the *polis* happens to possess more than enough. Hence, it is focused on arriving at, and maintaining, self-sufficiency (αὐτάρκεια) for citizens in living a good life, as opposed to surplus of either money or material goods, ones that do not have a use in that sort of life.

Several things may be learned about Aristotle's view of institutionalized religion from comparing it with his account of wealth acquisition.⁹¹ (a) Aristotle's analysis of wealth acquisition shows that he can consistently view the religious institutions in the city as natural, as we have supposed he must, even while maintaining that the content of traditional religion is unnatural. Just like money, for him, the content of traditional religion is conventional. But, again just like money, it gives rise to a practice the maintenance of which is the chief responsibility of certain institutions which are in turn

90) See R. Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy* [Oxford, 2002], p. 192.

91) That we are not misguided in utilizing the analogy between money and the content of traditional religion to understand Aristotle's view of the latter is supported by the fact that Karl Marx, in *Das Kapital* as well as in earlier works, makes constant use of the same analogy. The influence of Aristotle's philosophy on Marx's thought is well known, and is acknowledged by Marx himself, e.g. in the *Capital* (I. Ch. 1. Sec. 3). Marx's own analogy is explicit in his 'On the Jewish Question', 'Comments on James Mill', and, most maturely, in the *Capital* I, where he compares the 'religious world', which is for him a 'reflection of the real world', to the conventional manmade representations concerning the origin and nature of the value of goods (through a process that he calls 'commodity fetishism') (Ch. 1. Sec. 4). The conclusions Marx draws from the analogy are, needless to say, quite different from (if not the polar opposite of) Aristotle's. Marx not only thinks of a non-monetary, non-religious society as possible, but he positively recommends it. In his view, 'commodity fetishism and the god of commodities, money, prevail in a social system that is inhuman, unnatural, anti-nature' (A. Nelson, *Marx' Concept of Money* [New York, 1999], 179). Aristotle, on the other hand, thinks of (the uses of) both social phenomena as natural necessities. This difference, however, must not deter us from appreciating the significant similarity between their theories, which permit (and make use of) the analogy between the phenomena in question to begin with.

conditionally necessary for any city, as we have seen. The analogy may be extended further. (b) One important implication of the unnaturalness or conventionality of money is that its role in a natural process, such as the activity of natural wealth acquisition, requires that it be used as means for the attainment of a limited natural purpose. Once we pursue money with no limit, the process itself becomes altogether unnatural. Similarly, with the content of traditional religion, we may suppose that, for Aristotle, it cannot have its natural social use in itself, or in (engendering) the belief of the members of society in it, but must rather be used for, and limited to, the attainment of a further purpose in the *polis*, and a natural one, in order to count as having a natural role in a teleological process. (c) Money, unlike such artifacts as shoes, as we have seen, does not have a use value over and above its exchange value. It exists by convention, and is only valuable in so far as it is endowed with value by traders and their clients. By analogy, the content of traditional religion, apart from the value given to it by those who practice the religion, is totally valueless, since, for Aristotle, it is altogether false.

We may use our findings to counter the objections mounted at the beginning of this section. First, the content of traditional religion need not be true (as opposed to conventional, and hence unnatural) in order to be naturally used for the purposes of religious institutions, when those are established under proper state oversight, any more than money needs to be natural (as opposed to unnatural in the sense of being conventional) in order to be used naturally for the purposes of the offices attending to natural wealth acquisition. Second, with the content of traditional religion sharing with money the properties of (a) being conventional, and thus unnatural and consequently (b) having a natural use which is limited to the achievement of some natural end, and (c)

being valuable only in so far as it is valued by its users, an option becomes readily available for viewing it as usable in a natural process by the city without even being accepted as true. Money, for Aristotle, can, and in the ideal *polis* must, be used naturally by the *polis* for the purpose of natural and limited wealth acquisition, without itself being perceived as unlimitedly valuable. Indeed, as we have seen, Aristotle thinks that once money is perceived as worthy of being pursued without limit, the result is the unnatural process of commerce (M-C-M), or, what is even worse, and which has not yet been mentioned, 'usury' (ὀβολοστατική), which 'makes a profit from money itself, and not from the very thing money naturally procures' (M-M) and which is therefore 'the most hated sort [of wealth acquisition], and for the best reason' (I. 10, 1258b2-4).

Similarly, the natural use of traditional religion, in Aristotle's theory, would be limited to the natural function which it can achieve, that is, according to my suggestion in section III, the generation of just enough 'wonder' (θαυμασία) about divine matters in people with the appropriate potentials to get them to begin their philosophical inquiry. Suppose certain people do 'wonder' about matters relating to the gods as a result of their exposure to the content of traditional religion, but, rather than embarking on a philosophical journey, they decide to dedicate their lives to that content. The 'lover of myths' (φιλόμυθος) mentioned by Aristotle, by contrast to the philosopher, in *Met.* A. 2, is such a person (982b18-19). Unlike philosophers, then, the *philomuthoi*, or 'lovers of myths', pursue the content of traditional religion without limit, and thus fail to use this content naturally (i.e. they fail to see that it is only useful up to the point of motivating them to inquire into the nature of real gods, which is required for a fully philosophical and flourishing human life). In this they resemble those traders who pursue an unlimited

amount of money, and thus, according to Aristotle, fail to use money naturally (i.e. they fail to see that it is only useful up to the point of enabling them to acquire natural wealth, which is required for a self-sufficient, and hence for a flourishing, life).

Now, even if religion would not unfailingly (or even usually) lead up to theoretical apprehension and activity, its necessary and natural use for that end would not be called into question. Aristotle sees money in his day as being mostly used in an unnatural way for the purposes of commerce, as opposed to natural wealth acquisition (I. 9, 1257b33-4). Nevertheless, he also thinks that abandoning commerce in favor of natural wealth acquisition is not only to be recommended, but actually feasible, in the '*polis* of our prayers' (VII. 6, 1327a25-31), which, in turn, he makes clear, is in itself quite feasible (VII. 4, 1325b39). Similarly, it is possible, or even likely, that a considerable percentage of Aristotle's readers in his day (and afterwards)⁹² would have taken the content of traditional religion that he mentions (and that they have been otherwise exposed to) at face value, believing that it reflects the truth about e.g. the nature of gods or the existence of divine providence. In response to such a scenario, Aristotle would simply say that such people, just like the merchants of his period, are engaging in an unnatural activity. In ideal circumstances, he would add, religion in the *polis* would function differently. In the best achievable *polis*, that is, 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.

92) This is reflected e.g. in the twelfth century commentary on the *NE* by Eustratius of Nicaea / Michael of Ephesus. At X. 8, 1179a22-32, the author renders 'if there comes to be any care for human affairs by the gods, as is thought...' as: 'if there is divine care for human beings ... just as it seems to the best philosophers, and it seems to be the truth ... (ὥσπερ δοκεῖ τοῖς ἀρίστοις κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν, καὶ δοκεῖ ἀληθεύειν ...) (603. 10-12, Wendland).

5: The use of religion for social stability and the enhancement of moral virtue

If we accept the foregoing teleological account of traditional religion based on the *Politics*, then the usefulness of this phenomenon would turn out to rest on (a) the falsity of its content, and (b) the apprehension, ideally by the entire citizenry (though not necessarily by the entire population, which would include non-citizens as well), of this falsity. The function of traditional religion that we have dealt with, i.e. enabling the learning of first philosophy through the production in citizens of 'wonder' (θαυμασία) concerning issues related to the gods, certainly is in line with these two requirements. I wish now to examine two alternative uses which also seem to fit the bill (i.e. meet criteria [a] and [b] above), and show why they are, unlike the function we have discovered, insufficient for explaining why traditional religion is conditionally necessary in the *polis*, in Aristotle's view.

First, then, and as we have already seen, Aristotle himself accepts the use of traditional religion for securing social stability and adherence to law by deceiving certain people (in the ideal city, specifically non-citizens) into believing in the false contents of traditional religion. Legislators, Aristotle thinks, have introduced myths for their political purposes in the past (*Met.* A. 8, 1074b5), and may easily continue to do so even in ideal political circumstances (*Pol.* VII. 17, 1335b12-16). This use retains (a) the falsity of the content of traditional religion. It also (b) would normally entail the existence in the *polis* of those citizens who would reap the benefits of living in a safe society as a consequence of the false beliefs in the traditional gods of other members of their city. In fact, in

Aristotle's ideal *polis*, the entire citizenry would enjoy this advantage, since it would invariably consist (at least) of virtuous men of practical wisdom (*phronimoi*), whom Aristotle expects to reject anthropomorphism with regard to divinity, as we shall see shortly. The only people that Aristotle thinks might still be controlled by religion in such political circumstances (which is in line with the example of the pregnant women dealt with before) are women and non-citizens (slaves, *perioikoi*), who unfortunately in his opinion are, for different reasons, intellectually inferior.⁹³ Should we assume, with some scholars, then, that this use would be sufficient for explaining the conditional necessity of traditional religion in the *polis* in Aristotle's view?⁹⁴

Second, we might introduce a new use for traditional religion, based on Aristotle's theory, which would be in line with (a) the falsity of its content, (b) the realization by the entire citizenry of its falsity. As was just mentioned, Aristotle is commonly agreed to have addressed his *Nicomachean Ethics*, which he explicitly writes 'not so that we might know what virtue is, but in order that we may become good' (II. 2, 1103b26-8), to those citizens of respectable upbringing who have come to be acquainted with ethical facts

93) For Aristotle, women's capacity for practical deliberation (τὸ βουλευτικόν) is 'non-authoritative' (ἄκυρον) (*Pol.* I. 13, 1260a13). Elsewhere, he speaks of them as having a natural impairment (*GA* IV. 6, 775a15 ff). A natural slave, on his theory, is a man who shares in reason (ὁ κοινωνῶν λόγου), though only to the extent of perceiving (αἰσθάνεσθαι), rather than positively having (ἔχειν), it (*Pol.* I. 5, 1254b22-3). This condition is due to an impairment of one of the two psychological features necessary for rational action, 'intelligence' (διάνοια) and 'spiritedness' (θυμός). Aristotle thinks of cold temperature as harmful to intelligence, and of heat as harmful to spiritedness, for which reason Greeks, who inhabit a region located between Asians and Europeans, both of whom are for him natural slaves, have a perfectly balanced combination of both features, and are thus alone naturally suited to rule as masters (VII. 7, 1327b24-33).

94) R. Mayhew, 'Impiety and Political Unity: Aristotle *Politics* 1262a25-32', *Classical Philology* 9 (1996), 54-9 at 58. See also T. K. Lindsay, 'The "God-Like Man" versus the "Best Laws": Politics and Religion in Aristotle's *Politics*', *The Review of Politics* 53 (1991), 488-509 especially at 497-500. Broadie, S., 'Aristotle', in *The History of Western Philosophy of Religion* v. 1 ed. G. Oppy and N. Trakakis (Durham, 2009), 79-92 at 89.

through experience, and are now on their way to learning the explanations of these facts.⁹⁵ These ought to include, apart from prospective students of philosophy, future politicians who are not necessarily either interested in, or capable of, philosophizing.⁹⁶ Throughout the *NE*, Aristotle makes it clear to this audience that the belief in traditional gods must be rejected. He claims that the gods 'appear to be ridiculous when appealed to by reference to us' (γελοῖοι [...] φαίνονται πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἀναφερόμενοι: I. 12, 1101b19-20), and denies true gods any activity attributable to human beings, with the exception of theoretical contemplation (X. 8, 1178b7-23). Aristotle, then, expects even the well-educated (but non-philosophical) Athenian citizens of his day, including these students of his, not to think anthropomorphically about the gods.

However, still in the same work, Aristotle makes positive references to the very traditional gods whose existence he convinces his audience to renounce. In VII. 1, for instance, he speaks of three 'conditions of character' (τὰ περὶ τὰ ἥθη) which should be avoided: vice, lack of self-control and beastliness, with three opposite conditions of character (to be pursued), respectively: virtue, self-control and 'that virtue which is over and above us, which is something heroic and divine' (1145a15-27). Aristotle describes the third of these positive conditions, the possessors of which either are or become gods, as arising 'through an excess of virtue' (δι' ἀρετῆς ὑπερβολήν), by which he clearly means excess of virtue of character (cf. *Pol.* III. 13, 1284a3-17, 1284b25-34). The condition of beasts, then, is here said to be a bad one for humans to be in, not (solely) because beasts

95) See M. F. Burnyeat, 'Aristotle on Learning to be Good', in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* ed. A.O. Rorty (Berkeley, 1980), 69-92, especially at 71-ff.

96) L. S. Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship* (Cambridge, 2003), 8-16. Cf. R. Bodéüs, *The Political Dimensions of Aristotle's Ethics*, J.E. Garrett trans. (Albany, 1993) esp. ch. 1.

lack reason, but because even at their best they lack moral virtue. Gods, on the other hand, are to be imitated, as far as humanly possible, not (merely) because they transcend us intellectually, but because they have an excess of moral virtue, so much, in fact, that their condition can no longer itself be called (mere) virtue.

Surely, this characterization of the gods is incompatible with true gods as Aristotle conceives of them and describes them to the audience of the *NE*, so that the 'gods' to whom this condition is ascribed here must be those 'gods' whose existence Aristotle's audience has already been told should be denied, i.e. the traditional gods of Greek religion. This is also confirmed by the example Aristotle gives of a possessor of the condition in question, Hector, who, according to Priam, 'was nothing like the child of a mortal man, but of a god' (*NE* VII. 1, 1145a21-22; cf. *Iliad* xxiv. 258 ff.), viz. one of the Olympians. The members of the audience of Aristotle's *NE*, who are not meant to be deceived into thinking that traditional gods actually exist, are nevertheless encouraged to develop their character with a view to the condition of just these fictional gods. Being exposed to depictions of such gods on a daily basis, beginning in childhood (perhaps when one would still believe in their existence), must be thought by Aristotle as helpful for achieving that end, since Aristotle views imitation as a naturally inherent feature of human beings, at the basis of their cognitive development (*Poetics*, 1448b5-8). The presence of such depictions in the experience of children is due to traditional religion and its institutions, whose socio-political function might therefore be thought to consist in its use for moral education and the development of character virtue.

But there are good reasons to think that Aristotle would not view either of the two uses I have mentioned as necessary in order for the *polis* to exist as such, that is in accordance

with human nature, and that therefore we cannot employ these uses to provide a complete and satisfactory explanation for why it is that he thinks of traditional religion as being necessary in this way. First, though Aristotle clearly thinks of the condition of character that he associates with the traditional gods as worthy of being pursued (*NE* VII. 1, 1145a15-27), and though it seems reasonable to assume that the more exposure one has to (morally enticing depictions of) such gods the more likely one is to develop the condition in question, it is unclear whether such an experience is a necessary condition for arriving at that condition. For, (i) there might not be an equivalent necessary condition even in the case of the character virtues possessed by actual human beings, and (ii) Aristotle seems to think of the 'divine or heroic virtue' as being simply an excessive version of human character virtue, so that, at least in a society that has sufficiently virtuous agents among its members, it should be sufficient to spend time in the vicinity of the most virtuous agents in one's environment in order to get a sense of (and point of reference for) the closest approximation to the 'divine or heroic virtue' that one could reasonably be expected to achieve.

Second, and similarly, when Aristotle says that religion might be useful for convincing pregnant women to exercise, he says that it would be easy (ῥᾶδιον) for the legislator to use religion in this way. Though this might mean that legislators should use religion for such a purpose, it does not follow that they must do so, given sufficiently good alternatives (VII. 17, 1335b12-16).⁹⁷ Again, in *Metaphysics* α. 3, Aristotle speaks of

97) As we have seen (cf. p. 53), one might think, for instance, that the employment of one further task (ἔργον) which Aristotle says is necessary for any city, namely the use of weapons, would be sufficient for maintaining social stability, since Aristotle, at any rate, does explicitly state that it is necessary for that purpose (ἀναγκαῖον ... ἔχειν ὅπλα πρὸς τε τὴν ἀρχήν: 1328b7-10), which is more than he does for religion.

the 'mythical and childish features' (τὰ μυθώδη καὶ παιδαριώδη) in the laws as prevailing over our knowledge of these laws (995a3-6). Even if the features in question require for there to be traditional religion, it is still not obvious that these features themselves are necessary for the *polis* in order for it to enact its laws and ensure the adherence to them. Finally, in the passage with which we began, Λ. 8 1074a38-b14, Aristotle certainly associates traditional religion with its use for persuading the masses, and this use might therefore be thought to constitute the whole of the natural function of traditional religion. But, even if the passage is meant to indicate such a function (and not just the way in which religion has been used in the past), there is no reason to assume that it refers exclusively to the use in question. The text says that mythology has been used 'with a view to persuading the masses and (καί) for its usefulness in supporting the laws and bringing about the general advantage' (1074b4-5). If we do not take the first καί to be epexegetical, then the second part of the sentence would indicate a more general advantage of mythology for the purpose of keeping the laws. It seems plausible that this advantage would include e.g. the use of traditional religion for developing character virtue in citizens, since in *NE* X. 9 Aristotle presents a detailed account of the two principal ways by which the *polis* might ensure the adherence to its laws, corresponding to the two uses of traditional religion we have been considering in this section. The two ways are through (i) fear, in the case of 'the many' (οἱ πολλοί) (1179b10-13), and (ii) habituation (and later on, reasoned arguments), in the case of citizens (b20-6).

Further, if we do not take the second καί, in 1074b5, to be epexegetical either, then we may even take the passage to include a reference to a third use of traditional religion, which would promote the 'general advantage' of the *polis*, such as the function of

traditional religion of enabling philosophical activity. At most, then, what 1074a38-b14 can conclusively show is that all three uses might conjointly constitute the necessary function of traditional religion. Though this is in principle possible, there is, as we have seen, evidence supporting the necessary function we have proposed, and no reason to accept the necessity of the other two uses.

6: conclusion

Aristotle views the content of traditional religion, characteristically involving mythical, anthropomorphic depictions of the gods, as false. Nevertheless, he also thinks of traditional religion, and its institutions, as being necessary for any *polis* to exist as such, i.e. according to its natural purpose. Consequently, the natural role of religion in the *polis* would be based on the realization at least by a select few (and in the ideal *polis* by all mature citizens) of the falsity of its content. Several uses are in line with this requirement, and with Aristotle's theory more generally. First, the *polis* uses religion to deceive certain people (say, non-citizens) for the purpose of controlling their behavior. Second, religion might usefully cultivate the character virtues of (potentially) all citizens of the *polis*, by ensuring their continual encounter with depictions of excessively virtuous agents (the traditional gods), beginning in childhood. Third, religion is useful for the learning process of crucially important subjects, in particular 'first philosophy'. Since the objects of this science are (actually existing) gods, sparking one's 'wonder' (θαυμάζειν) at gods (generally speaking), through an exposure to traditional (and fictional) gods, would be the

first step towards engaging in this science (since the inquiry into any subject X requires an initial 'wonder' concerning X).

It is the third use that is the most suitable candidate for providing traditional religion with a natural function which would explain its conditionally necessary role in the *polis* according to Aristotle's view. Among other reasons, it is only this use that makes explicit reference to the subject matter of religion (i.e. the gods). Unlike maintaining social stability and developing moral character, in other words, it seems that sparking one's interest in the gods must be carried out by means of those institutions whose prerogative is to attend to matters relating to the gods. Moreover, traditional religion in fact turns out to be necessary, in Aristotle's view, in order to ensure the occurrence of 'wonder' about gods in future philosophers and consequently their arrival at knowledge of 'first philosophy'. Interestingly, prominent medieval followers of Aristotle have included similar uses to the three we have dealt with in their accounts of the function of (specifically) the anthropomorphic aspect of (their) religion, granting a special status to the third. A case in point is Maimonides, a self-proclaimed Aristotelian, whose furious rebuttal of anthropomorphism in relation to divinity (in the form of a negative theology) has been, as Hilary Putnam puts it, much more radical than that of 'both Islamic and Christian theologians'.⁹⁸ When Maimonides acknowledges the presence of anthropomorphic depictions of god in the *Torah* (as opposed to explaining them away), he assigns to them several different uses, assuming all the while, as Aristotle does, that they are themselves false. At times, then, he speaks of certain beliefs, such as the belief in an angry and revengeful God, as being, though unqualifiedly false, also useful for 'the

98) H. Putnam, 'On Negative Theology', *Faith and Philosophy* 14 (1997), 407-422 at 407.

removal of exploitation and the instillment of virtue' (*Moreh Nevukhim* [*Guide of the Perplexed*], III. 28). These two uses correspond exactly to the first two uses of traditional religion that we have found in Aristotle.

At other times, Maimonides speaks of a different use of simplistic, false descriptions of God:

When a person begins with metaphysics (lit. 'divine wisdom' [אלעלם אלאהי]), there shall occur not only confusion with regard to belief but a complete annihilation thereof. Such a person would resemble an infant who is being fed wheaten bread, meat and wine. This would surely kill that infant, not because these are unnatural foods for human beings, but because of the weakness of the child, precluding it from digesting and making use of them. This is why these true opinions [sc. the truths of metaphysics] are concealed, are only hinted at, and are deliberately taught by the wise in the most mysterious ways, not because they contain some evil content or are destructive of the principles of faith (as those fools believe, who only think themselves to be philosophers) but rather they are hidden because of the incapability of the human mind to receive them at the beginning [of the educational process]. (Ibid. I. 33)

Here Maimonides comes remarkably close to the natural function we have assigned to traditional religion in Aristotle's theory. Metaphysical truth, he says, is to be attained gradually, after those who are fit for receiving it have been exposed only to some premeditatedly obscure version of it for the appropriate amount of time. The metaphysical truths that Maimonides has in mind here are themselves closely related (at times, identical) to those in Aristotle's theory. He describes God, e.g., much like Aristotle's prime mover, as the '*intellectus, ens intelligens et ens intelligibile*' (I. 68). Leaving aside the highly controversial question of whether or not Maimonides could have done so in consistency with his negative theology (or whether such descriptions are themselves for him further means of hiding the 'ultimate' truth revealed only via negative

theology),⁹⁹ it is clear that at least more obviously anthropomorphic depictions of god are to be counted, for him just as for Aristotle, as serving the purpose of leading one towards a philosophical investigation culminating in the apprehension of the true nature of god.

At this point we should mention one further feature shared by Aristotle and Maimonides. For both, the most desirable goal for human beings to try and achieve is an approximation to the condition of the Aristotelian god, i.e. the exercise of one's intellect in theoretical contemplation (Aristotle: *NE* X. 8, 1178b18-23; 1179a22-32; *Met.* Λ. 7, 1072b14-18; Maimonides: *Moreh*, 1.1; 1.18, 1.34, 3.8, 3.27, 3.51 [the celebrated palace allegory], 3.54). On this view, then, it is a certain commonality between human beings and god(s) that accounts for (the possibility of) human flourishing or perfection, which is in turn itself understood as a form of an *imitatio dei*. If we focus on Aristotle in this regard, we see that he insists that what makes human beings human is in fact the presence in them of something divine, namely the intellect (νοῦς: *NE* X. 7, 1177b34-1178a7). As it turns out, then, the anthropomorphic, mythical depiction of divinity provided by traditional religion might play an importantly broader role with a view to the attainment of philosophical knowledge than simply to arouse one's wonder (θαυμασία) at 'the gods'. It may further, that is, arouse one's wonder at gods as they are related to human beings, i.e. qua intellectual beings the sharing in the activity of which constitutes the most preferable *modus vivendi* for us.

The use of traditional religion for the purpose of attaining philosophical knowledge, then, might explain Aristotle's initially puzzling reference to the 'supervision of religious matters' as being of primary importance amongst the different tasks (ἔργα) to be fulfilled

99) For a very reasonable solution see E. Z. Benor, 'Meaning of Reference in Maimonides' Negative Theology', *The Harvard Theological Review* 88 (1995), 339-360.

in the *polis* (πέμπτον δὲ καὶ πρῶτον τὴν περὶ τὸ θεῖον ἐπιμέλειαν: *Pol.* VII. 8, 1328b11-2). For, in accepting such a use, we are accepting this task as enabling an activity which Aristotle views as the pinnacle of human endeavor. Moreover, even if religion would not unfailingly, or even usually, lead up to theoretical apprehension, its necessary and natural use for this purpose would not be called into question, just as money, whose natural use is rarely if ever achieved, in Aristotle's view, nevertheless has this natural use, which is in principle perfectly capable of being exercised, under the right set of political circumstances. In such circumstances, the offices concerned with overseeing religious affairs would propagate the contents of traditional religion for the purpose of getting people (with the right potentials) to philosophize. Whenever the latter is accomplished, religion would make its most relevant contribution to the natural functioning of the *polis*, which, as Aristotle says, comes to be merely for the sake of living, but exists for the sake of living well (τοῦ εὖ ζῆν: I. 2, 1252b29-30).

Chapter III: Humans, 'Eternal Humans' and Gods: The Usefulness of Traditional Gods for the Imitation of the Divine

In the first two chapters I presented Aristotle's criticisms of the content of traditional religion as they emerge both from the extant corpus and from the lost dialogues, and which reject anthropomorphism with respect to the gods in general, and in particular the attribution to them of beneficence and providence. Both chapters, however, supported the conclusion that Aristotle's criticisms are not meant to deny traditional religion a legitimate role in individual as well as civic life, and both signaled what that role might be, in complementary ways. In the first chapter, the fragmentary evidence of Aristotle's *De philosophia*, *Protrepticus* and *De poeisis* was seen to present a case for the usefulness of traditional religion, despite the falsity of its content, as fostering a favorable state of mind in those who practice it, in particular one which is conducive to learning.

In chapter II, I showed that, in the *Politics*, Aristotle in fact views religious institutions, and the class of citizens maintaining them, as necessary for any correctly organized *polis* to exist as such, since they perform a crucial socio-political function. As in the first chapter, the function in question stems from the ability of religion to incite in those who practice it a mental or emotional state conducive to learning. In particular, I have argued, Aristotle thinks that religion is required for arriving at the knowledge of first philosophy, which he views as the highest intellectual achievement and the highest human good, and thus its achievement is among the most important purposes for which a *polis* existing according to human nature itself exists. Aristotle does think that religion is also useful in other ways, e.g. in so far as it encourages the masses to accept and support

legitimate social and political authority. But it is its role in enabling individual human beings to come to know and understand the ultimate truths of first philosophy, and thus engage in the highest human good, that he thinks makes religion and its institutions indispensable to any well-ordered *polis*. Religion excites one's 'wonder' (θαυμάζειν) at the gods by presenting traditional depictions of them. This sense of wonder leads one to inquire into the nature of gods. Eventually, assuming one possesses the appropriate potential and is proceeding in the right way, this inquiry leads to an apprehension of the true nature of divinity and the ability and will to engage actively in the contemplative knowledge of god, thus sharing in the very knowledge that is god's own essence.

The gods of traditional religion are anthropomorphic. It is this feature that Aristotle thinks attracts potential philosophers to such gods, since human beings are naturally pleased by things that are akin to themselves. Once enthusiastic about (alleged) gods that in many ways resemble them, the prospective philosophers begin their research into the nature of true gods, with whom they would turn out to share much less in common. Nevertheless, in Aristotle's theory, there remains an important feature that humans do, or can, share in common with those beings that he thinks exist and should be regarded as true gods, namely rational activity, in particular theoretical contemplation (*NE* X. 8, 1178b18-23). By engaging successfully in that activity, human beings are in fact capable of enjoying the way of life of the true gods, if only intermittently and for brief periods of time (*Met.* Λ. 7, 1072b14-18). And so, when religion acquaints us with humanlike alleged gods, or, alternatively, with 'eternal humans', as Aristotle calls them (*B.* 2, 997b8-12), it is not merely an effective tool for generating interest in a philosophical topic. It also raises

the question concerning the relation between human beings and gods, the answer to which is the key to the best condition of life humanly achievable.

We can see that this is so in the final lines of *NE* X.8. In giving his final argument in favor of taking contemplative activity based on knowledge and understanding to be complete or end-like *eudaimonia*, Aristotle encourages his audience to value most highly the exercise of their intellect by referring to the divine providence that would have been conferred upon the persons capable of engaging in such contemplation, had there been providential gods. This has come to be known as the '*theophilestatos* argument':

Furthermore, the person who actively exercises the intellect and is its servant (τούτον θεραπεύων) would seem to be the person in the best condition and the most god-loved (θεοφιλέστατος). For if there comes to be any care for human affairs by the gods, as people think, it would in fact be reasonable for them to be pleased by what is best and most akin to them (εἰ γάρ τις ἐπιμέλεια τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων ὑπὸ θεῶν γίνεται, ὥσπερ δοκεῖ, καὶ εἴη ἂν εὖλογον χαίρειν τε αὐτοὺς τῷ ἀρίστῳ καὶ συγγενεστάτῳ) (and this would be the intellect) and to do favors in return (ἀντενποιεῖν) to those who love and honor this most of all (on the grounds that by doing so they are taking care of their friends) and who act correctly and beautifully.¹⁰⁰ And it is clear that all of these things belong most of all to the wise person. This person, then, is the most god-loved. And it is plausible that this person is also the most *eudaimōn*, so that, by this argument too, the wise would be *eudaimōn* in the highest degree. (1179a22-32)

It is important in interpreting this argument to pay proper attention to the phrase in Greek that I translate as 'as people think', viz. ὥσπερ δοκεῖ.¹⁰¹ This is often misconstrued, as, for example, in T. Irwin's translation: 'as they seem to', which indicates that Aristotle himself

100) Taking ἐπιμελομένους to agree with αὐτούς, i.e. the gods who are pleased by and return a favor to human beings engaging in theoretical contemplation. Translators standardly take ἐπιμελομένους to refer to the human beings pleasing the gods by exercising their intellect. While this option is certainly possible, it misses the parallel between ἐπιμελομένους and ἐπιμέλεια in line 1179a24, and resorts to a clumsy understanding of τῶν φίλων at 1179a28 (e.g. as 'things that are dear to them').

101) Cf. J. Burnet (ed. and comm.), *The Ethics of Aristotle* (London, 1900), p. 467.

thinks the gods probably do take an interest in human affairs.¹⁰² But Aristotle clearly does not think that there are any providential gods who are capable of being pleased by, loving or 'returning a favor to' any particular kind of person more than another (more on this below, in section 2). He also clearly expects his reader to be aware of this, since he speaks earlier in the same chapter of benevolent actions as 'unworthy of the gods', to whom we may only attribute theoretical contemplation (1178b7-23).

Thus in the passage just quoted Aristotle motivates his readers (or listeners) to 'be servants of their intellect' by appealing to the accepted idea in Greek traditional religion that the gods reward those who serve them through sacrifices or through honoring what they hold in high regard, as Zeus does with justice among humans or Hera, with the sanctity of marriage vows. These are gods that both he and they realize are fictional. But, as he and they realize, the true gods are intellects themselves, pure ones whose whole being consists in active contemplative knowing and understanding.¹⁰³ So, if like the traditional gods the true gods rewarded any human beings for anything they did, it would be for devoting themselves to their intellects by acquiring knowledge and understanding and actively engaging in contemplative theoretical activities. Hypothetically retaining from traditional religion the idea that the gods do reward their servants, Aristotle seeks in this argument to motivate his audience to acquire the needed knowledge and

102) T. Irwin (trans. and comm.), *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics* (Indianapolis, 1999), p. 167.

103) At least, this is unqualifiedly true of such gods as the first unmoved mover. One possible exception is the celestial bodies. These count for Aristotle as gods, although they have material natures, and may even share in sense perception. But in their case, too, the intellect may be considered 'pure', since it most probably operates completely independently of their perceptual capacity (if indeed they have one). See below pp. 109-110.

understanding and to devote themselves to its active exercise in as much sustained contemplation as possible throughout their remaining lifetime.

That traditional false ideas about the gods (e.g. that they give rewards) are still expected to appeal to Aristotle's audience at this stage in their intellectual development is revealing. Traditional religion would presumably be even more useful for prompting one towards an initial inquiry about the gods while one may still not even have questioned the content of that religion. The *theophilestatos* argument also shows that the inquiry in question, which is initiated by traditional religion, is in fact twofold. It implies that one must not simply inquire into the nature of divinity, but also into the relation between humans and gods. Specifically, one must ask how he or she might approximate the condition of (true) gods, since such an approximation, according to the *theophilestatos* argument, must be feasible. The answer, ultimately, and again in keeping with that argument, is that one might do this by exercising one's intellect in a contemplative activity of knowing and understanding ultimate truths, in particular truths about the true gods of Aristotle's metaphysics.

Presumably, one realizes, either from the very start or somewhere along the inquiry, that it is not the condition of traditional gods, but rather that of the actually existing ones, that one should aspire to attain. However, it is the traditional gods, or the conception of these, that motivate one towards the inquiry outlined above (in fact, it seems from the *theophilestatos* argument that there is merit in using traditional ideas about the gods even for convincing those who are aware of the identity of the true gods, and who may even be themselves already in a position to engage in the activity of such gods, to do so). The active exercise by human beings of first philosophy, whose objects are the true gods, is

the highest human good, according to Aristotle's theory. And thus, bringing about this highest human good in a *polis*, as the product of the common effort of all the citizens, constitutes the ultimate socio-political role for the practice of traditional religion.

In this chapter I aim, first, to explain in detail why, in Aristotle's theory, the gods of traditional religion are the proper tools for motivating people with the appropriate potential towards an inquiry into the issues mentioned above, viz. (a) the nature of true gods and (b) the way in which humans may approximate these entities; and second, to give an account of the purpose of the inquiry into (a) and (b), so as to show just what it is that Aristotle thinks we might gain by practicing traditional religion in the right way. In section 1, I deal with issue (a). I distinguish between, and compare, the main categories of things that Aristotle uses the word 'god(s)' to designate, namely the divine *nous* and unmoved mover(s) of the heavens in *Metaphysics* Λ, the celestial bodies and the gods of traditional Greek religion. It is not a coincidence that Aristotle calls all such things 'god(s)', since he is in fact committed to a definition of 'god' which all the things in question meet. Traditional gods, then, are the appropriate category of things to lead one towards an inquiry concerning true gods, because they both are convenient items for human beings to identify with, and are in fact appropriately called gods.

In section 2, I turn to issue (b). The gods of traditional religion share, not only in the definition of 'god', but also in that of 'man'. Though powerful and everlasting, these gods also lead political and social lives, engage in practical deliberation, have various (human) needs, and are therefore not strictly speaking self-sufficient, as true gods according to the proper definition of gods must be. These features make traditional gods 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 rational or intellectual activity. In the case of those beings that Aristotle takes to be true gods, the activity in question is, more specifically, self-contemplation with knowledge and understanding of this self. In his *Ethics*, moreover, Aristotle in fact encourages his readers to imitate that specific kind of activity, as far as possible.

In section 3, then, finally, I go on to consider Aristotle's idea of the human imitation of divine self-contemplation. At first glance, it may seem puzzling that Aristotle recommends self-knowledge for beings (i.e. humans) who can, through first philosophy, apprehend intelligible objects much nobler than themselves (e.g. gods). However, I will argue, Aristotle thinks that it is only through self-cognition that human beings can reach self-sufficiency and attain the best condition available to them, where self-cognition includes both the knowledge and perception of one's own character and particular qualities and, ultimately, an understanding of one's own essence as intellect. The latter culminates in the knowing or understanding of one's intellect 'at its peak', and this, Aristotle says, is identical to the activity in which god in fact consists, although we may engage in it only after having gone through the learning process described above, and even then only in an imperfect, divided and non-eternal way. Approximating the condition of the gods successfully, for us, involves knowing our limitations by comparison to them. By the time we find ourselves in that condition, then, we have resolved both of the main issues prompted by our exposure to traditional religion and its gods, dealt with in the first two sections of this chapter. First, we possess an understanding of the nature of true gods. Second, we engage in a human version of the

activity of these very gods, knowing that such an imitation is as close as we can get to the divine and makes us as well off as we may hope to be.

1: 'Eternal Humans' – Gods: The nature of the divine

Aristotle's working definition of god in *Metaphysics* Λ, which seems to have been a relatively standard one, is 'the best [and] eternal living thing' (ζῶον αἰδίων ἄριστον: 7, 1072b28-9).¹⁰⁴ J. DeFilippo importantly notes that, contrary to conventional assumptions, here in Λ. 7 Aristotle ascribes the various features of this definition (DeFilippo focuses on the predicates 'eternal' and 'living thing') to his prime mover prior to claiming that it is god, and that therefore Aristotle infers that this prime mover is god from the fact that it is alive and eternal, rather than the other way around.¹⁰⁵ The fact that the prime mover is god, in other words, is established by the conformity of this entity, as its existence and nature are established by philosophical analysis, to an already formed conception of what being a god is. Similarly, and more formally, the *Topics*, in the context of explaining the mistake of giving the differentia as a genus in a definition, gives the example of mistaking immortal to be the genus of god, with the implication that the correct definition of god would be 'immortal living thing' (ἀθάνατον ζῶον), with 'living thing' functioning as genus and 'immortal' as differentia (IV. 2, 122b12-17). The absence of the superlative

104) For a discussion of this definition and its similarity to the one found in the pseudo-Platonic *Definitions* (i.e. 'immortal living thing self-sufficient with regard to happiness'), see S. Menn, 'Aristotle's Theology', in C. Shields (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Aristotle* (Oxford, 2012), 422-464 at p. 423 and p. 452 n. 4.

105) J. DeFilippo, 'Aristotle's Identification of the Prime Mover as God', *The Classical Quarterly* 44.2 (1994), pp. 393-409 at 404.

adjective 'best' (ἄριστον) in this definition, and its presence in that of the *Metaph.* Λ. 7, need not call the intended identity of the two into question, if we take 'best eternal/immortal living thing' to indicate a relation, not to other immortal living things, but to (all) mortal animals.¹⁰⁶ In *Topics* III. 1 Aristotle says that the *proprium* (ἴδιον) of what is better (τοῦ βελτίονος) is better (βέλτιον) than the *proprium* of the worse, and then explains:

e.g. [the *proprium*] of 'god' [is better] than that of 'human being'. For whereas they do not differ at all from each other with regard to what is common between them, with regard to their *propria* (τοῖς δ' ἰδίοις) the first surpasses the second. (116b13-17)

As Alexander of Aphrodisias notes in his commentary on the text, the thing with regard to which 'human being' and 'god' are identical, for Aristotle, is their genus, i.e. 'living thing', which as he notes they both also share with 'horse' (235. 18-21, Wendland).

As for the relevant notion of *proprium*, god's *proprium* being better than human being's and both better than horse's, there are two options. Aristotle uses the term to designate a property counter-predicating with the subject it is a property of and which either (a) does not indicate the essence (τὸ τὶ ἦν εἶναι) of the subject in question or (b) does signify the essence of the subject, in which case it is identical with the definition of that subject (*Topics* I. 4, 101b17-25; 5, 102a18-ff). More precisely, he tends to use a 'broad sense' of *proprium*, encompassing *propria* of both types, and a 'narrow sense',

106) Nor should the substitution of 'eternal' (in the *Metaphysics*) for 'immortal' (in the *Topics* and the pseudo-Platonic *Definitions*) be a cause for concern. Aristotle elsewhere 'slips' from speaking of the 'immortality' of his true god to speaking of his 'eternal life' (*De caelo*, 286a9; cf. *Topics* IV. 5, 126b36-127a3). In *Met.* Λ. 7, he may deviate from the precise terminology of the general definition of god that he is employing, foreknowing that the subject matter of the specific discussion to follow is his true god (or a plurality of true gods), which is (or are) of course both immortal and eternal.

referring exclusively to *propria* of type (a).¹⁰⁷ Whatever is true of type (a) *propria*, type (b) *propria* must be at least included in those *propria* that Aristotle considers better or worse relative to the things of which they are *propria* being better or worse than one another, so that the relevant sense of *proprium* here should be the 'broad' sense. For, type (b) *propria*, being definitions, signify what their subjects are, and so, the relation of being better or worse than one another applies to them as much as it does to the subjects themselves.¹⁰⁸ Aristotle explicitly mentions the (type (b)) *proprium* of god when he says that '[a *proprium* that holds] always is like [the *proprium*] of god, of being an immortal living thing' (V. 1, 128b19-20).¹⁰⁹ In saying that this *proprium* is better than the equivalent one in the case of 'human being', 'horse', and presumably all other animal species, Aristotle effectively says that the definition of god as an immortal animal already

107) For a helpful discussion of this distinction see S. Slomkowski, *Aristotle's Topics* (Leiden, 1997), pp. 76-7. Slomkowski mentions various occurrences, especially in book V of the *Topics*, where the broad sense of *proprium* is actually used (cf. V. 4, 132b8-18; 132b19-34; 5, 134a18-25; 7, 137a21-b12). We shall discuss one further example, from V. 1, 128b19-20, shortly. J. Barnes counts 27 out of the 36 *topoi* in book V in which the meaning of *proprium* is indeterminate between type (a) and (b) ('Property in Aristotle's *Topics*', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 52 [2009], pp. 136-155 at p.141).

108) Alexander speaks of the *propria* of 'god', 'human being' and 'horse' as being, in this context, 'immortality' (ἀθανασία), 'being receptive of knowledge' (τὸ ἐπιστήμης δεκτικόν), and 'being able to neigh' (τὸ χρεμετιστικόν), respectively (ibid. 21-25). In doing so, he seems to miss the mark, in that 'immortality', for instance, is neither a type (a) *proprium* of god, since it is part of its definition (it is the differentia, in so far as it is the quality of being immortal), nor the type (b) *proprium* of god, since it is not a full definition (furthermore, in either case, it need not, on its own, counter-predicate with 'god', since it is said to belong to things which do not qualify as living things, and are therefore not gods, such as the heaven as a whole [ὁ πᾶς οὐρανός: *De caelo* II. 1, 283b26-284a1] and the perpetual motion [κίνησις] in it [*Physics* VIII. 6, 295b25-26]). Perhaps by ἀθανασία Alexander means to refer to the property of being an immortal living thing, in which case it would perhaps function as a type (b) *proprium*. In any event, my interpretation above of *Topics* III. 1, 116b13-17 as pertaining (also) to type (b) *propria* still stands, seeing that we have Aristotle's 'broad sense' of *proprium* at our disposal.

109) R. Bodéüs seem to mistake the type (b) *proprium* of god here (viz. *Topics* V. 1, 128b19-20) with the differentia of god at IV. 2, 122b12-17 (*Aristotle and the Theology of the Living Immortals*, trans. J. E. Garrett [Albany, 2000], p. 115).

includes the predicate 'best' (ἄριστον), the explicit presence of which in the *Metaphysics* Λ. 7 version of this definition may therefore be deemed redundant.

Viewing Aristotle's definition of god as unified, and as one to which he commits himself, e.g. by using it in his appraisal of his prime mover as god, one would expect him to accept any object that meets this definition, that is to say, any immortal living thing, as a god. The heavenly bodies are a case in point. Aristotle thinks both of 'the courses of the planets' (αἱ φοραὶ τῶν πλανήτων) and 'the nature of stars' (ἡ τῶν ἄστρον φύσις) as eternal (*Metaph.* Λ. 8, 1073a30-3). He also thinks of such objects as living things, as he makes clear by saying in *De caelo* that we must not think of them as inanimate (ἄψυχα) bodies, but rather 'take them [sc. the ἄστρα of 292a11] to be partaking of life and action' (*De caelo*, II. 12, 292a18-21).¹¹⁰ Stars, for Aristotle, as it turns out, are immortal living things. According to the definition presented above, then, they must qualify as gods, for him.

And, indeed, they do. Apart from referring to them in the context of the aforementioned

110) Cf. *De caelo* II. 2, 285a29-30; 12, 292b1-2. Two further passages in *De Caelo* II. 1, 284a27-28; 9, 291a23, on the other hand, suggest that the movement of the heavenly bodies is not due to a soul. This apparent contrast prompted a controversy dating back at least to the Byzantines (H. A. Wolfson, 'The Problem of the Souls of the Spheres from the Byzantine Commentaries on Aristotle', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 16 [1962], pp. 65-93, at pp. 68-ff). According to Simplicius (in *De Caelo*, 388. 16-19, Heiberg), some philosophers (whom he opposes) went as far as denying (at least distinct motive and rational) souls to the heavenly bodies on Aristotle's behalf. Most recently, D. Blyth argues that in 284a27-8 and 291a23 Aristotle denies only the existence of a heavenly self-motive soul that acts on a celestial body 'in a way contrary to that body's own nature' ('Heavenly Soul in Aristotle', *Apeiron* [ahead of print, Oct. 2013], pp. 1-39 at p. 15 and n. 23; cf. J. Moreau, *op. cit.*, p. 115). Thus, on Blyth's view, 285a29-30 can still be taken to establish that the heavenly bodies (there, stars) are ensouled (contra R. Bodéüs, *ibid.*, p. 45, 120), but not that they possess either 'intelligence or self-movement' (Blyth, *ibid.*, p. 20). However, Aristotle cannot possibly attribute non-rational souls to the heavenly bodies, since he thinks both that (a) non-rational soul capacities are inferior to the intellect (*NE* X. 7, 1177a20-21), and that (b) human beings, though they are rational animals, are inferior to the heavenly bodies, which are 'more divine' (VI. 7, 1141a33-b2). It seems reasonable to conclude, then, that Aristotle does think of the heavenly bodies as having rational souls (which is also in line with Cicero's report, as we shall presently see).

discussion as 'divine bodies' (τῶν σωμάτων τῶν θείων: 292b32), and as 'more divine' (θειότερα) than human beings (*NE* VI. 7, 1141a33-b2), Cicero reports Aristotle to have said that the 'stars must be counted among the gods' (*in deorum numero astra esse ducenda*: *N.D.* 2. 15. 42=*De phil.* Fr. 21a, Ross). This is in line with the use of the definition of god in Aristotle as we have construed it, since the reason Aristotle gives for this last statement, according to Cicero, is that the stars, occupying the ethereal region which 'always moves and is lively' (*semper agitur et viget*), are endowed with perception and intelligence (*sensum et intellegentiam*) (*ibid.*). If we may add to the fact that stars are living things the further fact that they are immortal, as we have seen Aristotle state elsewhere and as he seems to suggest here,¹¹¹ we may conclude that, for him, stars are to be counted as gods because they meet his definition of god as we have unpacked it above.

The fact that the stars count as gods for Aristotle shows that we were correct in taking the predicate 'best' (ἄριστον) in the version of the definition of god in *Metaph.* A. 7

111) It is true that Cicero speaks in this passage of stars as 'coming into being in aether' (*gigni in aethere*), which would, if taken at face value, deny them eternity (though it would not necessarily deny them immortality). However, this is clearly meant to contrast with the sublunar animals having their origin (*ortus*) in 'earth, water and air', and whose generation out of such inferior elements makes it 'absurd' for there not to be animals made of the celestial element (aether), which is superior and consequently most conducive to life (*ad gignenda animantia aptissima*). The statement thus seems to me to take the form of a rhetorical paromologia, in which a loose and non-literal concession is made of a characteristic feature of animals (i.e. birth) to the case of stars, in order to connect the latter with, and establish their status as, living things in their own right. The eternity of stars is retained throughout, by their placement in a region of perpetual and eternal movement and eternal liveliness, as the upper, ethereal region is described in the passage. In any event, taking the statement literally would clash, not only with the extant Aristotelian corpus, but also with testimonies ascribed to the lost works (ὡς ἀναλλοιώτοις: *Olymp. in Phd.* 26. 22-27. 4 [Norvin]=*De phil.* Fr. 24, Ross), and, more importantly, with Cicero's own report, in which he attributes to Aristotle, for instance, the view that the courses of the stars are 'in all eternity settled and immutable' (*in omni aeternitate ratos immutabilesque*: *N.D.* II. 37. 95-96=*De phil.* Fr. 13a, Ross).

(as the 'best and eternal living thing') to indicate a relation between the category of things that qualify as gods and that of all other (viz. mortal) living things. For Aristotle regards both his prime mover and the unmoved movers of the heavenly bodies, as well as the heavenly bodies themselves (including, as we have just seen, individual stars), as gods, whereas he certainly is committed to there being a hierarchy between those kinds of being, where the movers of the celestial bodies are superior in goodness to the former,¹¹² and both are presumably inferior in some way to the prime mover.¹¹³ This hierarchy may even turn out to imply that higher-rank divine entities (e.g. the prime mover) are 'more divine' (θειότερα) than lower-rank gods (e.g. stars) for Aristotle, in which case the predicate 'best', when attributed to the former, would indicate a relation to the latter (and not only to non-gods).¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, in as much as all immortal living things are collectively best (ἄριστα), in the sense outlined above, the term 'god' applies to all of them. Now, since the hierarchical structure of gods should include all immortal living things, there is no reason for it to exclude, in principle, anthropomorphic gods, such as those of traditional Greek religion. Aristotle of course denies the existence of such beings. But this does not mean that he also denies their being the kind of thing that he has in mind in using the term god if they existed.

112) Generally, in Aristotle's paradigm of action, the agent affecting change in a patient without itself being changed thereby is of a higher kind than the latter. Cf. *GC* I. 7, 324a24-b6, and the discussion thereof in S. Menn, 'On Dennis De Chene's *Physiologia*', *Perspectives on Science* 8.2 (2000), pp. 119-143 at p. 136.

113) Cf. R. W. Sharples, 'Aristotelian Theology after Aristotle', in D. Frede and A. Laks (eds.) *Traditions of Theology: Studies in Hellenistic Theology, its Background and its Aftermath* (Leiden, 2002), pp. 1-40 at 8.

114) This seems to be suggested by *De caelo* I. 9, 279a12-b3, where Aristotle outlines a notion of the 'divine, primary and highest' as that which is unchangeable because there is nothing more divine than it which would be required in order to change it. See discussion of this passage in chapter I, p. 44.

This last statement requires clarification. When Aristotle, in *Metaphysics* B. 2, 997b8-12, criticizes those who say that 'there are gods, but in human shape' for 'positing nothing but eternal human beings', he means to criticize the mode of reasoning (in this case, the projection of ordinary human experience onto superhuman affairs, perhaps as part of the traditional teleological argument for the existence of gods) by which people come to believe, erroneously, in the existence of such beings. Indeed, since that belief attributes eternity to a type of being a part of whose form (namely, its nutritive soul) normally dictates a movement of 'growth and decay' (*De anima* II. 5, 432b9-14), its content almost amounts to a *contradictio in adjecto*, on Aristotelian grounds.¹¹⁵

Nevertheless, Aristotle certainly acknowledges the conceivability of such 'eternal humans', and indeed their high place in the collective consciousness of his day. As absurd as it is to think of the gods as digesting nectar and ambrosia, and as useless as it may be to consider the truth of such ideas seriously (οὐκ ἄξιον μετὰ σπουδῆς σκοπεῖν), Aristotle knows full well that such ideas are not only thinkable, but are ordinarily thought, backed up by the authority of such figures as Hesiod (*Met.* B. 4, 1000a9-19). Now, had 'eternal humans' miraculously existed, they would be immortal living things, and hence, by Aristotle's definition, gods. It is in this sense that I say that the traditional gods of Greek religion, albeit fictional for Aristotle, do not deviate from Aristotle's understanding of the

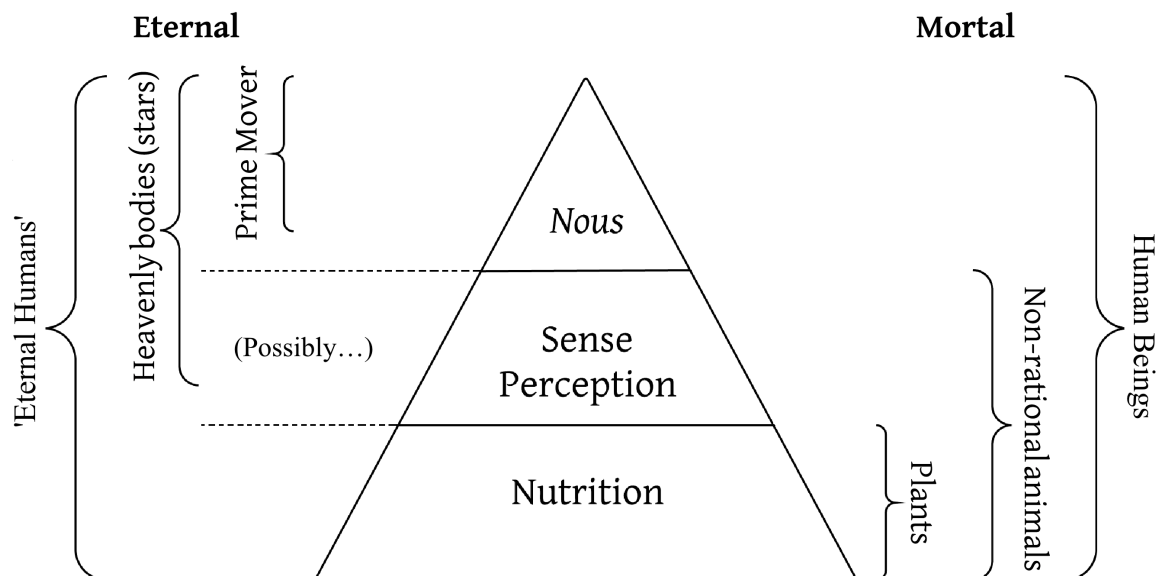
115) It is for this reason, it seems, that Aristotle does not attribute a nutritive soul to the heavenly bodies, focusing rather on their intelligence, and possibly on their perception. Presumably, for him, the necessity of having at least such a soul in order to count as a living thing only applies to the sublunar realm (at any rate, it surely does not apply to the prime mover) (cf. *DA* II. 2, 413a20-32). This interpretation is supported by Alexander's denial (on behalf of Aristotle) of a nutritive faculty to the heavenly bodies (Simplicius in *DC* I. 8, 263. 18-21, Wendland). Though be it noted that Alexander thinks they should not have sense perception either (ibid. II. 8, 463. 3-6). See H.A. Wolfson, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-78.

term, and that they must therefore be included as referents in any general statement that he might make about gods as such.

Furthermore, the 'eternal humans' functioning as gods in traditional religion share quite a significant common denominator with those gods whose existence we know Aristotle to affirm, against, say, 'eternal brutes' or 'eternal plants', in so far as 'eternal humans', like all of Aristotle's gods, are rational immortal living things. As we have seen, the essence of god, captured in its full definition, includes by implication its being better than those living things which do not meet its definition. Since 'eternal brutes', supposing they could exist, would lack intellect (unless they be zoomorphic gods of the kind commonly found in ancient religions, and which standardly share in deeds presupposing reasoning power), there is a real sense in which they would be worse than other, mortal, living things that do possess it (i.e. humans). For Aristotle thinks of the nutritive and perceptual capacities as inferior to the intellect (*NE* X. 7, 1177a20-21). It is no coincidence, therefore, that he regards the intellect as godlike ($\theta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omicron\varsigma$), and attributes it to every entity that meets his definition of god. This attribution, it appears, follows from that very definition.

In fact, on the picture that emerges from our discussion so far, the hierarchy that Aristotle sees between the different kinds of god, culminating in the prime mover, is in perfect correlation with the degree to which the beings in question are purely intellectual. This hierarchy is thus the inverse of that of the sublunary living things, among which one ensouled thing is ranked higher than another the more soul capacities it shares in, although both hierarchies, of course, have the intellect for their highest point. We may represent the relation between the two using the following diagram:

Figure 1:



The intellect (i.e. prime mover), Aristotle says, has itself as an object of thought because it must think the 'most-godlike' of things (θείότατον: *Met. Λ. 9*, 1074b15-35),¹¹⁶ and he suggests that, specifically in the case of humans, their intellect is either objectively godlike or the 'most godlike' (θείότατον) thing in them (*NE X. 7*, 1107a15-16). This 'most-godlike' thing, as we can infer from the above discussion and diagram, and as we would expect given the literal meaning of the adjective, qualifies as such because it is the thing the having of which, or in the case of the prime mover being which, is the most in accord with the essence and definition of god (which, as we have seen, includes its being better than all mortals). 'Eternal humans', though qualifying as gods, are at the bottom of

¹¹⁶) It is interesting to note, in this respect, that Aristotle is said to have called the Delphic inscription 'know thyself' the 'most godlike' (θείότατον) (Plu. *Mor.* [Adv. *Colot.*] 118c=De *phil.* Fr. 1 Ross).

the divine pyramid, so to say, since they possess both a perceptual and a nutritive soul in addition to intellect.

The heavenly bodies assume an intermediate position, since they are eternal, intellectual beings lacking a nutritive soul, though they are also movable material substances. They might even possess sense perception, though there is a long history of debate on this issue.¹¹⁷ Plutarch of Chaeronea, Galen, Plutarch of Athens and Simplicius, for example, ascribe sense perception to the heavenly bodies on Aristotle's behalf.¹¹⁸ We have already mentioned Cicero's testimony to the same effect.¹¹⁹ It is yet a further question whether the sense perception Aristotle would have attributed to these beings is at all comparable to that of sublunar living things, and, if so, which senses it ought to include. What seems to be generally accepted, though, is that sense perception if they have it must benefit them, not by maintaining their (already invulnerable) existence, but by enhancing their lives in some other way. Thus, Olympiodorus the younger, in his commentary on Plato's *Phaedo*, says that, for Aristotle, the heavenly bodies (τὰ οὐράνια) possess 'only sight and hearing' (ὄψιν μόνην καὶ ἀκοήν), as opposed to the entire range of animal senses, the ones that on Aristotelian theory require the sense of touch, since one should attribute to them only those senses that contribute to well-being (πρὸς τὸ εὖ) (4. 9. 1-4 [Westerink]=*De phil.* Fr. 24, Ross), and not the mere continued existence to which the

117) For a survey of the controversy see H. A. Wolfson, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-ff. The controversy revolves around the interpretation of several key texts, in particular *De anima* III. 12.

118) See H. A. Wolfson, *ibid.*, pp. 77-81. Cf. Plutarch of Chaeronea - *De musica*, 25; Plutarch of Athens - Philoponus in *De anima* 599.35 Hayduck; Simplicius, in *De anima* 320.29 Hayduck; Simplicius - in *De anima* 106. 25-9 Hayduck and in *De caelo* 463. 6-12 Heiberg.

119) See p. 104.

senses of touch, taste and smell contribute for those animals that possess them.¹²⁰ On the other hand, such figures as Alexander, Philoponus and Themistius deny sense perception to the heavenly bodies, often claiming that these entities, which are eternal and impassible (i.e. cannot undergo change), are in no need of sense perception either for their being or for their well-being, in Aristotle's view.¹²¹ Now, we may grant that the heavenly bodies are in no need of sense perception for the performance of their proper, eternal, intellectual activity. This activity, being eternal and unchanging, must be entirely separable from the material constitution of those bodies. So, unlike sublunar rational animals (humans), and like the prime mover, the heavenly bodies engage in an intellectual activity that does not depend upon sense perception (through the mediation of *phantasia*). That is not to say, however, that they necessarily lack sense perception. It might be that in their case, perhaps uniquely, a perceptual soul and a noetic one coexist independently, without cooperation or interrelation of any kind. Whether this was in fact Aristotle's view might be impossible to determine based on the extant texts. For present purposes it suffices to say that the heavenly bodies, for him, are eternal living things, and are therefore gods, ranking higher than traditional gods, because they do not possess a nutritive soul, but lower than other gods (e.g. the prime mover), since they are not purely intellectual beings, either because they share in sense perception or merely because they have bodies and are moved.

120) Olympiodorus seems to be drawing (rather loosely) on Aristotle's view that touch (perhaps in conjunction with its derivative, taste) is essential for any animal, with all the other senses being (at least in the case of rational living things) for the sake of well-being (τοῦ εὖ ἕνεκα: *DA* III. 12, 434b22-4; cf. *De Sensu* I, 436b14-437a5).

121) Cf. Alexander - Simplicius, in *De anima* 319-21 Hayduck, Philoponus, in *De anima* 395-6 Hayduck; Philoponus - in *De anima* III 595.39 and 596.12 Hayduck; Themistius - in *De anima* 123. 29-31 Heinze.

Importantly, the inferiority of certain types of god as gods gives them a certain usefulness over their superiors, so far as human beings are concerned. For it is precisely what makes some gods inferior to others, namely the 'impurity' of their intellect, which is accompanied in their case by other soul capacities, that (naturally) brings them closer to the kind of being a human being is. As a result, the lower some gods are in rank, the easier it would be for us to identify with them, and thereby gain access to gods in general and knowledge of divinity, including and culminating in the prime mover. Such an identification is paramount in Aristotle's overall project. As we have seen in chapter II, Aristotle thinks that it is a sense of 'wonder' about the gods that initiates the process of learning about their true nature, and, as a matter of psychological fact, he thinks, such a sense of wonder is most likely to be engendered in one by something that is akin to oneself.¹²² This fact is echoed by Aristotle's own philosophical method. Even those scholars who see an abysmal disparity between the intellect of human beings and that of god in Aristotle's ultimate view agree that (at least) in *Met.* Λ. 7 he draws on a presumed similarity between the two in order to establish our ability to understand god's (particularly the prime mover's) occupation.¹²³ He speaks there of the prime mover as having an 'occupation' (διαγωγή) identical to the best one achievable by us, only extended to eternity (1072b14-18).

The similarity between (the proper activities of) human beings and the prime mover establishes the status of the latter as a living thing (since 'the activity of intellect is life, and [the prime mover] is such an activity', 1072b26-7), and this fact, combined with the

122) See pp. 69-70. Cf. *Rhet.* 1371a30-2, 1371b12-15.

123) J. Beere, 'Thinking Thinking Thinking: On God's Self-Thinking in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Λ. 9' (2010), esp. at. p. 5 and p. 27.

eternity of the prime mover already established, enables the identification of it as (a) god, using, as we have seen, the readymade definition: 'immortal/eternal living thing'. It is perhaps the reliance on the comparison with human beings for the application of the genus of god to the prime mover that explains why the predicate 'best' (ᄁριστον) is stated explicitly in the Λ. 7 version of the definition of god, although it is also included, as discussed above, by implication in the *Topics* IV. 2, 122b12-17 version (viz. 'immortal living thing'). For it is by being of the same genus as the best mortal living things, i.e. humans, that the prime mover is here shown to belong to the class of the (absolutely) best living things, i.e. immortal living things (that is to say, gods), since it also happens to be eternal. Now, since it becomes gradually less clear in what way the activity of the prime mover really resembles human thought as *Metaphysics* Λ progresses,¹²⁴ an understanding of what it means for us to share in something as godlike as *nous* may only be plausibly attained by considering our relation to gods who resemble us in other respects as well.

It is understandable that it would seem, and often does seem, impossible for us to overcome the gap between human thinking and the activity of the prime mover, and thus to feel kinship with the prime mover, by anything like a direct comparison. A similar result holds, in fact, for a subclass of gods that are less purely intellectual and hence have more in common with us than does the prime mover, namely the heavenly bodies. Although these resemble us, not only in being rational, but also in having bodies, motion and possibly even sense perception, as we have seen, Aristotle implies that it is nevertheless quite difficult for human beings to feel any kinship with them, as he says that people tend to think of them, wrongly, as mere bodies and as 'completely inanimate'

124) J. Beere, *ibid.* p. 3: 'In fact, the resulting theory of god's thought is so strange that one might start to wonder why god's activity counts as thought at all'.

(ἀψύχων δὲ πάντων: *De caelo* II. 12 292a18-20). But it is clear that Aristotle does not think of the anthropomorphic gods of traditional religion as difficult objects for humans to identify with, since he himself compares them to 'eternal humans'. Indeed, it is clear that it is precisely on account of the similarities between human beings and such fictional gods that Aristotle criticizes the belief in the existence of the latter. Let us investigate the basis for human beings' identification with these gods further.

2: Humans – 'Eternal Humans': The divine in human beings

Arguably the most elementary difference between the natures of human beings and the true gods that emerges from Aristotle's discussions in the ethical and political works, and one which is at the center of the difficulty in understanding the basis for the analogy Aristotle occasionally makes between the proper activities of both, is the level of self-sufficiency (αὐτάρκεια) of humans in comparison to gods. This difference is apparent in the following famous remarks Aristotle makes in the *Politics* I. 2:

He who is incapable of partaking in a community (κοινωνεῖν), or is in no need of a community due to (his) self-sufficiency, is no part of a *polis*, so that he is either a beast or a god (ἢ θηρίον ἢ θεός).¹²⁵ The impulse toward this kind of community, then, is found in everyone by nature. And he who first established [such a community] was responsible for the greatest goods. For, just as a human being is the best of the animals when perfected, thus also, when he is separated from law and justice, he is the worst of them all. (1253a27-33)

It is because of his self-sufficiency (δι' αὐτάρκειαν), according to what Aristotle says here, that god (or a god) has no need for social interaction (κοινωνία) of whatever kind.

125) One is reminded here, once again, of the definition of god in the pseudo-Platonic *Definitions*. Cf. n. 104.

On the other hand, the first construction of a *polis* is responsible for the greatest goods for humans, since (Aristotle implies) it is conducive to their being perfected (τελειοῦσθαι).

Whatever it is that god's self-sufficiency consists in, then, it may not reasonably be adopted by a human being as an ideal to be attained directly. If god's condition is to be taken as an ideal to be imitated, such an imitation must not be taken to involve the renunciation of life under political organization, since that would result in the deterioration of a human being to the point of being 'the worst of all [animals]', and not in the best human life, as would have been intended. The unique nature of humans forces them to arrive at the best state achievable by them in a unique way, viz. via a political life, which would be appropriate neither for beast nor for god. Nevertheless, the traditional gods, Aristotle's 'eternal humans', are commonly thought to partake in politics, and even to be ruled by a king, a thought which results, as Aristotle recognizes, from a tendency to think anthropomorphically (I.2, 1252b24-7).

Moreover, the self-sufficiency of the true gods denies them any moral behavior or consideration. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* I. 9, immediately after mentioning the ways in which *eudaimonia* might be thought to be acquired,¹²⁶ Aristotle says:

If anything (else) is (also) a gift of the gods to humans, it is reasonable that *eudaimonia* should be god-given (εἰ μὲν οὖν καὶ ἄλλο τί ἐστι θεῶν δῶρημα ἀνθρώποις, εὖλογον καὶ τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν θεόσδοτον εἶναι), and particularly inasmuch as it is the best among human things. But this question would perhaps be more appropriate for another inquiry. But even if it is not god-sent, and comes to be through virtue and some sort of learning or training, it is apparently among the most divine things (τῶν θειοτάτων). For that which is the prize and end of virtue is apparently the best thing, and something both godlike and blessed (θεῖόν τι καὶ μακάριον). (1099b11-18)

126) Aristotle is drawing here, as on an established question with an established range of possible answers, on the opening lines of Plato's *Meno*.

The conditional in this passage does not reflect merely 'some uncertainty in [Aristotle's] words' or an intuitive feeling that 'the common belief in divine providence' was 'incompatible with his own idea of god in its strictest form' as W. J. Verdenius claims.¹²⁷ Both its protasis and its apodosis are clearly taken by Aristotle to be false, both here and elsewhere. Apart from his explicit attribution of the acquisition of the two kinds of virtue (i.e. virtues of thought and virtues of character) to the two methods given in this passage as alternatives to divine beneficence (i.e. to learning [μάθησις] and habituation [ἄσκησις], respectively), later on, in *NE* II. 1-2 (pointing against the apodosis, that *eudaimonia* is god-given), and from his general dismissal of anthropomorphism already mentioned in the previous chapters (pointing against the protasis, that gods give gifts to human beings at all, as well as the apodosis), the description of gods in X. 8 directly excludes the possibility of their bestowing any gifts upon anybody (again, contra the original conditional as a whole). There, Aristotle says that it is unworthy of the gods to attribute to them bountiful deeds: 'to whom will they give?' (since they live totally separately from human beings, and are of course in no need of financial or material aid themselves) (1178b7-18). Indeed, Aristotle there denies any action to the gods, save theoretical contemplation on the basis of metaphysical knowledge and understanding, with the conclusion that it is the latter that is most of the nature of *eudaimonia* (1178b18-23).

It is interesting that, in the discussion following this conclusion, arriving at which confirms the status of the conditional from I. 9 as a counterfactual, Aristotle introduces a similar conditional, i.e. in the '*theophilestatos* argument' already quoted above: 'If there comes to be any care for human affairs by the gods, as people think, it would in fact be

127) W. J. Verdenius, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-1.

reasonable for them to be pleased by what is best and most akin to them [and this would be the intellect] and to do favors in return [ἀντευποιεῖν] to those who love and honor this most of all' (X.8, 1179a24-9). The protasis here ('if there comes to be any care for human affairs by the gods'), like that of the original conditional of I. 9 ('if anything is a gift of the gods to humans'), hypothesizes a possibility of divine providence. Again, far from 'the truth of the antecedent [being] assumed', as S. Broadie says,¹²⁸ Aristotle must expect his reader to assume that it is false, and similarly for the apodosis. The characterization of the gods in the same chapter suffices to show that they are not the kind of beings to be capable of 'caring for', let alone of loving, 'being pleased by' (χαίρειν) or 'returning favors to' (ἀντευποιεῖν) anyone. These are obvious and deliberate anthropomorphisms, which are designed to contrast with Aristotle's own rigorous analysis of the divine and its properties.

This is made even clearer by Aristotle's remarks in the other two ethical works. In the *Eudemian Ethics* VII. 12, he says that 'it is clear that, needing nothing, [a god] will not need a friend (*philos*), nor will he have one, being that he needs none' (1244b7-10; cf. *Pol.* VII. 1, 1323b21-6). This is of course in line with the *Nicomachean Ethics*, according to which the distance in rank between humans and gods eliminates the possibility of mutual *philia* between the two (VIII. 7, 1158b35-1159a5), since it is impossible for any human being to make any meaningful contribution to a god's life (though he or she may

128) S. Broadie, 'Aristotelian Piety', *Phronesis* 48.1 (2003), pp. 54-70 at p. 61, n. 22. See also R. Bodéüs, *Aristotle and the Theology of the Living Immortals*, trans. J. E. Garrett (Albany, 2000), p. 10: 'This passage [i.e. 1179a24-30] manifest a view which ... has every intention of conforming to ordinary beliefs concerning divine benevolence'. Bodéüs (ibid. p. 153) attempts to link this passage to Aristotle's remark about 'the opinions of the wise' at 1179a17 in the same chapter, but these discussions are clearly separate, as is shown by the beginning of a fresh discussion between them, at 1179a20 (σκοπεῖν ... χρῆ).

be regarded as a good person [ἐπιεικής] for a meaningful attempt [NE VIII. 14, 1163b15-18; IX. 1, 1164b2-6]). The *Magna Moralia* adds as a conclusive reason that there can be neither a 'return of affection' (ἀντιφιλεῖσθαι) from gods back to humans, which is a precondition for mutual *philia*, 'nor at all any loving' (φιλεῖν: II. 11, 1208b26-31).¹²⁹ When *philia* is mentioned, then, the reference is to the unreciprocated *philia* of human beings to their god(s) (EE VII. 3, 1238b18-27; NE VIII. 12, 1162a4-5).¹³⁰

According to Aristotle, then, real gods do not act morally either towards one another or towards anyone else. Their self-sufficiency forbids it. Even justice (or just actions) are inapplicable to them, since they cannot 'have an excess of' things that are 'good without qualification' (NE V. 9, 1137a25-30). Again, Aristotle is quite aware of ordinary opinion, which does attribute moral characters to the gods. Clearly, when he speaks in the *theophilestatos* argument of NE X. 8 of the idea that there is some 'care (ἐπιμέλεια) for human affairs by the gods, as people think (ὥσπερ δοκεῖ)', he refers to the gods of traditional Greek religion, which are commonly believed to pay heed to, and take active part in, human life. These gods are neither apolitical nor amoral, and Greek culture is of course rife with examples of stories about them engaging in moral considerations and behaving accordingly, both towards one another and towards human beings. Naturally, Aristotle recognizes the existence of such a behavior among those gods (whose existence he of course rejects). Thus he says, for instance, that we attribute to the gods indignation, a feeling associated with good character (*Rhetoric* II. 9, 1386b14-15), which is the 'mean

129) It is also denied there that good fortune (εὐτυχία) is due to divine providence (II. 8, 1207a6-ff).

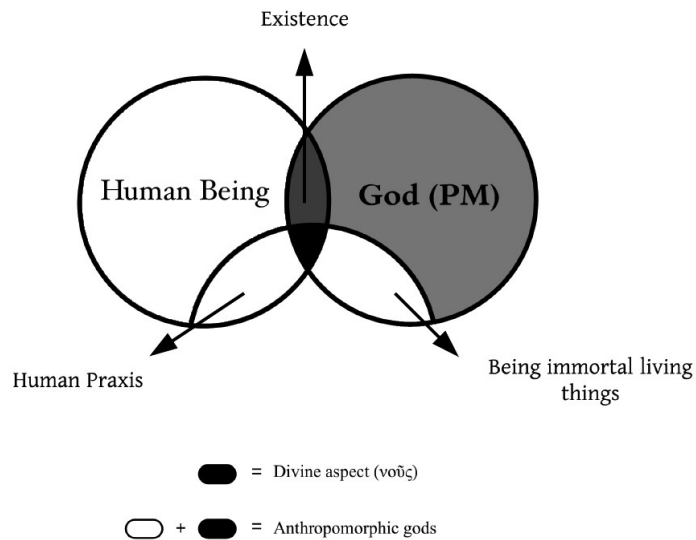
130) See J. Owens, 'The Relation of God to World in the *Metaphysics*', *Études sur la Métaphysique d'Aristote (Symposium Aristotelicum VI)* (Paris, 1979), pp. 207-222 at n. 26.

between envy and spite' (*NE* II. 7, 1108a35-b1; cf. *MM* I. 27, 1192b18; *EE* II. 3, 1221a3). In fact, he adds, indignation is itself made into a god(dess) – *Nemesis* (III. 7, 1233b26).¹³¹ The (fictitious) class of traditional gods, then, is distinct from self-sufficient gods like the prime mover, to whom neither morality nor politics is relevant. This does not go against their meeting Aristotle's definition of god. That definition, as we have seen, merely requires of a god to be an immortal living thing, as well as to be rational, so as not to be inferior to any mortal species, like human beings, in any respect. Traditional gods, it is true, are not superior to humans every respect, as (say) the first unmoved mover might be, but this only means that, had they ever existed, they would be lower-rank gods, rather than not gods at all.

Being equal to humans in (having a) moral character, and superior to them in being gods, the 'eternal humans' deified by popular religion form a category of (nonexistent) beings whose features constitute a subset of the union of the features of human beings and the first unmoved mover. The intersection between all three categories, i.e. the intellect, which, apart from being in existence, is the only feature known to be common both to humans and to the prime mover, is thus accompanied by a much wider range of properties from both beings in the category of anthropomorphic (or traditional) gods.

131) Cf. Hesiod, *Works* 200; *Theog.* 223.

Figure 2:



Conceiving of, and relating in some way to, such gods (say, by wondering at them), then, might open up new possibilities of exploring the way in which human beings share in something divine, i.e. the intellect, as part of their nature, and the extent to which their nature might allow them to enhance their share in it. One might begin this investigation by considering the case of morality just mentioned. Moral (or morally relevant) action, understood as the product of practical deliberation, is common to us and to the traditional gods. Such deliberation counts for Aristotle as an exercise of one's intellect (viz. the practical intellect [νοῦς πρακτικός], which Aristotle says differs from the speculative [θεωρητικός] intellect only in the end pursued [τῷ τέλει: *De an.* III. 10, 433a14-15]). And so, traditional gods, or 'eternal humans', share in the practical intellect both *qua* humans and *qua* eternal living things, that is to say, both in so far as they are 'political animals' whose natures are such as to necessitate social interactions in order to flourish, as well as

in so far as they are gods, whose full definition includes by implication noetic activity which sets them apart from (and above) non-rational animals.

In her discussion of the human approximation of the divine life according to Aristotle, G. R. Lear makes an important distinction between two possible reasons why Aristotle denies that actually existing gods have moral properties. This distinction helps us see just what I mean by the usefulness of the traditional gods for stimulating human investigation into, and coming to understand, our relation to the divine via a consideration of the practical intellect:

Now Aristotle thinks it is absurd to imagine the gods as possessing moral virtue ([*NE* X. 8.] 1178b10–21), but not because there is anything per se undignified about exercising practical reason when in political circumstances. What is unworthy of the gods is the thought of their being tied to (much less finding their leisure in) political circumstances in the first place.¹³²

The gods referred to here are of course those eternal living beings that Aristotle takes to be actually in existence, such as the first unmoved mover. That these gods do not engage in practical deliberation, Lear says, is no indication of the status of such an activity, e.g. as unworthy of them, but only of the particular circumstances surrounding the nature of such beings, including, as we have seen, their self-sufficiency, which translates into (*inter alia*) complete political and moral independence, and due to which there is no reason for them (and, consequently, no possibility for them) to deliberate.

Now, we need not accept Lear's own controversial argument for the godlikeness of political life, which relies on a very specific reading of *NE* X. 8,¹³³ in order to appreciate

132) G. R. Lear, *Happy Lives and the Highest Good: An Essay on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Princeton, 2004), p. 195.

133) According to Lear, Aristotle commits himself in *NE* X. 8 to thinking of moral action, based on practical deliberation, as godlike, since he says there that (*a*) non-rational

her general point. It is indisputably true that Aristotle views practical deliberation as an exercise of intellect, and the intellect as godlike, so that he is committed to viewing practical deliberation as an application of something godlike, one mode of whose exercise enables human beings to share in god's proper contemplative activity with metaphysical knowledge and understanding.¹³⁴ Human beings are confronted with situations, and are endowed with properties, totally inapplicable to (say) the prime mover, which predispose them to engage in intellectual activity for practical purposes. The activity in question remains, of course, of the intellect, and it is thus comparable to the activity of Aristotle's true gods. If those gods were 'thrown into' political circumstances, their intellectual nature would manifest itself in engagement in practical deliberation and in the rational behavior based thereon. It is of course completely impossible for such a scenario to occur, for instance in the case of the prime mover, since that would absurdly reduce this being to insufficiency, which is incompatible with its being the particular thing that it is.

animals cannot be happy because they do not participate in contemplation in any way (cf. 1178b22-28), and therefore (b) any human life that is happy would be so (for him) due to its proximity to divine contemplation, and (c) 'a fortiori, the happy political life must be happy in virtue of its godlikeness'. Lear, *op. cit.*, p. 195 (emphasis mine). However, it seems reasonable to suppose that, whichever view of political life and its relation to human flourishing he holds, in the discussion in question Aristotle deals exclusively with the philosophical life and the flourishing afforded by it. Otherwise, we are forced (with Lear) to attribute to Aristotle, *inter alia*, the view that practical reasoning is a 'kind of contemplation' (*theoria tis*: 1178b32).

134) V. Caston, 'Aristotle's Two Intellects: A Modest Proposal', *Phronesis* 44.3 (1999), 199-227 at p. 203: '...when Aristotle speaks of the practical intellect (ὁ πρακτικὸς νοῦς) and the theoretical intellect (ὁ θεωρητικὸς νοῦς), we are inclined to take this only as a statement about two different capacities ([*De anima*] 3. 10, 433a14-17). No one supposes for a moment that Aristotle is referring to two distinct *intellects*.'

Lear says: 'if the gods', again referring to the gods that Aristotle takes to exist, 'were political, that would imply that they were dependent (and perhaps even mortal) creatures'.¹³⁵ The anthropomorphic gods of traditional religion, or 'eternal humans', to return to Aristotle's own terminology, enable the elimination of the parenthetical remark in Lear's statement, by straddling immortality and human nature. These gods, although fictional, can function as thought experiments through which we may envisage the hypothetical scenario discussed above (and perhaps even accept it, of course solely on the basis of imagination), in which (real) gods are 'thrown into' the human condition or, more precisely, into a political context. By concluding, on the basis of this thought experiment, that the godlike *modus vivendi* in such a context would involve virtuous behavior and therefore a (correct) use of one's practical intellect, one can appreciate one's own share in the divine as tenable by such a behavior, and appreciate it on purely Aristotelian grounds. The upshot is both theoretical and practical. Imagining the gods as political and moral beings helps us appreciate Aristotle's view of human beings, not just as having, but indeed as essentially consisting in, something divine (i.e. in νοῦς: NE X. 7, 1177b34-1178a7),¹³⁶ and, through this appreciation, one may acquire in addition a criterion for determining which type of behavior would most fully realize one's own share in the divine (and consequently lead to one's [complete] flourishing or happiness).

Of course, practical deliberation is not our only, indeed not even our primary, mode of exercising our rational capacity. Higher (κρείττων) than it, says Aristotle, is the contemplative activity of the intellect (ἡ τοῦ νοῦ ἐνέργεια ... θεωρητικὴ οὐσα: NE X. 7, 1177b19-20). A human life is more godlike, and hence happier, the more it is dominated

135) G. R. Lear, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

136) For further discussion of this passage see G. R. Lear, *op. cit.*, pp. 190-1.

by this latter kind of activity (1177b26-1178a8). Although more godlike, and in fact in a sense constituting the real nexus between us and the real gods (X. 8, 1178b21-22), the human version of that activity differs from its divine expression. In particular, just as practical wisdom (φρόνησις) and the life corresponding to it are 'closely entangled with our passions' (συνηρημέναι τοῖς πάθεσι) and 'belong to our composite nature', and are consequently entirely 'human' (ἄνθρωπικαί), the (theoretical) activity of the intellect, though it is carried out in separation (κεχωρισμένη) from all connection to our passions and indeed our bodies, is also, in the case of humans, in need of 'external supplies' (τῆς ἐκτὸς χορηγίας), though to a lesser degree than its practical counterpart (1178a19-25). This account hearkens back to Aristotle's discussions of cognition in *De anima*, in which it is established that the (human) soul never thinks (νοεῖ) without a *phantasma* (III. 7, 431a16-17). Since *phantasia* presupposes the possession of sense perception (III. 3, 428b13-14), this feature of human thinking distinguishes it from the thinking of, at the very least, all immaterial gods.¹³⁷

The relevance of the conception of 'eternal humans' to the exploration of the relation between the intellectual activity of humans and that of the real (and immaterial) gods, may therefore be extended to include the case of theoretical contemplation. Practical

137) It would also seem to distinguish it from the thinking of certain material gods, e.g. the heavenly bodies. It is true that these beings may have sense perception, as well as voluntary movement, which Aristotle says is only possible given desire (τὸ ὀρεκτικόν) which in turn necessitates *phantasia* (*De an.* III. 10, 433b28-9). But one may do well to handle the material from *De anima* carefully when applying it to anything other than sublunary living things (just as one must take Aristotle's statement that contemplation [θεωρεῖν] necessarily occurs in conjunction with some *phantasma* [III. 8, 432a8-9] as admitting of exceptions, at the very least in the case of the prime mover). As J. Owens notes, 'there is very little [in Aristotle] about the soul of the heavens', so that their cognitive apparatus remains vague (*op. cit.*, p. 220). Even if the heavenly bodies turn out to possess *phantasia*, though, this need not necessitate that *phantasia* be involved in their intellectual activity (see also p. 110 above).

reasoning, unlike contemplation, is entirely foreign to such gods, but so is the use of *phantasmata* in theoretical reasoning. Since this use is, again, necessarily foreign to incorporeal gods, we may invoke 'eternal humans' once more to aid us in learning the sense in which human thinking (νοεῖν) is godlike. This invocation becomes all the more useful when one comes to consider the differences (already alluded to above) between the human activity of theoretical contemplation on the basis of metaphysical knowledge and understanding and the proper activity of the prime mover.

3. Humans – ('Eternal Humans') – Gods: The human imitation of the divine

So far, we have seen why traditional, anthropomorphic depictions of gods are the proper tools for motivating people to learn of (a) the existence and nature of what Aristotle takes to be actually existing gods, as well as (b) the common denominator between human beings and those true gods – viz. the intellect. That arriving at knowledge concerning these matters, for the sake of which traditional religion operates in a *polis* established according to nature, is of immense significance in Aristotle's view, is already clear. The science dealing with the nature of true gods is the 'most divine and most honorable' (θειοτάτη καὶ τιμιωτάτη), being both about, and worthy of being practiced by, true gods (*Met. A. 2*, 983a5-6). And thus humans, since they are in principle capable of practicing this science too, are capable of achieving, if only temporarily, the best possible life activity, precisely by understanding and pondering the truths of this science (*A. 7*, 1072b14-18). It is less clear, however, what Aristotle thinks this approximation of the

condition of the divine by human beings amounts to in detail, and exactly how he recommends to bring it about.

Particularly confusing, at first glance, is his recommendation in several places to imitate god's activity not, or not only (or directly), by engaging in the activity of knowing and understanding the nature of divine objects, but by engaging in self-reflective thought. What could be gained by concentrating one's intellectual attention on such lowly objects (relative to divine beings) as oneself (a human being)? The answer to this question turns out, somewhat paradoxically, to be, as I will argue, that human beings benefit from self-knowledge because, for Aristotle, we are both 'lowly' and divine. Our lack of self-sufficiency, manifesting itself in our political nature *inter alia*, forces us to form friendships in order to (gradually) learn about ourselves. As the culmination of the process, however, we gain an understanding of our true nature, which is divine (viz. we gain knowledge of ourselves qua intellects). Fully knowing ourselves as we truly are includes, and culminates in, knowing the best application of our nature and engaging in it, which is identical with the contemplative activity that constitutes the nature of Aristotle's true gods. Finally, since the traditional conception of divinity, as has been shown by the discussion of section 2 above, is useful for the realization both of our human limitations, in particular the lack of self-sufficiency in human beings relative to the true gods, and of the divine nature which we nevertheless possess, traditional religion turns out, here too, to be beneficial for the human beings' actually engaging in the human/divine activity in which we approximate god itself.

In order to understand the relationship, just sketched, between human rational activity and divine contemplation in Aristotle's theory, we need to focus on three corresponding

texts, from *MM* II. 15, *EE* VII. 12, and *NE* IX. 9, whose explicit topic is the relationship between human self-sufficiency and friendship. In the *Magna Moralia* II. 15, Aristotle (or the Aristotelian for whose authorship we owe this work)¹³⁸ raises the question whether the person who possesses all good things already and so is self-sufficient will have any need for a friend. Will that person be self-sufficient in this as in other matters? Aristotle proposes, and immediately rejects, the analogy between the self-sufficient person and god for the purpose of answering this question (1212b33-1213a10):

The comparison customarily derived from god [ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ] in discussions [ἐν τοῖς λόγοις] is incorrect there, nor would it be useful here. For if god is self-sufficient and does not need anyone, it does not follow that we will need no one. For this is the kind of thing that is said in discussions about god. For since, as they say, god has all the goods and is self-sufficient, what will he do? For he will not sleep. He will contemplate [θεάσεται] something, then, they say. For this is the finest and most appropriate thing to do. What, then, will he contemplate? For if he is going to contemplate something other [than himself], he will contemplate something better than himself. But this is absurd, that there should be something better than god. Therefore, he will contemplate himself. But this is absurd. For we evaluate the human being who examines [κατασκοπῇται] himself as ignorant. It will be absurd therefore, they say, that god will be contemplating himself. What, then, will god contemplate? Never mind that: we are inquiring about human self-sufficiency, not that of god – whether the self-sufficient man will need friendship or not.

That god does not need friends is not only 'said' (λεγόμενος), but is rather a well established and 'evident' (φανερὸν) fact, for Aristotle (*EE* VII. 12, 1244b7-10).¹³⁹ This fact is based on the self-sufficiency (αὐτάρκεια) in god's nature, which, as we have seen,¹⁴⁰ allows him to live independently, not only of friends, but indeed of any social or political interaction, by contrast to humans, who have an innate impulse for political organization in which alone, in fact, they may flourish.

138) See J. M. Cooper, 'The *Magna Moralia* and Aristotle's Moral Philosophy', in *Reason and Emotion* (Princeton, 1998), pp. 195-211.

139) See discussion in section 2, pp. 116-17.

140) See section 2, pp. 113 ff. Cf. *Pol.* I. 2, 1253a27-33.

It is this difference in nature between human beings and god that Aristotle must rely on when he says, in the passage just quoted, that the analogy between them is inappropriate either here (ἐνταῦθα, i.e. in the case of self-sufficiency and friendship) or there (ἐκεῖ, i.e. in the discussions about the object of god's contemplation). Although, in the discussion Aristotle refers to, it is said that it would be absurd for god to be contemplating himself (ἄτοπος ... ὁ θεὸς ἔσται αὐτὸς ἑαυτὸν θεώμενος), this alleged absurdity is inferred on the ground that we tend to evaluate a human being behaving in this way as ignorant or imperceptive (ὥς ἀναισθήτω ἐπιτιμῶμεν). However, since god's self-sufficiency rests on his unique nature, it is irrelevant to our consideration of what human self-sufficiency involves. And, by the same token, god's own self-sufficient nature is not to be determined by reference to human self-sufficiency, so that, Aristotle can endorse the condemnation of the 'self-examining' human being (as he seems to, by using the first person plural 'ἐπιτιμῶμεν'), while maintaining that self-contemplation just is the proper activity of god, that is to say of the divine *nous* whom he designates as god in *Metaphysics* Λ. 7. Aristotle positively argues, in what scholars have noticed are two parallel discussions in *EE* VII. 12, 1245b14-19 and *Met.* Λ. 9, 1074b33-5, that since (i) god, or the divine *nous*, knows or understands (voεῖ) that which is best, and (ii) god itself is that which is best or most excellent (τὸ κράτιστον), therefore (iii) god or the divine *nous* 'always voεῖ the same simple thing, namely itself'.¹⁴¹ God's knowing or

141) S. Menn, *The Aim and the Argument of Aristotle's Metaphysics* (a work in progress: <<http://www.philosophie.hu-berlin.de/institut/lehrbereiche/antike/mitarbeiter/menn/contents/>>), chapter IIIγ2, pp. 19-20 and n. 31; Cf. J. Brunschwig, 'Metaphysics Λ. 9: A Short Lived Thought-Experiment?' in M. Frede and D. Charles (eds.) *Aristotle's Metaphysics Lambda* (Oxford, 1997), 275-306 at 304-5.

understanding, as Aristotle puts it in Λ. 9, must be knowing or understanding of knowing or understanding (1074b34-5: ἡ νόησις νοήσεως νόησις).

Of course, there is a sense in which Aristotle does recommend god's proper activity to human beings, and recommends it to them, furthermore, qua being the proper activity of god. In *Nicomachean Ethics* X. 8, Aristotle tells us that god's activity, which 'is distinguished in blessedness', is contemplative, and that therefore the human activity most akin (συγγενεστάτη) to this must be the most constitutive of *eudaimonia* (εὐδαιμονικωτάτη) (1178b21-3). Here, Aristotle seems to endorse the comparison (concerning human beings) that is 'customarily derived from god in discussions' (*MM* II. 15, 1212b33-4), using it to determine the activity most appropriate for humans. Furthermore, in the *MM* passage, immediately after comparing human beings with god and mocking the 'self-examining' human being, Aristotle mentions the opinion of certain wise people that self-knowledge is 'a most pleasant' thing (ἡδιστον: 1213a14-15). On the ground that 'knowing oneself' (τὸ αὐτὸν γινῶναι/εἰδέναι/γνωρίζειν: 1213a14-15, 26) for humans is impossible to accomplish directly (or, introspectively), Aristotle offers his own method, involving a 'second self' (ἕτερος ἐγώ), that is to say a friend, by observing whom alone one would gain self-knowledge just as one sees one's own face only by looking into a mirror (1213a7-b2). Although human 'self-examination' is mocked, and the comparison between humans and god is declared irrelevant to understanding human self-sufficiency, then, clearly there is more to be said on both points. It is not the goal of knowing oneself that Aristotle objects to, but only one method of achieving that goal, i.e. solitary introspection. Similarly, he rejects the analogy with god, not absolutely, but only in so far as it might be taken to imply that direct self-knowing is available to humans as it is to

god. To be retained from the analogy is the need of self-knowledge for self-sufficiency, whether or not this also requires having friends (which in the human case it does).

Discussing exactly the same topic (i.e. the relationship between self-sufficiency and friendship) in the *Eudemian Ethics* VII. 12, Aristotle begins again from an analogy between the self-sufficient person and god:

If he who lives virtuously is happy, why would he need a friend? For the self-sufficient man is in need neither of useful people, nor of comforters, nor of society. He himself living with himself suffices [for him]. And this is most clear in the case of a god.
(1244b5-8)

And again, just as in *MM* II. 15, the analogy is immediately rejected. Aristotle suggests we may have missed the mark 'owing to the juxtaposition' (sc. of man with god) (διὰ τὴν παραβολήν: 1244b21-3). In what follows (1244b24 ff.), he goes on to explain why it is that the analogy in question is misguided, that is to say, why in order to approximate divine self-sufficiency as far as they can humans, unlike gods, need friendship. Now, Aristotle says at the end of *EE*, in VIII. 3, 1249b16 ff., that the best choice or acquisition of naturally good things, for example friends, is that which promotes the contemplation of god, and that the worst choice is that which hinders one from contemplating god. With the standard (ὅρος) for determining the goodness of acquiring this or that naturally good thing being the contemplation of god, then, the self-sufficiency with which *EE* VII. 12 is concerned, and for which friendship would turn out to be needed in the human case, seems to essentially involve the knowing of god, which is also the sole activity of god himself, by virtue of which he is self-sufficient.

To return to 1244b24-ff., where Aristotle sets out to explain why friendship is needed for human self-sufficiency, we find as a starting point an explication of (human) life in terms of perceiving and knowing (αἰσθάνεσθαι καὶ γνωρίζειν) (familiar from *De anima*), and the implication that living-together, as friends do, just is perceiving-together and knowing-together. With the implicit question of why it is that such things as perceiving and knowing along with one's friends would be useful for attaining self-sufficiency, Aristotle seems to go on to say that what is most choice-worthy (αἰρετώτατον) for each person is self-perception and self-knowledge (ἔστι δὲ τὸ αὐτοῦ αἰσθάνεσθαι καὶ τὸ αὐτὸν γνωρίζειν αἰρετώτατον ἐκάστω: *EE* VII. 12, 1244b26-7).¹⁴² The text allows for various readings of the kind of activity that Aristotle is concerned with here.¹⁴³ We may read the pronouns, for instance, not only as reflexive ('knowing oneself' as object [τὸ αὐτὸν γνωρίζειν]),¹⁴⁴ but also as subjective ('oneself knowing' [τὸ αὐτὸν γνωρίζειν]).¹⁴⁵ The reflexive reading is undoubtedly the one most in accord with the discussion in *MM* II. 15, 1213a12-26 above, and this fact gains added importance when we consider the similarity between the *EE* and the *MM* on the issue of the friend as 'another Heracles' or 'a second self' (cf. *EE* 1245a30).¹⁴⁶ Its occasional rejection by

142) Reading 'τὸ αὐτοῦ αἰσθάνεσθαι καὶ τὸ αὐτὸν γνωρίζειν' with Bonitz instead of Sylburg's 'τὸ αὐτὸ αἰσθάνεσθαι καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ γνωρίζειν'. Walzer-Mingay, in the OCT, follow Bonitz, whose reading seems to be well supported upon examination of the manuscripts. Bonitz rightly directs the reader in this regard to a comparison with 1244b33, 1245a4, 36 and b1. See H. Bonitz, *Observationes Criticae in Aristotelis quae feruntur Magna Moralia et Ethica Eudemia* (Berlin, 1844), p. 76.

143) J. Whiting, 'The Pleasure of Thinking together: Prolegomenon to a Complete Reading of *EE* VII. 12', in F. Leigh (ed.), *The Eudemean Ethics on the Voluntary, Friendship and Luck* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 77-154 at pp. 91-2 and pp. 103-ff.

144) This reading is supported, for instance, in R. Sorabji, *Self* (Chicago, 2006), p. 235.

145) A. Kosman, 'Aristotle on the Desirability of Friends', *Ancient Philosophy* 24 (2004), pp. 135-154 at p. 138.

146) Ibid. p. 136. Kosman, who seems to call into question the authenticity of the *Magna Moralia*, has no qualms about interpreting the two discussions we are dealing with from

scholars,¹⁴⁷ then, implies a doctrinal discontinuity between the two works, which I believe can be avoided.

In order to see why Aristotle should argue in *EE* VII. 12, 1244b26-7 that self-cognition is the 'most choice-worthy' thing 'for each person', we must first ask just what it is that Aristotle means by 'self-cognition' in this context. Since self-knowing and self-perceiving are also discussed later on in *EE* VII. 12 (1244b29-ff), we may begin by clarifying the notion of self-cognition there. There are two (closely related) candidate notions readily available in Aristotle's theory, and both seem to make an appearance in the text we are considering. Cognition, be it perceptual or intellectual, according to him, involves, apart from the actual cognition of the object, (1) becoming in the act of cognition somehow identical with the object cognized (and thus cognizing oneself by cognizing the object to which one is in a sense identical) (*De anima* II. 5, 418a3-6; III. 4, 430a3-4) and (2) cognizing that one is cognizing (III. 2, 425b11-25; *Met.* Λ. 9, 1074b35-ff).¹⁴⁸ In our text, Aristotle first says that our desire to know is not simply a desire for knowing to occur (e.g. to some other person), but rather a desire for knowing to occur in oneself, a desire for oneself to be actively engaged in knowing (1244b29-34). This seems to be a demand for the cognition of one's cognizing, or cognition's cognition of itself ἐν παρέργῳ, as it is called in *Met.* Λ. 9, 1074b36.

MM and the *EE* as incongruent. For him, the explanation of the desirability of friends in *MM* II. 15 '[is not the explanation] that is at work in the *Eudemian Ethics*. There a different argument is offered ...' (Ibid). See also J. Whiting, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

147) A. Kosman, *op. cit.*, p. 138; J. Whiting, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-6; C. Osborne, 'Selves and Other Selves in Aristotle's *Eudemian Ethics* vii 12', *Ancient Philosophy* 23 (2009), pp. 349-71, at pp. 349-52.

148) On the importance of distinguishing between these two admittedly connected self-referential aspects of cognition in Aristotle see K. Oehler, 'Aristotle on Self-Knowledge', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 118 (1974), pp. 493-506 at p. 498.

In the discussion that follows, the former kind of self-cognition, namely the cognizing of oneself by cognizing the object to which one has become in some way identical in the act of cognition, is introduced. Aristotle seems to argue as follows (1244b35-1245a10). Life and the good are desirable (their opposites being undesirable), and therefore it is also (naturally) desirable for us to be alive and to be good. Also desirable are what is perceived and what is known (their opposites being, again, undesirable). To be perceived and to be known, therefore, is also itself desirable. Since by perceiving and knowing we become (at least in some sense) identical with the objects perceived and known, and since being known and perceived is desirable, as has just been said, it follows that it is desirable to perceive and to know. Here, the relevant notion of self-cognition is that of cognizing an object to which one has thereby become (in a way) identical. It may seem, then, that one or both of the notions mentioned above, i.e. becoming like the object cognized and cognizing that one is cognizing, are exclusively what Aristotle has in mind in speaking of self-cognition in this chapter as 'most choice-worthy'. But, if that were the case, it would be unclear why Aristotle construes 1244b24-ff as a discussion of the necessary role friendship plays in the attainment of human self-sufficiency, since both of the kinds of self-cognition in question are provided by cognizing any object whatsoever and do not require having friends.¹⁴⁹

149) Cf. p. 129. A. Kosman, for example, who does recognize the connections we have noted between *EE* VII. 12, *De anima* and *Metaphysics* Λ. 9 (*op. cit.*, pp. 141-3), seems to think that the two kinds of self-cognition we have mentioned so far in connection with these further texts, viz. cognition of one's cognition and cognizing one as one becomes identical to a further object of cognition, exhaust all the references in *EE* VII. 12 to self-cognition. He concludes, partly on that basis, that Aristotle proposes in the *EE* 'shared consciousness, rather than self-consciousness, as the fruit of friendship' (*ibid.* p. 152). J. Whiting similarly recognizes the connections between the texts in question (e.g. *op. cit.*, p. 120), which she also utilizes to reject the reading of *EE* VII. 12 as 'arguing that the self-sufficient agent *needs* a friend in order to achieve *self-knowledge*' (*ibid.* p. 123).

Remarkably, Aristotle's next comment in the chapter is that 'indeed, choosing to live with others may seem foolish, from a certain vantage point' (1245a11-12). By saying this, Aristotle recognizes that, if all we mean by self-knowledge or self-perception is the cognition of objects which we have become similar (or somehow identical) to in virtue of that cognition, or our cognition of ourselves as engaging in such a process, then we may just as well carry on cognizing on our own. In order to settle the question of the relevance of our friends, however, 'the truth must be examined based on the following point', namely that, as is familiar from *MM* II. 15, a friend is a 'second self' (a29-ff). It is more promising, then, to follow *MM* II. 15, which is clearly related to the text we are dealing with, and to suppose that in discussing self-knowing in *EE* VII. 12 (as well as self-perceiving, though *MM* II. 15 focuses on self-knowledge) Aristotle has in mind also the more specific kind of cognition whose object just is oneself (or a substitute for oneself, a mirror-image, so to speak, such as one's friend is supposed to function): it is this type of self-cognition, it seems, that he mentions in 1244b26-7 as the 'most choice-worthy' thing for every individual.

In the language of *Met.* Λ. 9, the self-knowing (or perceiving) aimed at must extend, beyond the knowing (or perceiving) ἐν παρέργῳ of one's knowing (or perceiving), to oneself as the direct object of one's cognition. That this aim is modeled on the activity of the divine *nous*, as Aristotle describes it, is clear. What is not clear, yet, is why Aristotle thinks this aim is 'the most choice-worthy' one for human beings. He certainly thinks there are more godlike (θεϊότερα) things by nature than human beings, e.g. the heavenly bodies (*NE* VI. 7, 1141a33-b2), and these (not to mention the prime mover) must count as more worthy objects of knowledge. Indeed, as we have seen, *EE* VIII. 3 tells us that a

thing counts as choice-worthy precisely by virtue of exhibiting a contribution to the contemplation of god, which therefore seems to be itself the most choice-worthy thing of all. As J. Whiting legitimately asks: '...why should it not in fact be *more haierton* for a subject to know someone or something superior to himself – for example God or the starry skies above – than to know himself?'¹⁵⁰

The answer to Whiting's question is that self-cognition, of the last kind we have been considering, viz. one's cognition of oneself directly as such, both leads to the contemplation of god and is in a sense ultimately identical to it. The process may be described using the following discussion from *EE* VII. 12. First, one engages in 'vulgar' pleasures (τὰ φορτικά) with one's friend, and thereby perceives oneself, which gives one an initial grasp of one's own character, appearance, qualities etc. To these then one adds 'the more divine pleasures' (τὰς θειότερας ἡδονάς) (1245a37-9), whereby one obtains a deeper apprehension of one's own nature, which, as Aristotle says both in this treatise and elsewhere, contains (primarily) the 'divine element' within one, namely *nous* (*EE* VIII. 2, 1248a26-7; *NE* X. 7, 1177b28). Full knowledge of one's true nature as *nous* would naturally include, indeed culminate in, the realization of the best possible application of such a nature. This further knowledge is tantamount to the knowledge of god, who just is the best, eternally activated life of which we as human beings are capable of partaking, if only for brief periods of time (*Met.* A. 7, 1072b14-18).¹⁵¹

150) J. Whiting, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-6. cf. p. 124. The purpose of this statement in Whiting's paper is to support the 'subjective' reading of *EE* VII. 12, 1244b26-7 against the 'reflexive' reading which I support.

151) We are now in a position to reply to one of the main arguments mounted in the secondary literature against reading *EE* VII. 12, 1244b26-7 as suggesting that it is self-cognition that is the most choice-worthy thing for every individual (ἔστι δὲ τὸ αὐτοῦ αἰσθάνεσθαι καὶ τὸ αὐτὸν γνωρίζειν αἰρετότατον ἐκάστῳ). A. Kosman is concerned about harmonizing this reflexive reading with what follows the sentence in question.

Aristotle is therefore consistent in claiming both that (a) self-cognition is the most choice-worthy thing for every individual (*EE* VII. 12, 1244b26-7), and that (b) the contemplation of god is the standard for all good choices (*EE* VIII. 3), because, according to his theory, a human being is in fact among the most choice-worthy objects of knowledge. We have already seen that Aristotle thinks of each person (ἕκαστος) not only as having intellect for his or her highest element, but also as being essentially constituted by intellect (*NE* X. 7, 1178a2-3).¹⁵² Aristotle is justified in speaking of human self-knowledge both as 'most pleasant' (*MM* II. 15 1213a14-15) and as 'most choice-worthy' (*EE* VII. 12, 1244b26-7), then, since this knowledge ultimately amounts to knowledge of intellect. We know from the *Metaphysics* that the self-knowing activity of the intellect (in this case, god) is pleasure (1072b16), and that it is 'most honorable' and 'best' (A. 2,

Aristotle goes on to say that, if one were to 'cut off' and posit knowledge 'itself by itself' and its opposite, there would be no difference between such knowledge and someone else knowing instead of oneself (1244b29-32). Since this last point has to do with subjects of knowledge, Kosman argues, so must the preceding line, for 'why should the lack of reflective perception generate any such difficulty?' (*op. cit.*, pp. 137-8). As we have seen, Aristotle's 'objective' point in 1244b26-7, viz. that self-cognition is the most choice-worthy thing for every individual, marks the beginning of an elaborate account in that chapter of what self-cognition is, the reason for its choice-worthiness, as well as why, in the human case, it requires friendship. The 'subjective' point of lines 1244b29-34, viz. that one desires cognition more when it is accompanied by one's cognition of one's own cognition, alludes to one kind of self-cognition, and one which any normal instance of cognition, of whatever objects, would include. Since Aristotle thinks this kind of self-cognition occurs whenever one cognizes, there is every reason for him to worry that a 'lack of reflective [cognition]', understood thus, would result in a subjectless cognition, contra Kosman (*ibid*). But this is not the only kind of self-cognition that Aristotle discusses in this text. Second comes self-cognition in the sense of oneself becoming in a sense identical to one's object of cognition and the consequent cognizing of oneself by and while cognizing that object of cognition due to the (quasi-)identity relation in question. And, finally, there is the cognition of oneself as such, for which alone friendship is necessary, and which is the notion most relevant to Aristotle's discussion of self-sufficiency in this chapter. It is this last type that Aristotle has primarily in mind in calling self-cognition 'most choice-worthy' in 1244b26-7, though the other two forms of self-cognition are of course also necessary in order to attain it.

152) See section 2, pp. 122-4.

983a5) and hence most choice-worthy for whoever is capable of it (including god). In so far as humans have (or are) intellect, which is divine (*NE* X. 7, 1177b28), then, their self-knowing would amount to such an honorable and pleasurable activity.

Granted, the self-knowledge that is prescribed in *EE* and *MM* is not confined to the contemplation of intellect. The *EE* makes this crystal clear by coupling self-knowing (αὐτὸν γνωρίζειν) with self-perceiving (αὐτοῦ αἰσθάνεσθαι) (1244b26-7), though in both cases it is evident from the context that the relevant notion of self-knowledge includes knowledge of the sum of one's individual characteristics, not all (indeed plausibly not even most) of which could be subsumed under the activity of a self-knowing intellect. This knowledge therefore merits the use of verbs such as γινῶναι, γνωρίζειν and εἰδέναι, as opposed to θεάσεσθαι (consistently used in *MM* II. 15, 1212b33-1213a10 for the self-reflective activity of god) or νοεῖν (attributed to god in *EE* VII. 12, 1245b18). Moreover, it may be argued that even that part of human self-knowledge that does focus on one's consisting essentially in intellect would not compare with the knowledge of first philosophy or of god, since the latter involves knowing intellect, not generally speaking, but specifically qua god, that is to say qua the activity of knowing or understanding that is the cause or first principle of the ordered universe (cf. *Met.* A. 2, 983a8-9).

Nevertheless, if, as we have assumed, Aristotle thinks of the cognition of one's own physical appearance, character, etc. as a starting point for coming to know one's own true nature, then he may legitimately also think that self-knowledge *in toto*, viz. as encompassing both of the kinds of reflexive cognition just mentioned, is the most choice-worthy thing for every individual human being. For, the endpoint of the process, that is to say one's knowing or understanding of one's own true nature, in its best form, Aristotle

thinks, just is a version of god's absolutely self-sufficient condition, albeit an imperfect, non-eternal and temporally divided version (Λ. 9, 1075a7-9).¹⁵³ Knowing the intellect qua god, then, is equivalent to knowing oneself as one would be in the best condition one may ever attain (except that it might also include the proviso just mentioned, viz. that this would be only a temporary instantiation of god's condition, which is eternal). There is a real sense, then, in which self-cognition, when fully achieved, includes, as its topmost part, the knowledge of god, viz. the activity of metaphysical knowing and understanding that god simply is.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore this, it seems to me, would be the case whichever content we end up attributing to the knowing or understanding of Aristotle's god, a

153) K. Oehler goes further, and argues that the aspiration for self-reflective cognition, in Aristotle's view, is inherent to all living things, and is in all such cases comparable to divine self-knowing, which is 'only the purest form of the same self-reference, which [Aristotle] met with in other forms of life of all kinds'; he quotes *EE* VII. 12 1244b24-1245a10 in support of his view, *op. cit.*, pp. 505-6. There is something to be said for this suggestion. Aristotle says, at 1245a9-10, that one wishes to live always (ἀεί), because one wants to know always, which is in turn because one wants to be oneself the object known (τὸ γνωστόν). At least if we read 'ζῆν ἀεὶ βούλεται' as (or also as) 'wants to live always' as opposed to 'always wants to live' [M.M. McCabe brings up the possibility of reading ἀεὶ here as 'janus-faced': 'Self-Perception in *Eudemian Ethics* VII. 12', in F. Leigh (ed.), *The Eudemian Ethics on the Voluntary, Friendship and Luck* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 43-76 at p. 58 n. 63.], and similarly for 'βούλεται ἀεὶ γνωρίζειν', this statement immediately reminds us of *De anima* II. 4, in which Aristotle says that the nutritive or reproductive faculty is that by which all (sublunar) living things act 'so as to share in eternity and the godlike as far as is possible for them' (ἵνα τοῦ ἀεὶ καὶ τοῦ θεοῦ μετέχωσιν ἢ δύνανται: 415a23-b1). Percipient and/or rational animals, Aristotle seems to be adding here (in the *EE*), aspire to and may share in 'eternity and the godlike', not only by propagating their species, but also by engaging in self-cognition, the highest form of which is the activity characteristic of god.

154) An interesting analog is to be found in the (pseudo?) Platonic *Alcibiades* A, in which Socrates says that 'this [sc. knowing and thinking] seems to resemble god, and anyone looking at it and knowing all that is divine, god and thought (φρόνησις), would as a result know himself too most of all' (133a4-6). R. Sorabji notes the influence this text must have had on Aristotle in forming his thoughts about self-knowledge, but goes on to say, contrary to my view, that Aristotle (in *MM* II. 15 and *EE* VII. 12) differs from Plato in being interested, not in one's knowledge of human nature, but rather specifically in one's knowledge of 'particular actions seen as his or her own and as good or enjoyable', *op. cit.*, pp. 233-4.

debated issue which we cannot hope to resolve here and do not need to.¹⁵⁵ Thus, it is reasonable for Aristotle to think, based on his conception of human beings and god(s), that the former can, and ought to, imitate the self-reflective activity of the latter, with the appropriate modifications, in order to become self-sufficient and live happily in the highest degree.

The modifications in question point to the disanalogy between human beings and god, which amounts in the *EE*, as it did in the *Magna Moralia*, to a difference in the particular way in which self-knowing is to be had by either. Aristotle suggests that it is only in so far as the original analogy between the two suggests that humans can be self-sufficient without friendship that it is useless, the reason being that 'for us well-being (τὸ εὖ) is with regard to another, but as for him [sc. for god] – he is himself his own well-being' (1245b18-19).¹⁵⁶ What began as an outright rejection of the analogy between god

155) The main controversy surrounds the question of whether or not the self-knowing of the divine *nous* would include (also) the knowing of multiple (perhaps all) intelligible objects or not. K. Oehler, *op. cit.*, p. 493, traces the modern exclusivist line, which he adopts, to E. Zeller's *Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (Leipzig, 1921), p. 382, followed by W. D. Ross, B. Russell, F. M. Cornford and W. K. C. Guthrie. As prominent defenders of the inclusivist interpretation, Oehler mentions H. J. Kraemer in 'Grundfragen der Aristotelischen Theologie', *Theologie und Philosophie* 44 (1969), pp. 363-82 and 481-505, and L. Elders, *Aristotle's Theology* (Assen, 1972), p. 257 ff. For a more recent discussion, favoring the exclusivist reading, see J. Brunschwig, *op. cit.*, esp. p. 288 and S. Menn, *The Aim and the Argument of Aristotle's Metaphysics* (a work in progress), chapter IIIγ2, esp. n. 31.

156) C. A. Gartner, in her doctoral dissertation, offers an alternative interpretation of this line, according to which the comparison between god and human beings does not allude merely to a difference in means towards attaining self-sufficiency, but rather to a difference between two relevant kinds of self-sufficiency. In particular, human self-sufficiency (or *eudaimonia*), in her view, consists not only in individual, but also in mutual, well-being. Our need for friends, then, would be for the latter type of well-being, not for something like individual self-knowledge of which god would be the paradigm (*Aristotle's Eudemian Account of Friendship* [PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 2011], p. 130). This interpretation has two consequences that my interpretation so far has attempted to avoid. First, as Gartner recognizes, it makes, much like the views of Kosman and Whiting, for a discontinuity between the *MM* and the *EE* (ibid. pp. 127-8). Second, it

and human beings with regard to the issue of friendship both in the *MM* and in *EE*, then, turns out to be a fundamental reliance on it with regard to their proper activities. Not only is it possible for god to set an example for human behavior, according to Aristotle, but the excellent activity of humans, that is to say their *eudaimonia*, is in fact modeled on that of god. The problematic application of the analogy in the case of friendship presents a mere difference in practical detail between the attainment and nature of the proper activities of god and humans, but cannot call into question the essential commonality between them, i.e. that they are both contemplative activities aimed, either exclusively or as a crucial step, at the contemplator him- or herself as an object.

It is interesting, however, and at first glance curious, that in *Nicomachean Ethics* IX. 9, the third text dealing explicitly with the topic of the relation between friendship and self-sufficiency, god is left unmentioned.¹⁵⁷ This is not the place to discuss this chapter in detail.¹⁵⁸ It suffices for our purposes to point out that it is not only god that is missing from the arguments in this chapter for the necessity of friendship for human self-sufficiency: self-knowledge is also not spoken of. Instead of the various references in *MM* II. 15 and *EE* VII. 12 to self-knowledge (αὐτὸν γινῶναι/εἰδέναι/γνωρίζειν), IX. 9 talks only of self-awareness (αἴσθησις). These two omissions cannot be coincidental. As we have seen, both *MM* II. 15 and *EE* VII. 12 conclude that friendship is necessary for human self-sufficiency by establishing friendship as a precondition for self-knowledge. But the fact that gaining self-knowledge is in the first place relevant for self-sufficiency,

also seems to be at odds with the fact, which is at the heart of my interpretation, that Aristotle thinks the best state achievable by human beings just is (a non-eternal instance of) the very activity that god is (*Met.* Λ. 7, 1072b14-18; 9, 1075a7-9).

157) See S. Stern-Gillet, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Friendship* (Albany, 1995), p. 132.

158) For such a discussion see J. M. Cooper, 'Friendship and the Good in Aristotle, in *Reason and Emotion* (Princeton, 1998), pp. 336-356 at p. 338.

in both arguments, is grounded in an analogy between human beings and god. It is the reflexive intellectual activity of god that provides the paradigm for human self-sufficiency, in both the *MM* and *EE* texts in question, where the aim is one of explaining human beings' need for friendship in order to imitate the divine successfully.¹⁵⁹

The arguments of *NE* IX. 9 seem to take a different strategy in arguing for the role of friendship in human self-sufficiency, and the fact that they mention neither god nor self-knowledge supports our interpretation of the essential connection between these two features in the arguments of *MM* and *EE*. Since it is only in these two texts that Aristotle argues for his view that friendship is necessary for self-sufficiency by alluding to the self-knowledge that it facilitates, his overall view of this issue turns out to be unified and consistent.¹⁶⁰ However, Aristotle does compare human beings to god elsewhere in the *NE*.

159) Of course, the human self-knowledge leading to such an imitation would include knowledge of things completely inapplicable to god, such as the 'knowledge of one's character and qualities, motives and abilities' (cf. τί ἐστι καὶ ὁποῖός τις ὁ φίλος: *MM* II. 15: 1213a10-11) (see J. M. Cooper, *ibid.*, p. 341). And so, even if, as R. Norman suggests, the self-thinking of the prime mover is 'the same activity that human minds perform when they engage in abstract thought', and therefore 'God's happiness is not generically different from man's' ('Aristotle's Philosopher-God', *Phronesis* 14 (1969), pp 63-74 at pp. 67-72), such an activity would, in the human case, still be preconditioned on something quite distinct from divine contemplation (although, as noted above, it might also ultimately get remarkably close to such a contemplation, given the intellectual nature of human beings).

160) S. Stern-Gillet (*op. cit.*, p. 134) argues that: '...all three *Ethics* contain statements to the effect that, for whatever reason, self-knowledge cannot be direct and immediate', with the result that friendship is required. However, she limits self-knowledge in this context to knowledge of one's moral virtue (*ibid.* pp. 54-6). A. O. Rorty ('The Place of Contemplation in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*', *Mind* 87 (1978), pp. 343-58 at p. 355) seems more accurate, as does Z. Hitz ('Aristotle on Self-Knowledge and Friendship', *Philosopher's Imprint* 11 [2011], pp. 1-28 at p. 25) who says that, for Aristotle: 'Contemplative friendship, to the extent that it includes appreciative knowledge of one's nature, resembles God yet more than moral friendship, where one only appreciates the goodness or beauty of one's actions'. But both Rorty and Hitz base their conclusions on *NE* IX. 9, rather than *EE* VII. 12 or *MM* II. 15. Similarly, C. H. Kahn reads *NE* IX. 9 as arguing that (perfect) friendship involves the recognition of the friend's true self – which both friends share in common *qua* human beings – namely *nous* (which is the same, at

As we have seen,¹⁶¹ he establishes, both in I. 9 and in X. 8, the status of the activity that he considers best for human beings on the basis of an analogy with the proper activity of god, which is contemplative (X. 8, 1178b21-2), and indeed self-reflective, since contemplation is most pleasant and perfect when it is performed by a 'subject in good condition and in relation to its most excellent (σπουδαιότατον) object' (X. 4, 1174b21-3), and god is of course such a subject as well as such an object.

Aristotle brings up the analogy with god in the parts of the *NE* where he does so by introducing the traditional conception of gods as anthropomorphic, benevolent and providential agents. Such gods would grant humans happiness as a gift (I. 9, 1099b11-18), and would 'be pleased by' wise human beings and 'return them the favor' (X. 8, 1179a22-32). As we have seen in chapter II, Aristotle thinks that the role of traditional religion in the *polis* is to motivate citizens to inquire philosophically into the nature of divinity by introducing them to anthropomorphic gods. If this inquiry is successful, the citizens would be in a position to practice first philosophy, which is the top human good and therefore the natural end of any correctly organized *polis*. In the present chapter, we

least in kind, as the god of *Metaphysics* Λ) ('Aristotle and Altruism', *Mind* 90 [1981], pp. 20-40 at pp. 34-40). But since Kahn also focuses on IX. 9, which mentions neither god nor self-knowledge, he has to resort to linking this chapter to the (controversial) discussion of the active *nous* in *DA* III. 5. Lastly, M. D. Walker argues that, on Aristotle's view, friendship initiates a process of coming to know oneself, whose endpoint is the contemplation of god, whereby one comes to fully grasp one's own nature as *nous* ('Contemplation and Self-Awareness in the *Nicomachean Ethics*', *Rhizai* VII [2010], pp. 221-38). But, once again, Walker focuses on *NE* IX. 9, and not *EE* VII. 12 or *MM* II. 15. Walker is content to speak of the 'self-awareness' mentioned in IX. 9 as encompassing the self-knowledge spoken of in the *EE* and *MM* chapters (ibid. p. 222, n. 3), and even as being ultimately equivalent to self-contemplation (p. 230, and n. 17). But this is clearly reading too much into the self-awareness/perception (αἴσθησις) exclusively spoken of in *NE* IX. 9. Further attention to the *EE* and *MM* would also relieve Walker of the need to rely on Plato's *Alcibiades* A in order to corroborate his interpretation of Aristotle (ibid. pp. 226-9; cf. n. 154 above).

161) See pp. 95-8, pp. 114-16.

have seen that it is not merely the nature of the true gods, but also the relation between divine and human nature, that one must understand in order to reach this desired goal. We have seen, further, that the gods of traditional religion can be used as a mitigating factor for the relevant comparison between human beings and Aristotle's real gods, particularly the prime mover. Such a comparison suggests that human rational activity, consisting in both practical deliberation and theoretical reasoning, and culminating in the contemplation of god, is the closest approximation of god's self-sufficient state that humans can reasonably expect to achieve. The role of anthropomorphic gods here is to show that this is the case by illustrating the fact that it is precisely this kind of activity that real gods would have performed had they been subject to human limitations (or, alternatively, by illustrating the fact that it is this kind of activity that real gods would have conferred upon human beings had divine providence been possible, since it is most godlike, or that it is just the kind of activity that real gods would have identified with and repaid with gratitude and favor).

It is by means of this comparison, which yields both an analogy and a disanalogy between human beings and god, that one comes to learn of the best possible state one could aspire to as the closest approximation to that of god (i.e. the actually existing gods, such as the prime mover). As we learn from the *MM* and *EE*, one also comes to learn through this comparison about one's reliance on others, in particular on one's friends, on the way towards reaching that state. Here the traditional conception of gods again becomes relevant. Anthropomorphic gods exhibit a mode of behavior which deviates significantly from anything applicable to an actual god, but which is nevertheless a crucial step towards approximating the condition of god. Thus, acting morally and civilly,

sharing one's life with one's friends, none of which is even remotely attributable to such beings as the prime mover, are preconditions for knowing and perceiving oneself, e.g. knowing one's moral properties and character traits. But, such self-knowledge and self-perception, according to Aristotle, are in turn a prerequisite for knowing or understanding one's own true nature. Since this nature is essentially intellectual, fully knowing it involves understanding what its best activity consists in. To understand this, finally, just is to understand god, whose nature consists precisely in that best activity.

Traditional religion, according to Aristotle, is necessary in order for any *polis* to exist and thrive, because its anthropomorphic conception of gods leads citizens to inquire into the true nature of divinity. This inquiry, in turn, necessarily involves learning of the relation between human beings and the divine, for which the gods of traditional religion are also useful. Having undertaken these inquiries, some citizens would prove capable of engaging in excellent contemplative activity, which is modeled on, and may even stand a chance of periodically becoming identical to, the proper activity of god. These citizens would owe a longstanding debt to the traditional religion with which they were raised for its role in enabling them to lead flourishing lives, and would, as Aristotle might hope, recognize the importance of maintaining the institutions of that religion for future generations to benefit similarly.

Conclusion

Aristotle seems to be in two minds about traditional religion. On the one hand, he invariably criticizes the anthropomorphism underlying the traditional depictions of divinity. On the other hand, he deems traditional religion, depicting the gods in just this way, crucially important for political organization, and wishes to retain it even in his ideal *polis*, in an unrevised form. One might be tempted to ascribe this apparent tension to an internal conflict between Aristotle's rationalism and his personal belief in the truth of the religion of his day. However, Aristotle's conservatism about traditional religion is perfectly compatible with his uncompromising rejection of the truth of its main tenets and ideas, such as the existence of gods who are interested in, and meddle with, human affairs.

This compatibility is made possible by Aristotle's recognition of the crucial socio-political role traditional religion plays in human society. In this dissertation I have provided an account of this role, based on an examination of various texts. First, in his lost dialogues, and particularly in the *De philosophia*, Aristotle seems to have dealt explicitly with the connections between philosophy and religion. The view that emerges from the surviving discussions in these works is that traditional religion is useless as a source of information or knowledge, though it may be useful on the way towards achieving knowledge. The traditional teleological argument for the existence of gods, for instance, is based on fallacious ideas about the gods as intentional agents and artisans, and therefore proves nothing. However, the presentation of precisely these traditional ideas about the gods to people may engender a favorable emotional condition in them. In

particular, people exposed to traditional religion may become better learners, and thereby may come to learn of the existence of true gods in the only way in which learning such things is possible: through philosophical reasoning.

In the *Politics*, Aristotle commits himself to a stronger view. There, he argues that traditional religion, along with its institutions and people maintaining them, are in fact necessary for any correctly organized political constitution to exist as such. Though he acknowledges the use of religion for persuading the 'masses' to obey the law, and may consider the possibility of its being useful for moral habituation, a thorough examination makes it clear that what he thinks traditional religion is necessary for is its role in enabling citizens to attain the top human good – the active knowing or understanding of the true gods of Aristotelian metaphysics – which any *polis* is by nature aimed towards. Religion does this by exposing citizens to traditional, anthropomorphic depictions of gods, which generate in them a sense of 'wonder' about gods. The citizens consequently turn to a philosophical inquiry into the gods whereby, if everything proceeds in the right way, they would eventually gain knowledge of ultimate metaphysical truth and be able to practice 'first philosophy' – the science dealing with, and deserving to be dealt with by, the true gods, primarily the first unmoved mover of the heavenly bodies and spheres. By doing so, the citizens in question would in fact approximate the very condition of the beings they have inquired into, since true gods, in Aristotle's system, consist just in active knowing or understanding of their own nature.

It is therefore not simply knowing the nature of gods that is relevant to one's attaining ultimate philosophical knowledge, and hence the top human good. It is also relevant to come to know the relation between one's own nature as a human being and the

nature of the divine, in order to understand in what way one might approximate the activity of the true gods. Traditional religion is useful for both of the inquiries just mentioned, viz. the inquiry into the nature of the divine and the inquiry into the relation between that nature and the nature of human beings. Its anthropomorphic, fictional gods are easy for humans, who are naturally hardwired to take pleasure in what is akin to themselves, to identify with, and thus have the propensity to get people interested in and inquire into divinity in general. And it is appropriate for these gods to initiate such an inquiry, since they also share in the same definition of god (viz. 'immortal/eternal living thing') as the true gods, the knowledge of whose nature the inquiry in question ultimately yields.

Part of the reason why the traditional gods are easy to identify with is that they lead social and political lives and engage in moral action. They are subject, in other words, to limitations which human beings are closely familiar with, but of which true gods are completely free. Upon recognizing these human aspects of the traditional gods, one may use them as a point of reference for learning about the connections between humans and the true gods, who otherwise seem to be worlds apart. As we can infer from the relevant discussions in the *MM* and the *EE*, this process, which importantly also requires friendship, would advance from the awareness and perception of one's own character traits to an apprehension of one's true nature as an intellectual being, whose best activity is comparable to the activity of which god consists eternally. The role of traditional religion in enabling this full realization of human nature, through which human flourishing is attained, constitutes its necessary political role, as we have conjectured based on the *Politics*.

This account of the role of traditional religion in Aristotle shows clearly that his endorsement of traditional religion does not stem from a belief in the truth of its content, but rather from a belief in its usefulness for obtaining truth. It is true that Aristotle thinks some religious myths, particularly those transmitted by the wise sages of old, are based on philosophical truths. But this only goes to show that the role of traditional religion for getting people to philosophize has been recognized by philosophers prior to Aristotle's day. It does not mean that religion itself should be compared to philosophical truth.

Metaphysics Λ. 8 tells us that, to some extent, the idea that there are unmoved movers of the heavenly bodies which deserve to be called gods is prefigured by traditional religion, though it is veiled by its mythological and anthropomorphic modes of expression.¹⁶²

Similarly, in *De motu animalium*, Aristotle famously traces his own idea of the prime mover to Homer's description of Zeus as immovable ('You will not drag Zeus, the highest of all, from the heavens down to earth, not even if you wear yourselves out: hang on [to your chains], all you gods and all you goddesses': IV, 699b32-700a6; cf. *Il.* VIII.20-22).

These anthropomorphic depictions of divinity, constituting the content of traditional religion, are entirely false, and they are equally and often used to depict stories that are not grounded in anything true. However, they are useful, indeed crucial, for motivating us to study philosophy, whereby we may gain true knowledge of the gods, and it is this fact that is represented by the attribution of such modes of expression to ancient people who have already attained philosophical wisdom.

162) At 1074a38-b14; see chapter II above. For criticisms of the doctrines underlying certain myths about the gods cf. e.g. *Met.* Λ. 6, 1071b26-9; N. 4, 1091a29-b8. In addition, Aristotle draws on myths about the gods in explaining facts unrelated to his views on divinity. See e.g. *De motu* IV, 699a27-ff, *NE* VIII. 10, 1160b24-7, *Pol.* II. 9, 1269b27-31; VIII. 5, 1339b4-10; 1341a17-ff, b2-8.

In conclusion, we may allude to the document concluding Aristotle's life, as has been traditionally done by scholars writing on Aristotle's view of religion.¹⁶³ Aristotle is said to have concluded his will with the following requests:

And [my executors shall] set up my mother's [statue] as a votive gift to Demeter at Nemea or wherever else would seem appropriate. And wherever they may bury [me], there they shall also place Pythias' bones, just as she dictated. And they shall also set up as votive gifts, upon Nicanor's safe return, as I have prayed for him to have, four-cubits long stone statues for Zeus Sōter and Athena Sōteira in Stagira. (*Diog. Laert.* V. 16)

We need not interpret these words as 'showing between the lines' an 'adherence to a religious faith which [Aristotle] never renounced',¹⁶⁴ or as a 'proof of his fidelity to the gods of his ancestors'.¹⁶⁵ Given the account expounded above, it makes all the sense in the world for Aristotle to adhere to the practices of traditional religion and to aspire for them to be preserved even after he is gone. Aristotle does not believe, of course, that either Demeter, Zeus Sōter or Athena Sōteira exist, let alone that they would care whether or not statues are erected in their honor. He does believe, however, that erecting such statues for these gods, and maintaining traditional religion in general, would have a positive impact on society: it would advance the chances of the *polis* to flourish, by motivating its citizens to inquire philosophically into the nature of divinity. Rather than contrasting with his theory, then, Aristotle's will demonstrates it.

163) R. Bodéüs, *Aristotle and the Theology of the Living Immortals*, trans. J. E. Garrett (Albany, 2000), p. 220; J. B. Rowland, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-9.

164) J. B. Rowland, *ibid.*, p. 199.

165) R. Bodéüs, *ibid.*, p. 220.

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