

CONCLUSIONS

Plato's general approach to the traditional and cosmic gods emerges from a tension between the four threads that we have uncovered in our investigation. Sometimes Plato presents himself as an outspoken critic of popular and poetic religiosity, especially when it comes to the flawed beliefs about the nature of, and relations between, the Olympian gods. We can also find Plato the conservative whenever we turn to the alliance between politics and religion forged in the theocratic Magnesia. Then again, Plato's conception of the cosmic gods in the *Timaeus* and his arguments against impious views in the *Laws* is nothing but ground-breaking cosmological thinking. On top of that, Plato seems to be very sceptical about the possibility of complete understanding of such questions as the genealogies of the traditional gods. Although it is tempting to choose one of these positions as Plato's final judgement on traditional gods, I have argued that the tension between them is never dissolved. We have seen that Plato does not produce a holistic theory of traditional gods which would either systemically derive a religious doctrine from the highest cosmological principles or at least eliminate the conventional beliefs contradicting his philosophy. Instead, an examination of this question has shown that the persisting tension gives a fresh angle on Plato's later dialogues. In this book, I have argued that cosmology and religion have a reciprocal interaction whereby Greek culture provides the framework for Plato's intellectual projects, and these in turn give new meaning to some of the old religious ideas and practices.

Since my argument implies a twofold process, we have analysed it from two perspectives. On the one hand, I have traced the ways in which religious tradition sets the scene for Plato's philosophical programme. In Chapters 1–2, we see that the accounts of divine and human origins in the *Timaeus-Critias* are heavily influenced by Greek mythology. These accounts construe the generation of the universe as

Conclusions

a version of the birth of Ouranos, thus narrating the cosmogonic discourse as a theology of the traditional god. They also explain the creation of human beings and their societies as an outcome of the activity of the traditional gods, thus remaining committed to the political identity of these gods and their anthropogonic function. In Chapter 3, we see that the utopian politics in the *Laws* is centred around a religious community and reflects the role of its institutions, festivals and patron gods. On the other hand, I have explored how the religious tradition is readjusted to the requirements of Platonic philosophy. We have found some significant modifications concerning the nature of the traditional gods and the purpose of religion in the polis. More specifically, the *Timaeus* introduces cosmological updates to the understanding of Ouranos and adapts the origins of the traditional gods to the general cosmogony (Chapter 1). The *Critias* reconceptualises the civic gods as benevolent and teleologically orientated makers of human beings (Chapter 2). Finally, the *Laws* argues that traditional religion has the potential to develop moral virtues and that the imitation of the traditional gods can lead ordinary people towards happiness (Chapter 3).

We can conclude that Plato has a partly integrative approach to the traditional gods and religion. It is an *integrative* approach in so far as Plato attempts to combine his philosophy with those areas of Greek culture which he deems to be good. If we compare for a moment Plato's later dialogues with the *Republic*, we can see that he neither has an overly critical attitude towards Greek culture, nor believes that a realisation of his utopian projects requires a clean slate. On the contrary, he finds in Greek religion the concepts that are compatible with his cosmological doctrines and convenient for explaining his political and ethical proposals. Ultimately, this is the reason why the traditional gods have an explanatory role in Plato's accounts of origins and why traditional religion has an ethical-political function in Magnesia. Nevertheless, it is a *partly* integrative approach, because Plato does not give full philosophical support to conventional religious beliefs. The traditional gods make a good test-case for such philosophical limits: we have seen that Plato never considers giving rational arguments for the existence and knowledge of these gods. Instead, he brings to the fore only those aspects of the religious

Conclusions

tradition that are in potential agreement with his cosmology and theology. Similarly, Plato finds a great asset in traditional religion, but the Platonic legislator can achieve the desired moral and political ends by other means as well. In fact, Plato's earlier dialogues are open precisely to such a possibility.

Overall, the later dialogues have a peculiar tactic when it comes to the cosmologisation of the traditional gods. These dialogues do not make the traditional gods equal to the cosmic gods in terms of philosophical foundation and ontological structure, but the two divine families nonetheless are connected by Ouranos and Gaia, the two gods with a clear double identity. At the same time, there are some traces of cosmologisation, which emerges with the requirement for the traditional gods to participate in anthropogony together with the cosmic gods as the human makers. This functional equality, however, is lost when the topic shifts to the origins of the first cities, where the traditional gods gain priority, but this role does not find any direct cosmological support. Finally, both kinds of gods are integral to the ideal of godlikeness, though unequal when it comes to the moral value of imitating a particular kind. An inclusion of the traditional gods in the path of moral progress is once again not supported by cosmological arguments, but curiously nor it is denied by them. My tentative conjecture as to why Plato did not choose a more robust cosmologisation by, for instance, eliminating performative piety or the peculiar identities of the traditional gods, is that he was not only committed to his philosophical, theological tenets, but also to the value of religion. Plato remains in a theologically uncomfortable, but otherwise beneficial, grey zone. It is uncomfortable, because the traditional gods do not have as strong a philosophical foundation as the cosmic gods, which is why the readers of the later dialogues tend to repeatedly question the status of these gods. It is also advantageous, because the traditional gods can illuminate some aspects of Plato's philosophy in way that the cosmic gods are unable to do. If Plato was committed to the cosmic gods only, he would have had a hard time explaining, for instance, how these uniform gods managed to generate different first cities and how the ideal of godlikeness can accommodate moral virtues and the capacities of ordinary citizens. The presence of traditional gods can explain precisely these things, the diversity of this world.

Conclusions

The story, however, does not end here. As I have suggested both here and throughout my analysis, Plato's later understanding of the traditional gods and religion clearly draws on his earlier works, especially the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic*. For instance, we have seen that he remains faithful to the theological rules of speaking about the gods formulated in *Republic 2* and to the plurality of traditional gods discussed in the *Phaedrus*, but he considerably revises the relation between cosmology, ethics and religion. Therefore, there remains a possibility that Plato's position altered over the years. A further examination could clarify whether, and if so, to what extent Plato's later dialogues are discontinuous with his earlier reflections on religion in the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic*, the *Cratylus* and the *Euthyphro*. In Chapter 4 I have argued, moreover, that the Early Academy actively engaged with some of Plato's religious conceptions. Specifically, we have seen that the reformed god Ouranos retained a significant theological role in the philosophy of the Academics. We have also observed how Philip and Xenocrates blurred the distinction between the traditional and cosmic gods by using the names of the traditional gods to refer to the cosmic gods. It is worthwhile to recall that Aëtius is certain that, among other things, these conceptions were transferred from the Early Academy to the Stoics. The latter idea raises a set of interesting questions: did the Stoics use the same religious names as the Academics? If not, does it mean that they developed a new (and perhaps alternative) strategy of naming various aspects of the divine? A similar problem pertains to the new cosmic religion: did the Stoics adopt the Academic take on the relation between the primary cosmic god, moral practice and public life? If not, how different is the Stoic connection between theology, ethics and political philosophy from the Early Academy? However one may answer these questions, it is clear that Plato's engagement with the traditional gods and religion lurks in the background of broader philosophical issues. Thus, I hope that the present account of Plato's later dialogues can be preparatory for a more comprehensive investigation into Plato's conception of religion and its legacy in the Early Academy and beyond.