

**PLATO ON CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD:
LAWS X. 887c5–899d3¹**

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The word ‘god’ (theos) opens the Laws as its very first term.² It is a god, Zeus in the case of Crete and Apollo in the case of Sparta, who is the ultimate lawgiver for these communities. And later in the fourth book of the Laws in the passage bringing forth the theme of ‘becoming like god’ the Athenian visitor states that ‘it is God who is preeminently the “measure of all things” much more than any “man”’.³

To treat the offences against the gods as the most serious of outrageous actions then seems to have good grounds (cf. 884a7 ff.). Whoever is able to commit an unholy act does so because of suffering from three possible forms of misconceptions: either that the gods do not exist, or they do exist, but do not take care of human affairs, and even if so, they are easily bribed and influenced by sacrifices and supplications (885b7–9). We could imagine that the opposite claims (the gods do exist, they are involved with human affairs, i.e. could possibly issue rewards and punishments, and moreover cannot be bribed) if taken to be true and reflecting the real state of affairs produce a strong moral constraint upon our behaviour. If Plato wants to show that these constraints are fully justified and should be incorporated into the laws of the *polis*, he has to proceed by refuting these heresies including the first one: the claim of the atheists. This sets forth the project for the rest of *Laws X*.

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² Plato, *Laws I*. 624a1.

³ Plato, *Laws IV*. 714c4 ff. All the translations are by T. J. Saunders, if not stated otherwise. From now on I will refer to the text of *Laws X* merely by the Stephanus number, paragraph letter and line number.

In this case one could hardly find a better place to search for Plato's views on gods and divinity. If there is something like Plato's theology⁴ then *Laws X*, I believe, is its essential part.⁵ But reading the text one finds that the argument proceeds in sort of a detour and its connection with divinity is not clear. First, Plato argues for the primacy of soul over matter (892A–896C). In the second step the argumentation continues with proving the rationality of the soul that is in charge of the heavenly motions (896D–899D). My aim in this paper is to clarify how concluding that soul is prior to matter and that the soul governing motions of heavens is a rational one can be understood as a proof for the existence of the gods.

I will focus on what I believe are the essential characteristics of god according to Plato, i.e. what are the necessary and sufficient attributes an entity has to possess so that Plato would agree with calling it a god.⁶ In this respect I hope to show that the arguments for the existence of the gods in *Laws X* are working with these attributes and, further, that finding out these attributes possibly furnishes us with a platform to formulate Plato's theology in a rather unifying way.⁷

Primacy and activity of the soul

If one believes that a god or gods are the true guarantors of both the cosmic and social order the question arises, how to treat those who either

⁴ For the most clearly expressed sceptical view cf. Meldrum (1950), 74. In the following I hope to show that Meldrum is wrong that there 'is no entity that we can call "Plato's theology"'.

⁵ Cf. similarly Solmsen (1936), 218 and Naddaf (2004).

⁶ The term 'divine' (θεῖος) then simply means 'having the characteristics of god(s)'. I believe that it is possible to find such characteristics that the diverse uses of an adjective would not empty the meaning of it. Further, the proper answer concerning Plato's theology must be found so that it encompasses the relation between the terms 'god' and 'divine'. Cf. Kidd (1958), 378.

⁷ Already in Solmsen (1936) we find some remarks disregarding the unity of Plato's theology (p. 218), these are fully developed in Solmsen (1942), 140–142. Bordt (2006) holds that the god according to Plato is the ultimate principle (das erste Prinzip), but though fulfilling one and the same function, Plato changes his mind what these principles should be (p. 248). However, in his attempts to develop a unifying account Bordt does not take into account Ross' arguments against the possible identification of god and good expressed in Ross (1951). Menn's interpretation according to which god is νοῦς is a very illuminating one and my paper proceeds in a somewhat similar way, cf. Menn (1995).

do not believe in gods or believe in their negligence and venality (885c5–8)? In a speech imitating the possible demand of the atheists the Athenian visitor answers that before imposing the laws or even the due punishment one ought to persuade and instruct the atheists about the gods' existence and characteristics with sufficient proofs (885c8–e5).⁸ Clinias thinks that it might not be too hard and offers a kind of weak version of the argument from design supported by a claim that anyway all the Greeks and barbarians do believe in gods (886a2–5).⁹ However, pointing out the arrangement of the heavens and seasons is not enough for a sufficient proof. The opponents would calmly reply that sun, moon, stars and earth are nothing else than earth and stones and thus far from being divine or even intervening into human affairs (886d7–e1). Moreover, they could claim that regularity could be reached by means of necessity and chance (889b1 ff.).

Clinias acknowledges the seriousness of the situation (886e3–5) and encourages the thoroughgoing demonstration that the gods exist, which would refute the above-sketched physicalistic background of the atheists' theses (887b1–c4).¹⁰ The full seriousness of the account behind the atheists' beliefs is exposed as what some people regard to be the cleverest *logos* of all (888e1–2). According to it all things came to be, are coming to be or will come to be due to nature, art or chance (888e4–6).¹¹ Further, their theory has

⁸ A point which might be important in understanding the subsequent argumentation should be raised here: is it enough if the lawgivers of Magnesia persuade the atheists or is a rigorous proof demanded here? According to the fictitious atheist the lawgivers should try to *πείθειν καὶ διδάσκειν* that the gods exist by *τεκμηρία λέγοντες ἰκανά* (885d2–3). Although one could perhaps read 'convince and instruct' by 'showing adequate signs', I believe that 'convince and prove' by means of 'adequate proofs' is more correct here. Moreover, the argument should be nicer *πρὸς ἀλήθειαν*. Therefore, I think we should look for rather well constructed argument.

⁹ Clinias perhaps wants to argue that the existence of heavenly bodies and possibly the regularity of their motions as well as the regularity of the seasons is enough to prove the existence of gods since someone has to be responsible for this arrangement. His wording *διακεσμημένα καλῶς* at 886a4 might suggest a teleological proof which we know for example from Xenophon's *Memorabilia* I.4. But here it remains only a possible hint for a careful reader.

¹⁰ Their aim is conceived to be a 'medical' one; in the opening speech to a young atheist is his state of mind called an illness (*νόσον*, 888b8) and each illness ought to be cured.

¹¹ This sentence actually reveals not only the possible causes of becoming, but also the fact that according to the physicalists all the things came to be, are coming

yet another point: the greatest and most beautiful things are the products of nature and chance (889A4–5). Art, on the other hand, is the cause of lesser things, taking over the generation of the great and prime results and building upon and after it (889A5–8).

What this means is explained further in a longer exposition at 889B1–E1. First, the Athenian visitor introduces a physicalistic theory of the origin of *kosmos* (889B1–C6) and, secondly, derives from it several consequences concerning *technē* (889C6–E1). The heavenly bodies earlier introduced by Clinias as signs or proofs of deities originated, according to this conception, from a random motion of the primary material elements (fire, water, earth, air) which was based on chance and on the opposition of the properties (hot and cold, dry and wet, soft and hard). From this motion, mingling and mixing then the whole heaven and consequently the seasons, animals and plants came to be. Thus all these were created not by reason (*ou dia nous*), neither by god (*oude dia theon*) nor by art (*oude dia technēn*) but solely by nature (*phusei*) and chance (*tuchē*).¹²

From this physicalistic background the Athenian visitor derives consequences first for *technē* (889C6–E1) and then for the gods as well (886E3–890A9). According to this doctrine an art is something secondary; as a product of human beings that themselves came to be from the elements with their opposite properties it is something coming 'later (*husteron*) as something secondary (*husteran*) from these' (889C6–7).¹³ No *technē* has a share in truth, but creates only *eidōla*, images or pastiches. Those more serious *technai* that indeed seem to deal with something real (such as medicine or farming) can do so only because of their partaking with nature (*phusis*). The art of government and similarly legislation does belong to the first group of

to be or will come to be (πάντα ἐστὶ τὰ πράγματα γιγνόμενα καὶ γενόμενα καὶ γενησόμενα), i.e. they implicitly reject any eternal entity or entity without becoming.

¹² This account, I believe, does not stand for a single theory but rather for any system that does not make proper use of reason, god or art. The Athenian visitor stresses that the change happens *κατὰ τύχην ἐξ ἀνάγκης* and that it proceeds without any involvement of reason, divinity or art. It is the non-teleological aspect of any such doctrine or system that is exposed here. Concerning associating necessity and chance cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 46E5–6 and commentary upon this passage in Johansen (2004), 74–75 and 93–94.

¹³ Plato, *Laws* X 889C7: ὕστερον ἐκ τούτων ὑστέραν γενομένην.

arts that has very little to do with nature and their products are completely artificial and thus 'secondary'.¹⁴

The notions of 'prior' and 'posterior' are here used primarily in the sense of ontological priority. 'Ontological priority' can mean several things and I believe here it means at least two. The first is the dependence of posterior objects in their existence upon the prior objects: *A* is ontologically prior to *B* iff *A* does not depend on *B* in order to be but *B* does depend on *A* in order to be.¹⁵ Secondly, ontological priority can mean a scale of 'levels of being': *A* is ontologically prior to *B* iff *A* is more real (ultimate, higher on the levels of being) than *B*.¹⁶

According to the same physicalistic doctrine, the gods are then *by art or law*, they are artificial and not natural (889E3–4). The gods are posterior for they depend in their being upon the arts which are in turn products or activities of human mind and human beings depend in their existence upon the elements. For the same reason 'being' of the gods is more derivative and thus less real than that of the physical elements. This means that the gods are not real at all and they exist solely as products of mythmaking. Then the gods appear to be something like local customs established by a mere agreement.¹⁷

Thus to persuade the citizens about the existence of the gods, the Athenian visitor and his company have to refute the above expounded thesis concerning the priority and posteriority of arts and nature which grows out of the physicalistic doctrine summarized at 891b8–c4. However complicated the text and Plato's theory could be, he is at this moment quite clear on how to proceed with the counterargument: the mistake of the physicalist doctrine is that 'it denies the priority of what was in fact the first cause of the birth

¹⁴ At this moment Plato clearly addresses the *nomos* versus *phusis* conflict present in Greek thought of that time. Although this problem is usually associated with the sophists it is not the first place Plato connects a certain materialistic or physicalist ontological doctrine with the sophist's social philosophy; the Protagorean secret doctrine expounded in the *Theaetetus* is another clear example. For a detailed development of the natural theology among the presocratics cf. Naddaf (2004), 110 ff.

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V.11, 1019^a1 ff. ascribes this meaning of ontological priority to Plato. For a recent development cf. Fine, K. (1991), 270.

¹⁶ Similarly as Forms are more real than particular things. This conception, which I admit is slightly unclear, is developed in Buchler (1990), 31–2.

¹⁷ In a same way as social justice appears to Thrasymachus or Callicles, cf. *Gorgias* 482e5–483d6; *Republic* 338c ff.

and destruction of all things and regards it as a later creation. Conversely, it asserts that what actually came later, came first' (891E5–8). What the physicalistic doctrine, according to the Athenian visitor, misunderstood was the nature of the soul. The soul is not something secondary as they claim (891C3–4) but quite the opposite, it is among the first things (*en prōtois*), born before material bodies and governs or leads (*archei*) all of their changes and rearrangements (892A4–7). If this could be proved then the soul more than anything else would rightly be called *by nature*, since nature in the physicalistic doctrine means the origin of the first things (*genesin tēn perita prōta*, 892C1–2).¹⁸ Thus what now needs to be proved is that the soul is primary to the body (893A6–7).

Priority of the self-moving motion

At the beginning of his argumentation the Athenian visitor introduces a classification of motions among which he chooses and describes the most powerful and oldest one, i.e. the first motion which is the source and origin for all the other motions (893B1–895B7). Then he identifies this motion with the soul (895C1–896C8). This identification seems to proceed in two phases, one working with the notion of the life, the other with a linguistic definition of the soul itself.

The categorization of motions in *Laws X* is frequently discussed for its importance in Plato's physics and cosmology,¹⁹ within this paper I will introduce only its basic features necessary to understand the argumentation in the whole passage. Athenian stranger introduces a classification of motions where it might be slightly hard to get to the wanted number of ten,²⁰ but for the present purposes it is worth noting only that the listed motions are different kinds of locomotion (e.g. revolving, rolling, linear movement) and general kinds of change like generation, growth or decay. To this list of motions the Athenian stranger adds two other motions and says

¹⁸ The argument wants to show that the true *phusis* as something prior or the origin of the prior entities (892C2) contains laws, thought and art (i.e. activities of a teleological character).

¹⁹ Cf. for example Bordt (2006), 199–207; Karfik (2004), 227–241; Kerschensteiner (1945), 68–76; Mohr (1985), 158 ff.; Parry (2003); Skemp (1967), 96–107, 157–162.

²⁰ Cf. Karfik (2004), 227–233, with references to different interpretations of the passage; for a different classification cf. Kerschensteiner (1945), 70 or Mayhew (2008), 106–119.

that the whole classification was made for the sake of these two (894B2–3). We are immediately reminded by Clinias that the whole discussion took place because of the soul (894B6). And soon we will see in what sense he is right and that exactly here we find the first hint upon the final answer of the argumentation for the primacy of the soul.

The first motion added is the one capable of moving other things but incapable of moving itself and the other is a motion being one and the same which moves both itself and other things.²¹ The self-moving motion is said to be found behind all active and passive processes, it is the true source of all motion and change.²² Now, this last motion is the most excellent and superior one (894D3–4) and thus should not be called the last but the first one: indeed this motion can be shown to be the first one both in origin as well as in its power (*prōton genesei te estin kai rhōmē kata logon*, 894D10).

Now there are two arguments for the priority of self-motion. Since Plato obviously considers an eternal or circular chain of motions causing one another to be an absurd thing, he argues that there must be the original cause of change or the first change (894E5–6), and it is said to be the initial principle, which cannot be anything else except self-moving motion (895A1–3). Then the Athenian visitor adds that the self-moving motion is the first thing that could come to be among the stationary things and ranks highest among the things in motion. Since it moves itself, it is necessarily the oldest and most powerful of all motions (895B3–6).²³

It is still unclear, in what sense the discussion so far was both about the first motion as a self-motion and about the soul (cf. 894B2–6). It becomes clear as soon as we ask how do we call it when this motion appears in a sensual, material world. Whatever entity which we see moving itself we call 'alive' (895C4–8). At the same time whatever is alive is said to have soul as

²¹ The first motion is ἡ μὲν ἕτερα δυναμένη κινεῖν κίνησις, ἑαυτὴν δὲ ἀδυνατοῦσα, 894B8–9; the other: ἡ δὲ αὐτὴν τ' αἰεὶ ἕτερα δυναμένη <sc. κίνησις κινεῖν>, 894B9–C1.

²² Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 245C5–E2. In the well-known proof in the *Phaedrus* Plato introduces the self-moving soul as a true source and origin for the rest of the motion.

²³ Cf. Mayhew (2008), 199–124. Concerning the understanding of *πρώτην ἔν τε ἐστῶσιν γενομένην* at 895B4 I differ for example from Saunder's translation, cf. England (1921), 471. The first motion must come to be among stationary entities without an origin and in this respect it is temporarily prior to all other motions. Moreover, as their only possible origin, it is ontologically prior as well for all other motions have their ultimate cause in this first motion.

well (895C11–12). Thus so far we can establish that the set of self-moving entities within the material world is identical with the set of entities having soul. In other words, whatever is self-moving in the sensual world has a soul. However, we do not have yet established any connection between self-motion and soul itself.²⁴ The bare fact that there is no perceptible entity having first characteristic (self-motion) without having the second (being ensouled) does not establish any relation between the self-motion and soul as such. Those two characteristics are simply coextensive in the range of all perceptible entities.

Therefore, Athenian stranger introduces another part of the argumentation that ought to show that these two properties are not only coextensive but in certain sense identical as well. In any given thing we can recognize three aspects (895D4–5): its being (*ousia*), definition of its being (or an account, *logos tēs ousias*) and its name (*onoma*).²⁵ When we ask what is the name for this or that we know the definition and ask for the name, whereas when we ask what is *a*, we know the name but we are ignorant about its definition. E.g. ‘even’ is the name for the capacity ‘divisible into two’.

Now, the definition of the entity named ‘soul’ is for the Athenian visitor nothing else than ‘self-moving motion’ (895E10–896A4). When one says ‘soul’ he names the same entity which is defined as a ‘self-moving motion’. Thus being capable of self-motion and having a soul are not two merely coextensive characteristics. To say ‘x has a soul’ and ‘x is capable of self-motion’ is actually saying one and the same thing for the soul is a self-moving motion.²⁶

²⁴ Michael Bordt treats this argumentative step, wrongly I believe, as an independent trait of argumentation, Bordt (2006), 206. Similarly Mayhew (2008), 124–125 does not notice possible difference between two properties being (a) coextensive, (b) causally related or (c) identical.

²⁵ Cf. Plato, *Letters* VII. 342A7–B5.

²⁶ The argumentation is perhaps persuasive, however, even the Athenian visitor is aware of its limits for how to prove in a rigorous way that a given name and a given definition point towards one and the same entity and not only to two coextensive characteristics? This might be the reason, why his last remark in this argumentation step starts with a conditional: εἰ δ’ ἔστι τοῦτο οὕτως ἔχον, ‘and if things are in this way’ (896A5). However, Clinias is convinced and replies that it has been proved to the highest level that the soul is oldest of all since it is the origin of motion (ικανώτατα δέδεκται, 896B2). At this moment the need of some counter argumentation is on the side of the atheists for the lawgivers presented us with a rather persuasive part of the introduction to the laws concerning gods existence and misdemeanours against them.

I would say that the soul seems to be *temporarily* prior to all other things that have beginning or origin (and thus to all material things).²⁷ Second, the soul is *ontologically* prior (in both senses of the term discussed above p. [000]) to other generated things and other motions for it is the source of their being. Both of these senses of primacy are suggested already at 895B3–7.²⁸

Could the argumentation stop here? What is proved so far: primacy of soul and soul-derivative activities over the body and bodily activities; further we saw that soul is in a certain sense the true nature (*phusis*). The soul must exist since it is the self-moving origin of any motion. It is still unclear, how the priority of self-motion (or soul) could be possibly understood as a proof for existence of gods. Or at least it is still hard to see why and how the existence and priority of the soul, which has been proved, does imply the existence of any gods yet.

Rationality as goodness

If the priority of soul were sufficient to prove the existence of god, no further argumentation would be necessary. However, in the second argumentative step (896D–899D) Plato, according to my understanding of the passage, adds an essential aspect of the entire argumentation. It is first after this second part that one could see (a) what are the essential characteristics of deity according to Plato and (b) how the argument against atheists in the *Laws X* actually works.

The Athenian visitor recapitulates that the activities and states of soul are prior to the states of body (896c5–d4). From this follows that the soul is cause (*aitia*) of all things good and bad, nice and shameful, just and unjust and all such opposites (896D7) because it is said to be the cause of all things (896D8). Being the cause of all things has for the soul two consequences. First, the soul controls the heavenly spheres since it is the origin of all motion and cause of all things that move (896E1–2). Second, since the soul is the cause of

²⁷ To support this inference one does not have to refer only to the *Timaeus* 28B–C but similar ontological point (all material entities have a beginning, they came to be) is suggested in *Laws X* 895B3–7 and 896B10–C2 as well.

²⁸ The self-moving motion originated among the stationary things (895B4–6) and among the things in motion it is the oldest one (*πρεσβυτάτην*) and the most powerful one (*κρατίστην*). However, this does not imply a creation *ex nihilo*; the ordered world and intelligible motions in it did not exist before soul so-to-say ordered them (cf. discussion of *παραλαμβάνειν* from 897A5 in footnote 30).

all opposites, there have to be at least two souls: one being the cause of good things, the other of their opposites (896E4–6).²⁹

The list of ethical opposites of which the soul is the cause (896D5–7) and positing one good and one bad soul (896E4–6) brings into discussion the normative notion of goodness for the first time. Although I consider the bad soul in charge of heaven to be only a hypothetical possibility, nevertheless it is true that there are bad souls and there is evil in our world (cf. my footnote 28). I will attempt to show that the notion of good will be the main motif of this second part of the argumentation. The second step in the argumentation consists of four passages; first the Athenian visitor recapitulates the kinetic priority of soul (896E8–897B6) with an important additional note concerning *nous*. Then is it established that the good soul governs the heaven and earth (897B7–898C8) and after discussing three possible ways of how a soul can move heavenly bodies (898C9–899A6) comes the final conclusion to the entire argumentation against the atheists (899A7–899D3).

²⁹ Almost no modern interpreter has followed Plutarch *De anima procreatione in Timaeo* in positing the evil, irrational soul as a second, alternative principle governing the cosmos. Most of them, on the other hand, interpreted this passage as offering a mere *hypothesis* concerning the existence of the evil world-soul, cf. Kerchensteiner, (1945), 75; Görgemanns (1960), 200 fn. 1; Bordt (2006), 207–208. At this point it is worth bearing in mind that the dualism of two divinities is strictly rejected in the *Politicus* myth: ‘from all of these considerations, it follows that one must not say that cosmos ... is turned by some pair of gods whose thoughts are opposed to each other’ (*Polt.* 269E7–270A2, transl. Rowe). However, explaining the evil world-soul away as a hypothesis does not and cannot mean explaining away the evil from Plato’s world as such. That would be too sketchy and it would be actually in conflict with what Plato says in the *Theaetetus*: ‘But it is not possible, Theodorus, that evil should be destroyed – for there must always be something opposed to the good; nor is it possible that it should have its seat in heaven. But it must inevitably haunt human life, and prowl about this earth.’ (*Tht.* 176A5–8, transl. Levett, rev. Burnyeat) This short passage entails three important pieces of information: i) evil as such cannot be explained away, it has to be present somehow in the world; ii) it is not settled in heaven among the gods and, finally, iii) it is present with the realm of human beings. In accordance with the passage from the *Theaetetus* the only souls among which one can find *kakē psuchē* are the souls of mortal living beings. This way of interpretation has been supported for example by Carone (1994), 289–290; Carone (2005), 164, 178 ff. and Karfík (2004), 241. The propensity of our souls toward evil is then at stake in the unending battle between good and evil depicted in *Laws* X 906a.

When the Athenian visitor recapitulates the doctrine about the priority of soul he says that in virtue of its own movements it sets in motion everything in the heavens on the earth and in the sea (896E8–9). This enumeration of several possible regions suggests that the text is not about the world-soul only but about soul in general, i.e. about each and every soul disregarding any of its possible differentiations (moreover, the singular *psuchē* on 896E8 immediately after stating that there are at least *two* souls supports this claim as well).³⁰ Among the psychic motions there are different faculties both of cognitive character and emotions (897A1–3). However, one term is repeatedly missing from this list and it is *noein*, although *nous* was mentioned among the things belonging to the soul at 892B3. These psychic motions *take over* (*paralambanousai*) the secondary motions of the *bodies* (*sōmatōn*) and lead them into growth or diminishing, separation or combination with all the belonging properties (897A4–b1).³¹

A further additional remark of great importance qualifies two possible ways how the soul proceeds in leading or governing all things. Whenever soul does anything accompanied by reason (*noun men proslabousa*, 897B1–2), which is rightly a god among gods,³² it works in a correct and blessed way.

³⁰ The interpretation of this passage that understands the soul in question just as soul *qua* soul is taken for example by Cherniss (1954) and Carone (1994), 287 and Carone (2005), 173.

³¹ Saunders translates ‘of matter’ and I believe his intention is correct. This passage actually mirrors the incongruity between *Laws X* and the *Timaeus* concerning the ultimate source of the motion. For the motions of the soul are said not to initiate or create the motions of the body, but merely to take them over (*παραλαμβάνειν*). The same verb is used throughout *Timaeus*’ speech to describe the activity of demiurge when he *takes over* the material for his work (cf. *Tim.* 30A4, 68E3). Thus even in the *Laws* it seems that the *psuchē* is operating on and making use of bodily or material motions that are in existence already. A stronger interpretation of this passage might suggest that the soul first organizes the chaotic motions of the body into the (particular) motions for which we can have a name.

³² The knotty expression at 897B2 is hard to understand and it is perhaps impossible without an emendation. Cf. England (1921) *ad loc.* I tried to make as much sense as possible from $\theta\epsilon\omicron\nu\ \acute{\omicron}\rho\theta\acute{\omega}\varsigma\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\iota\varsigma$ which seems to be the most probable manuscript reading we have. Reason ($\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$) is rightly or appropriately ($\acute{\omicron}\rho\theta\acute{\omega}\varsigma$) a god ($\theta\epsilon\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$) among gods ($\theta\epsilon\omicron\iota\varsigma$). Why this is so will be clear from my interpretation of the entire argument against the atheists; I take the text here as a preliminary interjection. A similarly difficult passage which helped me in understanding this place is *Tim.* 41A7, cf. Karfik (2004), 147–148.

Whereas when it proceeds without reason its work is of an opposite kind (897B1–5). It is reason that makes the soul to be a good leader and ruler of all things. The activity of reasoning (*noeien*) is what the soul does *qua* reason (*nous*). Any reasoning soul is then better in its guiding and ruling, for whatever is correct and blessed is better to what lacks correctness and blessedness. Acceptance of *nous* thus means improving the soul in some respect.³³

The next section 897B7 – 898C8 is a rather complex argument which aims to establish the good and rational sort of soul to be the one in charge of universe. The Athenian visitor asks what kind (*genos*) of soul is in control of heavens, earth and all its revolutions: is it the rational one full of virtue (*phronimon kai aretēs plēres*) or the *nous*-lacking one (897B7–C2)? He does not give a straight answer, but outlines the following way of argumentation. If the way the heavens move is similar in its nature to the revolutions and motions of *nous*, then it is clear that it must be the rational and good soul behind all these heavenly movements (897C4–9). In the case of the opposite, i.e. irrational and disordered heavenly motions,³⁴ the conclusion will be in favour of the irrational soul (897D1–2).³⁵ The argumentation consists in simple implications: ‘if *x* is the fact then *a*’, ‘if *z* is the fact then *b*’ where *x* and *z* are mutually exclusive. This argumentation leaves it open, whether there

³³ Cf. Menn (1995), 18: ‘*nous* is not a soul but a virtue in which souls participate’. Menn’s interpretation is further supported by equating the soul accompanied with reason with the soul full of virtue couple of lines latter in the text (897c1).

³⁴ The term disorderly (*ἀτάκτως* or adjective *ἀτάκτος*) is used in the *Timaeus* to describe the chaotic motion in the pre-cosmic state (30A5, 69B3) or the results of causes deprived of reason (43B1, 46E5).

³⁵ The first conditional is on its own neutral; however, the second one, in favour of the evil and irrational soul, already suggests the answer. For it describes the result of an irrational soul not only as irrational or mad (*manikos*) but it adds disordered (*ataktos*) as well. Either the disorder follows analytically from irrationality and than it means ‘disorder’ in the sense of ‘without rational guidance’ i.e. without teleological motivation, or it is connected with it here quite *ad hoc*. For example, causal relations governed by strict laws are not necessarily disordered though being without any intelligent guidance. Brute necessity and chance works without any rational guidance; Plato, on the other hand, sees ‘order’ in matters that possibly could be otherwise but they are arranged and led in the best way because they are effects of teleological considerations (e.g. of gods, Demiurge).

actually are any 'evil' souls – it focuses solely on the one in charge of heavenly motions.

After stating two possible alternatives for which kind of the soul is in control of the heaven, the Athenian visitor proceeds to find out what is the nature of the motion of *nous* so that he could compare it to the motion of heavenly bodies. Since we cannot see the reason with our mortal eyes and blindness might be the result of our attempts to do so, he decides to proceed with the help of an image (*eikōn*, 897D8–E2). Similarly Socrates in the *Phaedo* mentions those who burn their eyes while watching the eclipse of the sun if not observing it in some reflection (i.e. in something else); Socrates himself starts his search for the causes in the *Phaedo* by 'escape into *logoi*' (*Phd.* 99D–E). And, indeed, soon in our text the Athenian visitor describes the interlocutors as 'creators of nice images by speech' (*dēmiourgoi logōi kalōn eikonōn*, 898B3).

The *eikōn* chosen to represent the motion of reason is a spherical rotation (i.e. movement on one place around a fixed middle). The similarity, according to Athenian, consists in several respects. Both reason and this motion proceed:³⁶

- a) regularly (*kata tauta*), possibly meaning in the same speed and rate;
- b) uniformly (*hōsautōs*), i.e. that the regular motion happens throughout the entire extension of the moving entity;
- c) within the same limits or within the same (*en tōi autōi*);
- d) about the same (*peri ta auta*), which can be understood both spatially and in a cognitive way;
- e) in the same direction or towards the same (*pros ta auta*); and finally
- f) in accordance with one account or ratio and order (*hena logon kai taxin mia*).

The opposite possibility, i.e. extremely disordered heavenly motion, is then associated with irrationality (898B5–8).³⁷

³⁶ Here I follow a classification from Lee (1976), 73ff.

³⁷ Of course, this spatial imagery of noetic activities was found problematic already in Plato's times. Aristotle heavily criticises Plato for picturing *psuchē* as spatially extended in the third chapter of the first book of *De anima* (*DA* I.3 407^a2–^b11). Some interpreters tried to save Plato from this severe criticism – in antiquity it was Proclus, *In Tim.* II 279 and among modern scholars most notably Lee (1976), 84 ff. and Skemp (1967), 83. The question remains whether the Athenian visitor wouldn't need more than metaphorical description of activities so that his argument could work. However, Aristotle seems to be right in pointing out two

Clinias then hurries to the conclusion that from what was said it is clear that the soul or souls responsible for all the revolutions are the ones full of excellence (898c7–8). The comparative description of the heavenly motions which the reader might find missing was actually not skipped. Already in book VII it was stated that: ‘the belief that the moon and sun and other heavenly bodies do in fact “wander” is incorrect and precisely the opposite is true’ (VII 822a4–b1). Thus, we can see that from the conditional answers suggested at 897c4 and 897d1 the first is the valid one: since the heavens move in a regular way and thus the nature of its revolutions is similar to the motions of *nous*, then it follows that it must be the rational and good soul behind all these heavenly movements.

Whatever the way the soul moves the sun is, it is clearly stated that this soul ought to be called god (*theos*) by every man (899a7–10). Then the souls³⁸ that are in charge of stars, moon, years and seasons (i.e. behind the rotations of the planets and the universe) are to be called gods as well. The two reasons listed are (a) soul or souls appear to be the causes of all these (*pantōn tautōn aitiai*) and (b) they are good with all the excellence (*agathai de pasan aretēn*, 899b5–7).

How does the argument work and what to get from it?

Both argumentative steps consist of several subarguments and most of these could be said to ‘beg a question.’³⁹ In both arguments we find premises and steps that are suppressed, they are not overtly present in the text. In order to show what is the ultimate line of the argumentation, I will try to sum up both steps in a structured form. Of course, a reconstruction of the implicitly present argument from a dialogue is always a sort of interpretation. However, I believe that my interpretation allows me to show an argumentative strategy used by Plato in order to prove the existence of gods. At the same time this approach reveals us several characteristics of deity he is implicitly using in his talk.

problems: spatial imaginary of noetic activities as such (cf. *DA* I.3 407^a16–17) and a relation between *nous* and *psuchē*: when we agree that the soul is spatially extended, do we have to say the same about *nous*? A possible answer is suggested by Menn (1995) according to whom *nous* is a virtue in which a soul participates and thus *nous* does not have to have the same characteristics as the soul.

³⁸ Whether there are many souls or one soul is left open in the text, both possibilities are explicitly suggested, however this distinction is not crucial for Plato’s argumentation and neither for my interpretation.

³⁹ Cf. Parsons (1996), 165.

First, the Athenian visitor argues for the ultimate priority of the soul. The conclusion is that the soul is the true *phusis* understood as an origin of the primary generated things and thus the first origin as such:

1. Self-motion is prior to all motions.

Argument about the first mover

- 1.1. Every motion moves from or due to something. I.e. there is always a cause for a given motion.
- 1.2. Any motion originates either (i) from or due to something else or (ii) from or due to itself.
- 1.3. Motion of the type (i) always refers to something else as its cause or source (i.e. to a mover), whereas motion of the type (ii) does not refer further behind itself (it is a self-mover).
- 1.4. Motion of the type (ii) is the cause or origin for all other motions.⁴⁰
- 1.5. An origin or cause is always prior to its results.

Hypothetical standstill (895A5–B7)⁴¹

- 1.6. Imagine everything stands still; which motion would be the first?
- 1.7. Not the motion of type (i), for there is no possible prior mover.
- 1.8. Motion of type (ii), self-motion, must be the first.

2. Soul is a self-motion.

Coextension of soul and self-motion

- 2.1. Being a self-mover (among the perceptible entities) is being alive.
- 2.2. Having (or being) a soul is being alive.
- 2.3. Having (or being) a soul is being a self mover.

Consideration from definition

- 2.4. Entity with the name 'soul' is by definition 'self-moving motion'.
3. Soul is prior to all motions. It is prior to all other motions and things that could be in motion (i.e. prior to all the other generated things); moreover in this sense it is their ultimate *cause*.

⁴⁰ Plato rejects infinite or circular chain of motions.

⁴¹ Here I use title given by Mayhew (2008), 120. I treat it in accordance with a title as a mere hypothesis strengthening the previous argument about first-mover.

So far the reader can be convinced that soul is prior to all motions and that it is an ultimate cause of all motions and generated things – it is a certain originative activity. It is prior or ‘first’ for it is essentially active, it never ceases to originate motion. It originates the motion of itself (it is a self-mover) and being in the body, it moves the body as well (as a self-mover it is a ultimate mover). As I said above, I think it is still rather unclear what does this have to do with deity and gods. Before providing a possible answer, let me sketch the second step of the argumentation.

- I. Since the soul is the cause of all motions (cf. 3 in the previous argument) and the heavens are in motion, the soul is the cause of their movements as well.
- II. If the motion of heavens is in accordance with the motion of reason, it is caused by reasonable soul; if it moves chaotically then the cause is a soul without reason.
- III. Motion of *nous* is best described by a spherical, ordered motion.
- IV. Motion of heavenly bodies is a spherical, ordered motion.
- V. Motion of heavens is in accordance with the motion of *nous*.
- VI. Therefore, the rational soul is the cause of the heavenly motion.

As I said above, both argumentative steps are question begging. Within both we need certain assumptions that are not present in the text.⁴² Within the first step we have to take for granted that the definition of the entity called soul is self-motion (895E10–896A2). The second interpretative step introduces the spherical rotation as the ideal image of the motions of reason (898A3–6). Again without much of argumentation – it is an assumption that must be taken for granted. We know that there is a similarity between the motion of the *nous* and a spherical rotation. However, it remains unclear what is the merit of this similarity, i.e. in what sense a noetic activity can be similar to a spatial motion.

The entire argumentation works only if it could be either proved that the soul is a self-motion (and the best image for reasoning is spherical rotation) or it was so in virtue of language itself. There is indeed no need to prove or argue for that ‘circle’ is the set of all the points on a plane with the same distance from one point (the centre) or that ‘aunt’ is a female sibling of my parent. It is simply so that the relation between the name of something

⁴² Cf. Parsons (1996), 176: ‘an argument begs the question (in the logical sense) if one of its premises is not among the assumptions of the setting.’

and the definition of the very entity seems to work in this way (at least for Plato) and thus he does not feel obliged to go deeper in the argumentation for the equivalence of soul and self-motion. The second problematic point (similarity between noetic and spatial motion) remains in our text, I believe, largely unexplained as noted already by Aristotle.⁴³

Moreover, what has been explicitly proved? I believe it was an existence of the rational soul in charge of heavenly motions. In the first step Plato established priority of the self-motion as the ultimate cause; in perceptible world it is the soul that is a self-mover and thus it is the soul which is the ultimate cause of every change and motion in perceptible world. The second argumentative step argued for a goodness of those souls moving the heavenly bodies; goodness that is based in their share in reason (*nous*), i.e. in their rationality.⁴⁴

And it is exactly this soul (*tautēn tēn psuchēn*) the Athenian stranger demands to be called god by all men (*theon hēgeisthai chreōn panta andra*, 899A7–9). The reasons for this demand are summarized once again: we claim that these souls are gods, Athenian stranger says, because they (a) are causes of all these things (in this particular case heavenly motions)⁴⁵ and (b) are good with all the virtue, i.e. they are rational⁴⁶ (899B5–7). On what bases should the reader agree with the fact that *a rational self-moving cause*,⁴⁷ for its existence has been proved in the arguments above, ought to be called a god?

Well, for the same analytical reason a self-mover in the perceptible world is called ‘soul’ and a set of all the points on a plane with the same distance from one point is called a ‘circle’. As far as I understand Plato’s argumentation, calling something ‘divine’ is saying it is a rational self-moving cause and whatever deserves to be called god or divine (not in a hyperbolic usage) must possess those two characteristics:

- a) it has to be self-moving cause and

⁴³ Cf. above footnote 36.

⁴⁴ I take goodness here as derivative upon rationality. The soul in charge of heaven is called good because it is rational; it is not rational because it is a good soul.

⁴⁵ πάντων τούτων αἴτιαι (899B6).

⁴⁶ ἀγαθαὶ δὲ πᾶσαν ἀρετήν (899B6).

⁴⁷ A rational self-moving cause according Plato seems to be always an origivative cause; i.e. it is a cause not only of its own motion (self-motion), but of other motions as well. There might be rational causes (even being a self-motion) that are generated by another rational cause: namely, the immortal parts of our soul created by the demiurge in the *Timaeus*.

b) it has to be rational (i.e. good).⁴⁸

The entire argumentation for the existence of gods in *Laws X* then works as if someone would argue for the existence of circles on the bases that (i) there exist plane figures and (ii) of these plane figures some are such as that all their possible points are of the same distance from one point. From this by definition follows that when there are such entities then circles do exist for circles *are* exactly these entities. Analogically, I believe, it was proved in our text that there exist self-moving causes (in material world represented by souls) and that these causes are rational as well. And thus it follows that gods exist for gods *are* nothing else than rational self-moving causes.

Now two more questions could be raised. First, does it mean that gods are necessarily souls? Second, what is the relation between reason (*nous*) and soul according to this passage of *Laws X*?

Nothing in the argument suggests that only souls can be gods. The souls are used as exemplary self-movers that occur in our world and their effects are directly observable around us in the case of animals, heavenly bodies and ourselves.⁴⁹ The argument is narrowed to the souls at 895c4 with a condition: *if* we should see that self-motion comes to be made of earth or water or fiery form would we call it alive? Any rational self-moving cause that is not instantiated within a material form could be called god as well.

Concerning the relation between the soul and *nous*⁵⁰ the second argumentative step (896d–899d) says two things: soul can *join* or *take hold*

⁴⁸ There is another important attribute that seems to fit to the gods and that is *perfection* or immutability; gods do possess the two above mentioned characteristics (causally effective self-motion and rationality) in a perfect way, i.e. they cannot be otherwise; whereas a rationally acting soul of a human being could be called divine and hyperbolically a god, but it is possible that the same soul ceases to be rational in some subsequent time. For attributing perfection to the gods cf. Plato, *Rep.* II 380d5, 381c9 and 382e8.

⁴⁹ Focusing on one single heavenly body, for example the sun, we see its body (*sōma*) but its soul (*psuchē*) is hidden to our perception (*anaisthēton*). However, there is much of hope (*pollē elpis*) that the soul embraces or is naturally grown into (*periphukenai*) each of the heavenly bodies and can be apprehended by reason (*noēton*). The dualism *sōma* – *aisthēton* and *psuchē* – *noēton* (cf. *Phd.* 79A ff.) reminds us that though the soul is not an object of our senses, its motion is manifested through the visible bodies it moves around (898c9 – 899e3, cf. *Tim.* 90c–d).

⁵⁰ Menn (1995) is indispensable publication to this topic.

of reason (*proslabousa*, 897B1–2)⁵¹ and this makes soul prudent and full of virtue (897B8–c1, cf. 898c7–8) and indeed it makes it the best soul (*tēn aristēn psuchēn*, 897c7). According to the text *nous* is not identical with soul, soul takes hold of it or rather has a share in it for there can be more than one rational soul. This acquisition makes it virtuous. Because of being rational (having share in *nous*) the soul acts rationally, i.e. in accordance with reason. And thus a rational soul leads the heavenly bodies analogically to the motions of *nous* itself.

My reconstruction and interpretation of the argument against atheists in *Laws X* ought to make clearer what Plato's conception of deity was and what are according to him the essential attributes an entity deserving the name god or being divine must possess. The arguments do prove existence of entities that suit the definition of god as rational self-moving cause. If an entity should be rightly called god or divine according to *Laws X* it must be a self-moving cause and it must be rational.

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⁵¹ *προσλαμβάνω* can mean 'to take as a helper' as well.

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