

Binghamton University

The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB)

The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter

12-28-1995

Plato's Theologia Revisited

Gerard Naddaf

York University, naddaf@yorku.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/sagp>



Part of the [Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity Commons](#), [Ancient Philosophy Commons](#), and the [History of Philosophy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Naddaf, Gerard, "Plato's Theologia Revisited" (1995). *The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter*. 198.

<https://orb.binghamton.edu/sagp/198>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). It has been accepted for inclusion in The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter by an authorized administrator of The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). For more information, please contact ORB@binghamton.edu.

PLATO'S *THEOLOGIA* REVISITED

by Gerard Naddaf, York University
SAGP meeting at New York
December 28, 1995

A. The etymology of the word *theologia*

At a glance, the word *theologia* would appear to be quite easy to define. Like most Greek compounds, it should suffice to break it up into its component parts: *theos* and *logia*. *Logia* is derived from *logos* (the suffixe *-ia* in Greek denotes the names of actions and abstract substantives) which means first and foremost "speech." As for *theos*, it can be translated without ambiguity by God or divinity - the most common meanings in Ancient Greece. Whence the literal translation of *theologia* by "speech about God or godlike things". However, this is what one finds under the word *theologia* in most of the principal lexicons: Liddell-Scott-Jones: "Science of things divine"; Bailly: "Recherche sur la divinité, théologie"; Pape: "Untersuchung über Gott u. göttliche Dinge"; Ast: "Ratio de deo dicendi vel deum adumbrandi"; H. Estienne: "Sermo aut dissertatio de Deo rebusve divinis".

So why translate *-logia* by "science" or "research"? The answer is quite simple, but generally passed over in silence. If the suffix *-logia* is derived from *logos*, *logos* is cognate with the verb *legein* which, in turn, is derived from the root **leg*. The fundamental meaning of this root is that of "gathering," "picking up," "choosing".¹ In sum, *legein* was not originally a saying verb,² but a word which translated the activity and laws of the mind.³ If *legein* was later to become a saying verb, this was due to its figurative meaning of "recounting, telling over, reckoning up" - one of the essential aspects of the verb "say".⁴ However, and this is the point I wish to make, contrary to *legein*, *logos* retained in Attic Greek the rational values of the root **leg-* with the meanings "account, reason" and applied them to the concept of speech.⁵ This explains why despite the numerous meanings that the word *logos* was to take following this, one can reduce them to two:

¹ On this point, see P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, Paris: Klincksieck, 1968-1980, vol. III, 625.

² The first occurrence of *legein* as a "saying" verb is found in Hesiod, *Theogony*, 27.

³ Cf. H. Fournier, *Les Verbes "dire" en grec ancien. Exemple de conjugaison supplétive*, Paris: Klincksieck, 1946, 53.

⁴ This explains why *legein* already appears in Homer in the sense of "saying, speaking" and especially "recounting". On this point, cf. Fournier (1946, 217).

⁵ Nowhere is this more evident, I believe, than in Heraclitus: where the word *logos* can designate simultaneously the intelligent speech of men and the intelligently ordered and structured speech of the universe. For an interesting analysis of the concept of *logos* in Heraclitus, cf. Michel Fattal, "Le logos d'Héraclite: un essai de traduction," *Revue des Etudes Grecques* 99, 1986, 142-152.

speech and reason. Since the first is subjected to the second, this explains why *theologia* could take on the sense of "science, research or rational discourse" about "god or divine things".

B. The first occurrence of *theologia*: the debate

According to the five major lexicons cited above, the word *theologia* is attested for the first time in Plato's *Republic* II, 379 a 5-6: *hoi tupoi peri theologias*, and the consensus is that it is employed here in the sense of a "rational discourse on divine things." Indeed, according to W. Jaeger,⁶ the word was here coined especially *ad hoc* by Plato to support the introduction of a new doctrine which resulted from a conflict between the mythical tradition and the natural (rational) approach to the problem of God.⁷ In sum, for Jaeger, the word *theologia* designates what Aristotle was later to call *theologikē* or "first philosophy" (*hē prōtē philosophia*)⁸ - whence his translation of *hoi tupoi peri theologias* by "outlines of theology."

V. Goldschmidt,⁹ for his part, in an illuminating article entitled "Theologia" will have

⁶ W. Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*, Oxford, 1947, 4-13.

⁷ In sum, according to Jaeger, Plato was not only the greatest of all classical theologians, but the one without whom neither the name nor the subject would have existed. *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, Oxford, 1939-1995, vol.2, 414.

⁸ "Both in the *Republic* and the *Laws* Plato's philosophy appears, at its highest level, as theology in this sense. Thereafter every system of Greek philosophy (save only the Sceptic) culminated in theology, and we can distinguish a Platonic, Aristotelian, Epicurean, Stoic, Neopythagorean, and Neoplatonic theology." *Ibid.*

Aristotle, for his part, employs the terms *theologos*, *theologia* and *theologein* to designate the activity of the poets as opposed to the philosophical speculations of the *phusikoi* (eg. *Metaph.* 1075b26; *Meteor.* 353a34-b5). Although Aristotle's use of the term *theologikē* may very well indicate that he wants to distance himself from the theology of the poets, this in no way implies that Plato's use of the word *theologia* does not designate a "science of things divine." Indeed, the two approaches are radically different. Further, a study of the occurrences of *theologia* and its derivatives (even a rapid consultation of the *Greek-English Lexicon* and the *Patristic Greek Lexicon* would suffice) reveals that they went through the whole of antiquity with the same double meaning, that is, synonymously with "first philosophy" or "mythology."

⁹ V. Goldschmidt, "Theologia"[1949] in *Questions platoniciennes*, Paris, 1970, 141-72. Goldschmidt's position is defended by G. Vlastos, "Theology and Philosophy in Early Greek Thought" [1952], in *Studies in Presocratic Philosophy*, vol. I, London, 1970, pp. 92-129. In a purely historical study which appeared the same year as Goldschmidt's, Festugière reached a similar conclusion (*La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste II: Le Dieu Cosmique* [1949], Paris, 1983, Appendice III "Pour l'histoire du mot *theologia*," 598-605).

nothing to do with such a contention.¹⁰ He argues (convincingly) that the word *theologia* here used by Plato means nothing more than a species of *muthologia*.¹¹ Furthermore, he brings to the fore earlier evidence to make it plausible that the classification implied: gods, daemons, heros, and life after death,¹² and that perhaps the term itself also antedate Plato's use of it here.¹³

Meanwhile, if the principal lexicons¹⁴ certainly agree with Jaeger, that is, *theologia* bears the sense of 'science of divine things,' the vast majority of contemporary translators,¹⁵ for their part, would follow Goldschmidt in taking *theologia* as either the equivalent to *muthologia* or a species of it.

The indecisiveness or insolubility of the debate is reflected in the authoritative articles on "theology" in the most recent editions of primary encyclopaedias in English and French: the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and in the *Encyclopaedia Universalis*. The author of the English article obviously sides with Goldschmidt¹⁶ while the author of the French article, with Jaeger.¹⁷

¹⁰ According to Goldschmidt, what we generally understand by theology is nowhere to be found in Plato: "Il ne peut y avoir dans le platonisme, ni théologie, ni preuve de l'existence de Dieu..." *La religion de Platon*, Paris, 1949, 148.

¹¹ As Goldschmidt points out (147), Marcianus (T.) goes so far as to propose the gloss *muthologia* in place of *theologia*.

¹² *Republic* II 377e-III 392c. They are grouped together at *Republic* III, 391e11-392a9. Although this paper will focus on the first species, *theoi*, there is no reason to believe that what is valid for one would not be valid for the others.

¹³ The fact that this list may have antedated Plato's use of it here, as Goldschmidt contents, is, for the case at hand, irrelevant.

¹⁴ In his post 1949 historical lexicon of Greek philosophical terms (*Greek Philosophical Terms*, New York, 1967, 193), F.E. Peters translates *theologia* in this passage as "accounts about the gods, myth," thus siding with Goldschmidt.

¹⁵ Of course, it isn't always possible to know if the translators have been influenced by the debate. Here is a short list of the how a certain number of contemporary (post - 1949) translators have translated the phrase in question: *hoi tupoi peri theologias times an eien*. D. Lee: "What are the lines on which our poets must work when they deal with the gods?"; A. Richards, "But of the gods what is to be said?"; A. Bloom, "What would the models for speech about the gods be?"; G.M.A. Grube, "What would be the general lines about the gods?"; R. Waterfield: "What are these guidelines for talking about the gods?"; E. Chambry, "Quels sont ces modèles qu'il faut suivre pour parler des dieux?"; L. Robin, "Quelles peuvent être, quand on traite les dieux, les formes appropriées?"; R. Rufenen, "Aber nun eben diese Richtlinien für die Götterlehre - welche waren das?"

¹⁶ "The Greek philosopher Plato..., with whom the concept emerges for the first time, associated with the term theology a polemical intention.... For Plato theology described the mythical, which

In view of the importance of the concept of *theologia* in the Western tradition - it is often used synonymously with *philosophia* -, I believe it merits another analysis. Indeed, nothing, to my knowledge, has been written on this important passage since the insightful and polemical article by V. Goldschmidt in 1949.¹⁸ The aim of this paper is to show that the word *theologia* in this passage of the *Republic* can mean 'science of things divine' *pace* Goldschmidt and his followers, but not in the context of natural philosophy as Jaeger seems to imply. The most important thing is to determine whether the element *-logia* should be translated as 'science' or 'speech', that is, whether Plato is making a value judgement about *theos*.

C. Context

The passage in question is found in the context of the education of the future guardians

he allowed may have a temporal pedagogical significance that is beneficial to the state but is to be cleansed from all offensive and abstruse elements with the help of political legislation". H. Thieliicke, "Theology," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Chicago (15th ed), 1974-1992, vol.28, 608.

¹⁷ "Le mot 'théologie' appartient au grec classique, et c'est Platon qui fut le premier à l'utiliser pour désigner la recherche de Dieu ou des dieux par la voie de *logos* (*Rép.* II, 379a 5-6). En fait, il prenait ses distances par rapport aux discours mythiques des poètes (les premiers théologiens) pour instaurer en Occident la théologie comme approche rationnelle du problème de Dieu". C. Greffré, "théologie," *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, Paris (rev ed), 1990-1993, vol.22, 489.

¹⁸ G. Vlastos in his article "Theology and Philosophy in Early Greek Thought," 1970, 98, n. 22 draws a conclusion similar to (but quite independant of) that of Goldschmidt. However, Vlastos' analysis of the passage lacks depth and ignores what follows. Further, he puts the accent on compounds with *-logos* (eg. *theologos*) and not *-logia* (*theologia*). Indeed, according to Vlastos, there are no examples prior to Plato of Greek compounds ending in *-logia* in the sense of a scientific or rational discourse focusing on the first term. However, *astrologia* and *meteōrologia* are two obvious examples of this; cf. E. Laroche, "Les noms grecs de l'astronomie," *Revue de philologie*, 20, 1946, 118-123 and C. Gaudin, "Remarque sur la 'météorologie' chez Platon," *Revue des études anciennes* 72, 1970, 332-343. For one obvious example in Plato, see his use of *muthologia* at *Critias* 110a. For an interesting discussion of this passage, cf. L. Brisson, *Platon, les mots et les mythes* [1982], Paris (2nd ed.), 1994, 189-190. D. Babut, in his book *La Religion des philosophes grecs*, Paris, 1974, 84-88, draws a conclusion similar to my own. Ironically, however, in his discussion of the passage in question, he does not mention the debate even though he does cite the works of the author in question. My observation that no one has replied "directly" to Goldschmidt (I do not include those who adopt one position or the other without holding that their own position has been challenged) is based on the Luc Brisson's and H. Cherniss' Platonic bibliographies in *Lustrum* 4(1959), 5(1960), 20(1977), 25(1983), 30 1988), 35(1993).

(*phulakes*) of the state.¹⁹ Plato has just discussed the qualities required to be a "professional" guardian²⁰ and now turns to how they should be raised and educated within the framework of the ideal state.²¹

Indeed the primary question is the following: how is one to mold the character of a guardian who is gentle, spirited and philosophical²² by means of traditional education?²³

Since Plato is convinced that a child's character is molded from the earliest age,²⁴ he begins with a discussion of the first instance of a child's education: stories (*logoi*).²⁵

According to Plato, there are two kinds of *logoi*, one true (*alēhēs*) and the other fictitious (*pseudēs*).²⁶ The fictitious kind of *logoi* are called *muthoi*²⁷ and it is these to which children are at

¹⁹ Indeed the primary or initial education for every future member of the state. The philosopher kings have not yet entered into the picture.

²⁰ *Rep.* II, 375a-376c.

²¹ *Rep.* II 376 d 11 - e 1. Or to be more precise, within the context of how justice and injustice originate in the state (*dikaiousunē te kai adikian tina tropon en polei gignetai*; *Republic* II 376 d 2-3).

²² *Rep.* II 374 e - 376 c. Although the words *philosophia* and *philosophos* are employed by Plato in *Rep.* II to IV in a moral rather than an intellectual sense (which begins to predominate at *Rep.* V, 473b), it must be remembered that without the initial molding of the moral character of the individual, the intellectual molding, strictly speaking, would be futile. However, it is important to note for the case at hand, that it is only a philosopher who can mold, thanks to his knowledge of the forms, the moral character of the individual.

²³ *Rep.* II, 376e. What Plato understands by traditional education or *paideia* runs from *Republic* II 376e to *Republic* III 412b and consists of two things: *mousikē* for the soul and gymnastics for the body. The section on *mousikē* runs from 376e to 403c and the section on gymnastics, from 403c to 416b. Although the second must be subordinated to the first, there must be a complete harmony between the two (411e-412a). It is worth noting in passing that what Plato understands by *mousikē* are the arts over which the nine Muses preside. However, his focus is restricted to the learning and reciting of epic and dramatic poetry.

²⁴ This is reiterated and developed in the *Laws*, notably in Books I and II.

²⁵ In sum, narratives in poetry or prose of any sort. I should note that while I am here translating *logoi* by "stories," "discourses" may be more appropriate. For a detailed analysis of this section, cf. Brisson (1994).

²⁶ *Rep.* II 376e12

²⁷ *Rep.* II 377a5.

first exposed.²⁸ Now, since a child cannot yet distinguish fact from fiction with respect to *muthoi*, the first business of education is to supervise the production of *muthoi* (*tois muthopoiois*, 377b11-c1), that is, to determine which *muthoi* are suitable and which are not.²⁹ Plato continues that most *muthoi* currently related by mothers and nurses would have to be rejected. Queried by Adeimantus as to which *muthoi* (stories) he is referring, Plato replies that it is essentially to those of Homer and Hesiod.³⁰ They must be rejected and/or reformed because they grossly misrepresent the true nature of the gods and heroes.³¹ Indeed, the poets portray the gods as being jealous, vengeful, quarrelsome, adulterous etc.,³² whereas it is imperative that the first stories that a child hears be those that will encourage virtue of the highest order.³³

It is worth remembering here that the reason why Plato is so preoccupied with the moral and "theological" side of the poets is because they provided the ordinary Greeks with their moral and "theological" concepts. Indeed, the "poetic" gods were seen as the models to follow, and this is precisely the problem he wants to address. Consequently, when queried by Adeimantus as to what these *muthoi* should be, Socrates replies that they are currently acting as founders of a city (*oikistai poleōs*) and founders of a city are not required to produce stories (*poiēton muthous*), but only to provide the molds (*tupoi*) for those who do, namely, the poets (*poiētai*).³⁴ Adeimantus agrees, but wants to know: "What are the molds that must be followed when discoursing about the gods?" (*hoi*

This is the context in which the first occurrence of *theologia* appears and what follows should leave little doubt that *theologia* should be understood as "science of things divine," that is,

²⁸ *Rep.* II 377a7. According to Plato's definition of *logos* at *Theaetetus* 206d1-2 ("the expression of one's thought by means of vocal sound with names and verbs" [Cornford's translation]), any *muthos* is also a *logos*. Plato does not however seem to include all types of *logoi* here. Indeed, the context forbids us from also including *logos* in the sense of an "argumentative discourse." Otherwise, Plato would not have concluded the section on *mousikē* with: "we have now exhausted the part of *mousikēs* relative to *logous te kai muthous*" (398b7-9). This explains why the word "stories" is an appropriate translation of *logoi* at 376e10, 12. It is also worth noting at this point that Plato's aim, as we shall see, is to turn the false *muthoi* into true ones.

²⁹ Indeed, Plato is of the opinion, as we shall see, that *muthoi* can be "true" as well as "false."

³⁰ *Rep.* II 377d.

³¹ *Rep.* II 377e.

³² *Rep.* II 377e-378d. Much of Plato's critique with respect to Homer and Hesiod has often, and rightly so, been compared with that of the 6th century B.C. philosopher-poet, Xenophanes.

³³ *Rep.* II 378e.

³⁴ *Rep.* II 378e7-379a4.

"rational discourse about the gods". Indeed, the molds (*tupoi*)³⁵ that the poet must follow when composing mythical discourses (*muthoi*) relative to the gods (*peri theologias*) are the *tupoi* that the founder of the city or philosopher would have determined following his contemplation of the intelligible world.³⁶

Consequently, when Plato tells us that the *tupoi* that must be followed with respect to God (*theos*) must represent God as he really is (*hoios tunchanei ho theos ōn*, 379a7-9), he means by this that the traditional gods must conform to an "ideal model," that is, an "intelligible form." This may explain why these *tupoi* are later called laws (*nomoi*)³⁷ - laws from which the poets must not deviate. Plato gives us two examples of these which are crucial for the present debate: 1) God is absolutely good and therefore can only be the cause of good things;³⁸ 2) God is absolutely perfect and therefore is immutable.³⁹

It is obvious that these molds are derived directly from an analysis of the intelligible form of god.⁴⁰ Indeed, God (or the gods) is described as good (*agathos*, 379b1, c2), cause of good (*aition tōn agathōn*, 380c9-10), beneficial because good (*ōphelimon to agathon*, 379b12), true (*alēthes*,

³⁵ *Tupos* is being translated as "mold," that is, an "empty mold" as opposed to the *apotupōma* or "impression in relief." This explanation is given by A. Diès in his translation of *Theaetetus: Les Belles Lettres*, 236. On the meaning of *tupos*, cf. G. Roux, "Le sens de TUPOS," *Revue des études grecques*, 63, 1961, 5-14.

³⁶ Indeed, as Festugière points out, the characteristics that Plato attributes to his gods are similar to those he attributes elsewhere to the forms, notably, simplicity, immutability, and intelligibility. *Contemplation et vie contemplative selon Platon*, Paris (3rd ed.), 1967, 96-97, 102-103. Ironically, Festugière still maintains that *theologia* in the passage in question is synonymous with *muthologia*. Cf. above n. 9.

³⁷ Cf. *Republic* II 380c5,7,d1, 383c7. Note that in the *Laws*, the laws are to be used the real catechism of the state (VII 811c-d) and any other literature, prose or poetry, written or unwritten, must conform to it. On the possibility of these laws being put to music and sung, cf. G.R. Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City*, Princeton, 1960, 340 ff.

³⁸ According to the first law, if God is absolutely good, then he cannot, contrary to popular opinion, be the cause of all things. Consequently, Homer and the other poets are wrong to represent Zeus and the other gods as allotting a mixture of both good and evil. If mortals are punished by the gods, it can only be because of justice (*Rep.* II, 379c-380c).

³⁹ According to the second law, if God is absolutely perfect, then he cannot, contrary to popular opinion, change his proper form to deceive others. Consequently, Homer and the other poets are wrong to portray the gods as being protean and deceitful in word and deed (*Rep.* II, 380d-383c).

⁴⁰ Goldschmidt's contention that "il est inutile de soulever ici la question de savoir si Platon, dans ces exigences dont découlent les *tupoi*, a voulu nous livrer une théologie authentique," is ridiculous for to reply to these demands indicates if the discourse can be qualified as rational or not.

382e11), simple (*haplous*, 380d5), perfect (*aristos*, 381c8), absolutely perfect (*pantēi arista echei*, 381b4), absolutely perfect and true (*komidē...haplous kai alēhēs*, 382e10), most beautiful and best (*kallistos kai aristos*, 381c8), immutable (*hekastos autōn menei haplōs en tēi hautou morphēi*, 381c9). In sum, gods can be truly or falsely represented because they are *nooumena* (intelligible entities) and not *horōmena* (visible entities).⁴¹ Indeed, it is in apprehending intelligible entities that the mind (*nous*) is most capable of attaining truth (*alētheia*).⁴²

If such is the case the suffix *-logia* in *theologia* is used by Plato to suggest a "rational argument or speech" which focuses on the first term: *theos* (or *theoi*). Whence *theologia* as "science of things divine".

D. *Theologia* and *mimēsis*

Since the communication of a myth for Plato is always involves a *mimēsis*,⁴³ and since we now know that gods can be truly or falsely represented, that is, that there can be true or false *muthoi*, it is important to take a closer look at Plato's conception of *mimēsis*.

As Cornford notes, the Greek schoolboy, when reciting Homer, "was expected to throw himself into the story and deliver the speeches with the tones and gestures of an actor."⁴⁴ But he went further than just imitate the character, he went so far as to represent or embody the character.⁴⁵ Poetry (*poiēsis*), of course, is the imitative art (*mimētikē*), par excellence.⁴⁶ And this also, indeed more so, has its dangers, as Plato makes abundantly clear when he turns from the content (*logos*)⁴⁷

⁴¹ For the distinction between *nooumena* and *horōmena*, cf. *Rep. VI*, 50813-c2. Christopher Gill makes a similar observation in his article "The Genre of the Atlantis Story," *Classical Philology*, 72, 1977, 290.

⁴² Cf. *Rep. VI*, 508d4-9, 511d6-e4.

⁴³ According to Plato, all *mousikē* is imitative and representative (*Laws II*, 668a6; cf. *Laws II* 668b10. For an excellent analysis of the subject, cf. J.-P. Vernant, "Image et apparence dans la théorie platonicienne de la *mimēsis*," *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique*, 2, 1975, 133-160; reprinted under the title "Naissance d'images," in *Religions, histoires, raisons*, Paris, 1979, 105-137. For what follows, it is worth noting that the word *mimēsis* covers both imitation and representation. Indeed, any artistic creation is considered a *mimēsis*.

⁴⁴ F.M. Cornford, *The 'Republic' of Plato*, London, 1941, 80.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Aristotle states in his *Poetics* ch. I that *mimēsis* is precisely what the different kinds of poetry have in common.

⁴⁷ *Rep. II* 376e-392c.

to the form or way of expressing the content (*lexis*).⁴⁸

Poetry is not simply indirect speech or narrative (*diēgēsis*) which, in Plato's eyes, is bad enough since a child cannot distinguish fact from fiction, but also, and above all, imitation or representation (*mimēsis*), that is, a form of direct speech.⁴⁹ If Plato sees narration (*diēgēsis*) as less harmful than imitation, it is because in the case of narration there is no confusion between the narrator and what is said,⁵⁰ whereas in the case of imitation the narrator delivers a speech as if he were someone else. That is, he assimilates himself through his expression (*lexis*) to the point that he represents or personifies (*mimeisthai*) the character speaking in both thoughts and feelings.⁵¹

Since Plato is of the opinion that we should try, in our activity, to assimilate to God as much as possible,⁵² one would think that the expressive, that is mimetic, aspect of poetry and myth-telling should also be able to conform to the philosopher's model and corresponding *tupoi* with regard to God.

Now although Plato believes that with respect to poetry in general and myth-telling in particular, it is impossible to separate narration from imitation,⁵³ this is not why he believes that the poets must be banned from the ideal city. They must be banished from the ideal city because poetry and myth-telling engage in "multiple representations" (*polla mimēsetai*, 395a2),⁵⁴ and are incapable of doing otherwise.⁵⁵ Further, since Plato assumes that one can become like the characters one acts, then it would be bad for the future guardians to take part in representations other than those suitable to their profession.⁵⁶ Furthermore, since it was agreed from the outset that each citizen should

⁴⁸ *Rep.* II 392c-398b. There are different types of *lexis*, mixed, unmixed, and a combination of the two (cf. 397d), but they all involve *mimēsis*. To grasp to what degree the conception of imitation and representation is important here, it is worth noting that the word *mimēsis* and its cognates are employed 40 times in the section on form or expression (*Rep.* II 392c-398b), whereas they only appear twice in the section on content (*Rep.* II 376e-392c).

⁴⁹ *Rep.* III, 392d.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Rep.* III 393d-394b.

⁵¹ *Rep.* III 393c.

⁵² Although this expression is taken from the *Theaetetus* (176b), this is precisely the model for the citizens of the ideal city.

⁵³ *Rep.* III 394b-c.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Rep.* III 397e.

⁵⁵ Plato, of course, returns to this point in *Rep.* X, 605c-608b in his attack on poetry.

⁵⁶ *Rep.* III 395c-e.

perform one and only one job in order to do it well,⁵⁷ this is equivalent to stating that the citizens in general and the guardians in particular must remain as godlike as possible that is, avoid transforming their proper character into that of others and exhibit only the qualities that would be considered suitable to their proper profession; qualities such as, in the case of guardians, courage, self-control, piety, freedom.⁵⁸ Since Plato feels that it is neither possible, nor desirable to eliminate *mimēsis* completely, he naturally opts for the simple style of expression which represents the good man.⁵⁹ In sum, the poet and the myth-teller must not only imitate the expression of the good man, but also conform their language to the molds regarding the gods previously prescribed.⁶⁰

Now if the poets are effectively banned from the ideal state, then the founders of the city, that is, the philosophers, would not only have to provide the *tupoi* to be followed, but equally have to compose the *muthoi* that would correspond to these.⁶¹ In sum, they would be responsible for both the content (*logos*) and the form (*lexis*) of the *muthoi*, and in particular the *muthoi* with respect to the gods. If such is the case, this would support the thesis once again that *theologia* should be translated as a "science or rational discourse about things divine." For we now know that the philosophers and only the philosophers will be responsible for both the content and the form of *muthoi*, that is, "true *muthoi*."⁶² They are true, insofar as they conform to the *tupoi* which, for their

⁵⁷ *Rep.* II 370a ff. This is the *sine qua non* of the ideal state and it is reiterated in detail from 394e to 398b.

⁵⁸ *Rep.* III 395c.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Rep.* III 398b2. This explains why, when Adeimantus is asked to choose between three styles of expression (*lexis*): the complex, the simple or the combination of the two, he opts for the simple style which represents the good man (*ton tou epieikous mimētēn akraton*, 397d4-5).

⁶⁰ *Rep.* III, 398b. Of course, the *tupoi* in question are the laws or principles with respect to the divinity mentioned above. It is worth noting that it is not by chance that Plato finishes up the section on *mousikē* with a discussion of harmony and rhythm (398c-400c). Harmony and rhythm along with words are the basic ingredients of song, music and dance. Since song can only increase the effectiveness of the imitation employed in words (401c), and since different styles of music and dance are associated with different types of character, Plato wants to ensure that the music and dance in his ideal state will conform to the *tupoi* and the goodness of character which the citizens associated with them must exhibit. Much of what we find here is developed and clarified in the *Laws*. For an interesting discussion, see G. Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City*, Princeton, 1960, 302-318.

⁶¹ To ban the poets entirely entails that the members of all three classes are obliged to follow the *tupoi* and the corresponding *muthoi*. A perfect example of this is the myth of the three metals at *Rep.* III, 415a-d.

⁶² Indeed, any type of *logoi*, that is, literature in general.

part, are derived from a direct apprehension of the intelligible forms.⁶³

E. *Theologia naturalis*

Jaeger's contention that Plato's use of the word *theologia* at *Republic* II, 379a5-6 "sprang from the conflict between the mythical tradition and the natural (rational) approach to the problem of God" appears to me to have no support in the context in question. Indeed, as Festugière⁶⁴ has so well remarked, when Plato wrote the *Republic*, the "concrete reality" appeared to him to be without any value because it was in a state of *ataxia* (disorder). The sensible world was not yet integrated with the intelligible world. This explains why the training of the philosopher (and, with him, the ideal city) was entirely dependent upon the theory of Forms and the Form of the Good.⁶⁵ On the other hand, the theology found in Plato's *Laws* X is a perfect example of a *theologia naturalis* - indeed, in my view, it is the first instance of natural theology in Western philosophy.⁶⁶

This is not to say that there is nothing to qualify as "natural theology" prior to Plato. I most certainly agree with Jaeger and those who hold that the Presocratics, as we call them, discovered, so to speak, nature or *phusis*, that is, the principle or ultimate reality behind the growth and present organisation of the world,⁶⁷ and that the word *phusis* is often used synonymously with *theos* or qualified as *theia*. However, although many of the Presocratics use a rational argument or *logos* in their approach to nature (that is, substitute rational causes for mythical causes to explain the origin and evolution of the present order of things) and qualify this nature as divine, this may constitute theology (a rational discourse (or *logos*) about God or the gods, but not a natural theology.⁶⁸

⁶³ While it is true that poetry in general and myth in particular appeal to the emotional, that is the irrational part of the human soul, it is still the case that the philosopher's aim is to harmonize the irrational part as much as possible with the spirited and rational parts of the human soul.

⁶⁴ A.J. Festugière, *La Révélation de Hermès Trismégiste II, Le Dieu cosmique*, Paris, 1949, 98.

⁶⁵ The fact that Plato could and does at times employ the word *phusis* to qualify the Forms and the intelligible world (cf. *Rep.*X 597b6,c2,d3,e4,598a2) has nothing to do with the case at hand. Indeed, although the word *phusis* is used to qualify the "ultimate reality," (and the intelligible world is, so to speak, the "ultimate reality"), the nature referred to in the expression "natural theology" is the "concrete reality," that is, the "physical universe."

⁶⁶ For the details on this and what follows, see Gerard Naddaf, *L'Origine et l'évolution du concept grec de phusis*, Lewiston, N.Y., 1992. A second revised edition of this work is in preparation for Les Editions Klincksieck and an English translation for the Academia Verlag.

⁶⁷ For a detailed analysis of the word *phusis*, see Naddaf (1992).

⁶⁸ If we are to understand by *theologia naturalis* or *phusikos*, the theory of the nature of the divine as it is revealed in the physical universe (or in the nature of reality), the famous phrase attributed

Plato must be considered the first to give us an authentic *theologia naturalis*, for he was the first philosopher in the Western tradition to give us not only an argument (*logos*) for the existence of God, but an argument, or more precisely, a demonstration (*apodexis* or *epidexis*)⁶⁹ based on arguments (*logoi*),⁷⁰ which shows that the order and harmony exhibited in the universe and in particular, in the heavenly bodies reflect a divine intelligence - in sum, an argument of the physico-theological or physico-teleological type.⁷¹

Until Plato, or more precisely the later Plato, it was the *phusikoi* who studied the *meteōra*, but these were not yet considered divine⁷² - whence Plato's ironical use of the word *meteōrologia* and its cognates as "astronomical or high speculation."⁷³ What is perhaps more ironical is that *meteōrologia*, once considered impious,⁷⁴ is now considered by Plato as *theologia* par excellence.

to Thales that "everything is full of the gods" (*panta plērē theōn*) would not in itself amount to a "natural theology". And this is also the case with Xenophanes who is often seen as confounding God and nature. Not only is there nothing we could genuinely qualify as "natural theology," but nothing that could be characterized as an argument for the existence of God or gods. On this point, see J.H. Leshner, *Xenophanes of Colophon Fragments. A Text and Translation with a Commentary*, Toronto, 1992, 114 ff.

⁶⁹ These words and their cognates are used in this sense several times in *Laws* X: 887a, 892c, 893b, 899d.

⁷⁰ Plato employs the word *logos* several times in the plural in *Laws* X to qualify his own procedure: *logoi*, 887a6, 887b7, 890e2, 898c9, 898d6, 899d4.

⁷¹ I follow A. Lalande here for whom the two mean the same thing. Cf *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie*, Paris (10th ed.), 1972, 779.

⁷² At least they were not considered divine by the *meteōrologoi* in the same sense that the Olympic gods were considered such by the ordinary Greek.

⁷³ Cf. *Cratylus*, 396c, 401b; *Republic* VI 488e, 489c; *Phaedrus* 270a, *Politicus* 299b, *Timaeus* 91d. In sum, astronomical research remains for Plato "high speculation" as long as it is not directed toward a precise end, that is, that the universe is governed by a divine intelligence which cares for us. Anaxagoras, of course, is Plato's forerunner, but fell far short of the mark (*Phaedo* 97b-99d). He is a perfect example of one who, although he studied the heavenly bodies, could not be considered as having developed a *theologia naturalis*. He is also alluded to twice in the *Laws* (886d, 967b-c).

⁷⁴ Of course I am thinking here of Anaxagoras, but more particularly of the decree under which he was condemned for impiety, that is, the famous Decree of Dioppeithes, enacted around 430 B.C. which authorized the prosecution of persons "who do not acknowledge (or believe in) divine matters (*tous ta theia mē nomizontas*) or teach such theories (*logous*) about the heavenly bodies." Cf. Plutarch, *Pericles* 32. On Dioppeithes and his decree, cf. E. Derenne, *Les procès d'impiété intentés aux philosophes grecs à Athènes au Ve et au IVe siècles av. J.C.*, Liège, 1930, 19-24. It should be

Indeed, the new *theologia* or rational approach to things divine is indissociable from the study of the structure and movements of the heavenly bodies.

The fact that it is in *Laws X* and not in the *Timaeus* that we find the first authentic natural theology deserves at least a brief explanation. Indeed, one would think that in both cases what we have is natural theology. But in reality, the "natural theology" expounded for the first time in the *Timaeus* is radically different from what we have in *Laws X*. While it is true that Plato insists on the teleological dimension of the creationist process in the *Timaeus*,⁷⁵ the events which led to the present order of things, including, as is well understood, the structure and movements of the heavenly bodies, are expounded in the form of a "likely story" (*eikōs muthos* or *eikōs logos*).⁷⁶

There are at least three reasons for which Plato qualifies Timaeus's account of the production of the world as "likely story." First, the *Timaeus* is a cosmogonical account which describes the production of the sensible world (whereas in *Laws X*, we have a description of the world as it is, a cosmology) and, since the sensible world is only a changing copy (*eikōn*) of a model (*paradeigma*), its description can only be provisory and likely (*eikōs*). Second, since the state of the world before and during its production escapes any direct or even indirect perception, Timaeus can only "imitate" in the order of discourse what appears to him to have been the procedure of the Demiurge.⁷⁷ Third, it is likely in the sense that the cosmogonical accounts of his adversaries, the *theologoi* and the

noted that Plato makes a direct reference to this decree and indeed shows his contempt for it at *Laws* 821a.

⁷⁵ The *Timaeus* is part of trilogy which explains the origin and evolution of the present order of things from a teleological point of view. As such, it is the first *historia peri phuseōs* of the teleological type, as opposed to the evolutionary type, which was common to most, if not all, of the Presocratic philosophers and which originated in the old cosmogonical myths whose aim was likewise to explain the origin and evolution of the present order of things. The substitution by the Presocratics of rational (i.e., natural) for supernatural causes to explain this order reinforced, as Plato was well aware, the sophistic contention that law, morality, and even the gods were not absolute entities. The aim of Plato's *historia* is to refute those predecessors and to show that law, morality, and the gods (i.e., heavenly bodies) exist by nature (*phusei*) and not by convention (*nomōi*). For a more detailed account, as well as how this is connected with the famous Atlantis story, see Naddaf (1992) and more recently, G. Naddaf, "The Atlantis Myth: An Introduction to Plato's Later Philosophy of History," *Phoenix*, 48, 1994, 189-209.

⁷⁶ For a more detailed analysis of these expressions in the *Timaeus* and their relation with *Laws X*, see Naddaf (1992), 370-374. I do not share the opinion of those who hold like Cornford that the *Timaeus* is, for Plato, a *muthos* because "no account of the material world can ever amount to an exact and self-consistent statement of an unchangeable truth." (*Plato's Cosmology*, London, 1937, 31). Indeed, if such were the case, the *logos* employed in *Laws X* would equally be a *muthos* and this, as we shall see, is clearly not the case.

⁷⁷ On the role of *mimēsis*, cf. P. Hadot, "Physique et poésie dans le *Timée* de Platon," *Revue de théologie et de philosophie* 115, 1985, 113-133.

phusikoi, are not likely, for they confounded "true causes" with "subordinate causes."

It is important to note that in all three cases the production of the world described in the *Timaeus* must be considered as a "non-verifiable" discourse.⁷⁸ However, this is not the only problem for the case at hand. None of Plato's predecessors and adversaries would have accepted the principle of a Demiurge and the world of intelligible Forms. Indeed, in the *Timaeus* account, it is a Demiurge who organized the spatial medium by fixing his eyes on the intelligible models to produce the sensible copies of which the universe is composed. Plato must, therefore, demonstrate with arguments, acceptable to all, that the universe exhibits order and harmony and that it is consequently "divine" without recourse to a Demiurge and an intelligible world of Forms.

In *Laws X* Plato evokes the cause of what he sees as the collapse of the society of his time.⁷⁹ The origin of this cause is found in the works of the *peri phuseōs* type, which uphold that law, morality and even the gods are products of "human conventions." Since the gods for Plato are the only true guarantors of the city and its laws, one must, at any price, try to prove their existence but not, once again, by means of a likely (albeit non-verifiable) story, but by means of a demonstration based on arguments acceptable to all.

Before beginning this demonstration Plato briefly explains the position of his adversaries, in the form of a *peri phuseōs* account, that is, an account which explains and describes how the present order of things, that is, world, humanity, and society, originated and developed from its primordial state.⁸⁰ According to his adversaries, whom he considers as atheistic materialists, the

⁷⁸ In their book *Inventer l'univers. Le problème de la connaissance et les modèles cosmologiques*, Paris, 1991, L. Brisson and W. Meyerstein hold that Plato's account in the *Timaeus* is the first true "scientific" account in the sense that Plato employs there for the first time what was to become the method employed for any research which pretends to be scientific: a list of axioms and rules of inference. Further, Plato, again in the *Timaeus*, was the first to employ mathematics as the instrument for the expression and deduction of the postulated axioms. This explains, according to Brisson and Meyerstein, why Plato is the inventor of the method which is behind the success of modern science. Indeed, science for our two authors is indissociable from a formal axiomatized system. Furthermore, they maintain, indeed it is their central thesis, that the gap between theory and experience is so deep that no immediate data originating in the sensible world can modify the fact that the theory itself is always based on an ideal construction, on a set of irreducible and nondemonstrable axioms. In sum, it is impossible to have more than a "likely account" of the sensible world. This, as we shall see, is precisely the antithesis of what we find in *Laws X*. For a more detailed account and critique of their position, see my review of their book in *Phoenix*, 49, 1995, 83-86.

⁷⁹ For a detailed account of what follows see Naddaf, 1992, 474-522.

⁸⁰ It is interesting to note here that Plato's aim is not only to refute modern works of the *peri phuseōs* type, but equally the older works of the *peri phuseōs* type like Hesiod's *Theogony*. Indeed, both the old (*hoi men plaiotatoi*, 886c3) and the new accounts (*ta de tōn neōn*, 886d3) suppose that the gods of worship (whether conventional or not) appear *after* the birth of the universe. For Hesiod, cf. 886c. For the moderns, of course, the gods exist *technē* and not *phusei* (889e). Since the

present order of things emerged by chance (*tuchē*) from four primary inanimate (*apsucha*) elements or principles: earth, air, fire, and water. This is what the materialists understand by *phusis* as *archē*.

In order to demonstrate that the gods exist and are the true guarantors for the state and its laws, Plato has recourse to versions of two⁸¹ famous arguments: the cosmological and the physico-theological.⁸² Plato employs the cosmological argument to show that the soul (*psuchē*), which his adversaries held to be a product posterior to the four elements, is in fact prior. For if one understands by *phusis* the primary source of generation for all things, then the soul has a better claim to be qualified as *phusis* - at least moreso than the four *apsucha* - for soul is movement which moves itself and only such a movement can be the primary source of generation; for it is prior, in existence and in dignity, to the series of movements transmitted by bodies. Indeed, soul is the ultimate cause of all bodily motion. Consequently, if the universe really was generated (something all his predecessors maintained), it is impossible, according to Plato's argument, that the present order of things was able to emerge from its initial state without the initial impetus of a moving principle, a principle which is identified with *phusis* as *archē* and which, if it were to cease to act, would bring about the end of the universe.⁸³ In sum, without soul, the primordial state of things would forever remain at rest.

However, this first argument is not sufficient, since soul is not the supreme principle Plato has in mind when he thinks of God. Soul is neutral and hence can be good or bad according to the circumstances. Now since God is by definition good, Plato must determine which principle will assure, in a permanent way, the goodness of soul. This principle is obviously *nous* (intelligence), which is exhibited in the harmony it establishes and maintains in the natural world.

This, however, remains to be demonstrated and this is precisely the aim of the physico-theological argument. This demonstration depends essentially on one thing: its ability to prove that the movements of the heavenly bodies are of the same nature as those of *nous*, that is, circular, uniform and constant.⁸⁴ But how does one go about this? Plato supposes that a simple observation of the heavenly bodies will suffice to convince one that their movements and those of the intellect are identical and, consequently, that it is the *aristē psuchē* which is in control. However, in reality, it is much more complex. The observation of the sky (i.e., observational astronomy) reveals that

substance of *Laws* X is to refute not only the *phusikoi*, but also the *theologoi*, it is rather surprising the Jaeger began with *Republic* II, which does not mention either the *theologoi* or the *phusikoi* in this context, although they are critical to the argument of his introductory chapter.

⁸¹ Plato is perfectly conscious that he employs two different, but mutually dependent arguments, to prove the gods exist (*du'eston tō peri theōn agonte*, 966d6). Cf. *Laws* XII 966d-967d.

⁸² Indeed, he may be considered as their initiator.

⁸³ *Laws* X 895a5-b1.

⁸⁴ *Laws* X 897c. Cf. 898a-b. Plato takes this a simile from a previous classification of movements at 893d.

some of the heavenly bodies appear to wander. Mathematical astronomy, on the other hand, can show that the heavenly bodies that, until then, were considered wanderers, move in circular fashion, i.e., intelligently. This could be shown by successfully demonstrating that each planet has a geometric trajectory which conforms to the movements determined by observational astronomy.⁸⁵ This may very well explain why Plato now considers astronomy as "noble, true, beneficial to society and completely acceptable to God"⁸⁶ and in the *Epinomis*, a dialogue with a strong Platonic overtone, as the most noble science of all.⁸⁷ It sounds as though astronomy now replaces dialectic as the supreme science. Indeed, it is thanks to astronomy that the physico-theological argument proves that the soul which animates the heavenly bodies is necessarily good, something the cosmological argument could not successfully prove. In sum, astronomy confirms the conviction of those who believed that the universe as a whole is the product of a rational design.

Once Plato completes his demonstration, he can affirm, as he did in the *Timaeus*, that the rule of life consists in imitating, as perfectly as possible, the sensible model which the world represents for him. In brief, the human soul must imitate the movements of the World Soul, which manifest themselves to us under the form of those perfectly circular and uniform movements which are those of the heavenly bodies: the visible gods.⁸⁸

F. Conclusion

While it true to say that the context in which Plato uses the word *theologia* in the *Republic* II 379a5 leaves little doubt that it could and should be translated as "science of things divine," the theology in question has nothing to do with *theologia naturalis*. Indeed, the rational discourse (*logos*) about God or the gods in the *Republic* is indissociable from an analysis of the intelligible Forms relative to God. Further, the sensible world is still seen as being in a state of *ataxia* and, therefore, something that should be shunned, not worshipped. On the other hand, in *Laws* X Plato has no recourse to either a Demiurge or to the intelligible world of Forms. The argumentation he employs to prove the existence of God or the gods (i.e., the heavenly bodies) is wholly empirical, for it is based on an analysis of motion in the sensible world.⁸⁹ And this, in my view, is what

⁸⁵ For the relation between theory and observation in astronomy, cf. R.B. Goldstein, *Theory and Observation in Ancient and Medieval Astronomy*, London, 1985.

⁸⁶ *Laws* VII 821b.

⁸⁷ *Epinomis* 990a.

⁸⁸ Plato summarizes his two arguments at *Laws* XII 966d-967e. Although a similar conclusion is reached in the *Timaeus* (90c-d), it is not, once again, based on argument.

⁸⁹ Indeed, he tells us himself that his proof would not have been possible without an alliance between the senses (notably sight) and the intellect. Cf. *Laws* XII 961d-e. To show to what degree Plato has come full circle with respect to the senses, it should be noted that the lessons of history and experience are the primary factors behind his conception of the new constitution of the *Laws*.

qualifies Plato as the father of *theologia naturalis*.

In fact, at *Laws* XII 951b, he tells us that a state that insists on keeping to itself, refusing any contact with others, will never attain an advanced level of civilisation. Further, it is worth noting that the language employed by Plato in *Laws* X to describe the destiny of soul after death is equally wholly empirical. Indeed, not only is there no reference to a world of intelligible Forms or any type of metamorphosis, but it is said that human *psuchai*, on death, will automatically float to the region (*topos*, 903d7,904b8,d2,d8,e1,905b1) of "physical space" (*chōra*) which corresponds to their character (903d-905c). This is the case we are told because everything is arranged in view of the interest of the whole (903b-d).