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GREEK
POPULAR
RELIGION
IN GREEK
PHILOSOPHY

JON D. MIKALSON

Jon D. Mikalson examines how Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and other Greek philosophers described, interpreted, criticized, and utilized the components and concepts of the religion of the people of their time. Previous studies of religion in the philosophers have concentrated on their new theologies and their criticisms of the mythological gods of Greek poetry. Mikalson, however, investigates the philosophers' treatments of the religious beliefs and practices of their contemporaries—chiefly sacrifice, prayer, dedications, and divination. The major concepts involved are those of piety and impiety, and after a thorough analysis of the philosophical texts Mikalson offers a refined definition of Greek piety, dividing it into its two constituent elements of 'proper respect' for the gods and 'religious correctness'. He concludes with a demonstration of the benevolence of the gods in the philosophical tradition, linking it to the expectation of that benevolence evinced by popular religion.

Jacket photograph: detail of a Greek amphora, fifth-century BC, by the Dutuit Painter. Louvre, Paris. © Hervé Lewandowski/RMN.

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GREEK POPULAR RELIGION IN GREEK PHILOSOPHY

Preface

This book has its origins over forty years ago, in an undergraduate tutorial with Friedrich Solmsen at the University of Wisconsin. He assigned me first to read and write short papers on Plato's *Meno* and *Phaedo*. Our third and last reading was to be Plato's *Phaedrus*, and this time I suggested a paper topic—'Orphism in the *Phaedrus*'. Professor Solmsen laughed slightly (I now know why!) and said, 'Ah, but first you must read Linforth's *Arts of Orpheus*.' Such was my introduction to Plato, to investigating religious topics in philosophical writings, and to source-criticism, for all of which I am much indebted to both Ivan Linforth and Friedrich Solmsen. Other projects have distracted me over the years, but in recent years I have found great pleasure in returning to the philosophers, especially Plato and Aristotle, to see what they can contribute to my understanding of the religion practised by the Greeks. In this I have received invaluable help and encouragement from Robert Parker, Andrew S. Mason, and my colleague Daniel Devereux. I have credited them in notes for some specific points, but throughout their comments led me to revise or sharpen several discussions and arguments. They do not, certainly, agree with all my conclusions, but where I have been wise enough to accept their advice, I have benefited greatly. I thank, too, the staff at Oxford University Press, especially Hilary O'Shea who offered welcome support and encouragement.

J.D.M.

Crozet, Virginia
April 2009

ἀλλ' εἴτε τοὺς θεοὺς ἴλεως εἶναι σοι βούλει,
θεραπευτέον τοὺς θεούς.

Socrates, in Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.28

Abbreviations

For ancient authors and their texts I use the abbreviations in S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (eds.), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd edn. (1996), with a few alterations. The abbreviations of the titles of works of Plato are so frequent that I list them here. Those in square brackets are of uncertain or unlikely attribution to Plato.¹

[Alc.]	[Alcibiades]
[Amat.]	[Amatores]
Ap.	Apology
Chrm.	Charmides
[Clit.]	[Clitophon]
Cra.	Cratylus
Cri.	Crito
Criti.	Critias
[Def.]	[Definitions]
Ep.	Epistulae
[Epi.]	[Epinomis]
Euthd.	Euthydemus
Euthphr.	Euthphyro
Grg.	Gorgias
[Hipparch.]	[Hipparchus]
[Hp.Ma.]	[Hippias Major]
[Hp.Mi.]	[Hippias Minor]
La.	Laches
Lg.	Leges, Laws
Ly.	Lysis
Men.	Meno
Menex.	Menexenus
[Min.]	[Minos]

¹ For these works see p. 3 n. 4.

<i>Phd.</i>	<i>Phaedo</i>
<i>Phdr.</i>	<i>Phaedrus</i>
<i>Phlb.</i>	<i>Philebus</i>
<i>Plt.</i>	<i>Politicus</i>
<i>Prm.</i>	<i>Parmenides</i>
<i>Prt.</i>	<i>Protagoras</i>
<i>Rep.</i>	<i>Republic</i>
<i>Smp.</i>	<i>Symposium</i>
<i>Sph.</i>	<i>Sophist</i>
[<i>Thg.</i>]	[<i>Theages</i>]
<i>Tht.</i>	<i>Theaetetus</i>
<i>Ti.</i>	<i>Timaeus</i>

The abbreviations of journal titles are those recommended in the *American Journal of Archaeology* 95 (1991), 1–16, also to be found at www.ajaonline.org under ‘submissions’.

The following serve as abbreviations for books from which the fragments of the philosophers are cited.

[Auricchio]	F. L. Auricchio, <i>Ermarco: Frammenti</i> (Naples 1988).
[Döring]	K. Döring, <i>Die Megariker: Kommentierte Sammlung der Testimonien</i> (Amsterdam 1972).
[G]	G. Giannantoni, <i>Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae</i> (Naples 1990).
[IP]	M. Isnardi-Parente, <i>Senocrate—Ermodoro: Frammenti</i> (Naples 1982).
[K]	J. F. Kindstrand, <i>Bion of Borysthenes</i> (Uppsala 1976).
[Mannebach]	E. Mannebach, <i>Aristippi et Cyrenaicorum Fragmenta</i> (Leiden 1961).
[O]	D. Obbink, <i>Philodemus: On Piety</i> (Oxford 1996).
[Pötscher]	W. Pötscher, <i>Theophrastus: Περὶ Εὐσεβείας</i> (Leiden 1964).
[Rose ³]	V. Rose, <i>Aristotelis Qui Ferebantur Librorum Fragmenta</i> (Leipzig 1886).
[Ross]	W. D. Ross, <i>Aristotelis Fragmenta Selecta</i> (Oxford 1955).
SVF	H. von Arnim, <i>Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta</i> (Leipzig 1921–3).

- [Theiler] W. Theiler, *Poseidonios: Die Fragmente*, 2 vols. (Berlin 1982), i.
- [Usener] H. Usener, *Epicurea* (Leipzig 1887).
- VS H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Zürich 1964–6).
- [W] M. Winiarczyk, *Euhemeri Messenii Reliquiae* (Stuttgart 1991).
- [Wehrli] F. Wehrli, *Die Schule des Aristoteles* (Basle 1944–59).
- [WI] M. Winiarczyk, *Diagorae Melii et Theodori Cyrenaei Reliquiae* (Leipzig 1981).

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Introduction

GREEK RELIGION IN GREEK PHILOSOPHY

In the *Republic* Socrates entrusts to Apollo of Delphi the founding of sanctuaries, sacrifices, and other cult 'services' to the gods, *daimones*, and heroes in his new city (4.427b1–c4). In the *Laws* Plato has his Athenian lawgiver arrange, often with Apollo's approval, a rich annual religious programme with daily sacrifices and festivals for a large number of deities in a variety of sanctuaries. Aristotle in the *Politics* would have sanctuaries for gods and heroes distributed throughout the land and would dedicate the income of one-quarter of the land of his ideal city to expenses related to the cult of the gods (7.1330a8–13 and 1331b17–18). These are but a few of many indications that Plato and Aristotle knew, understood, and had some sympathy with the practised religion of their time.

There is, I think, something more to be learned of ancient Greek practised religion from the descriptions, criticisms, and uses made of it by Plato, Aristotle, and other philosophers of the time in which it flourished. And, I think, a look at how philosophers describe and manipulate elements of practised religion will offer a new perspective on some of the philosophical writings themselves, shedding new light on some old problems and introducing some new ideas. By 'practised' or 'popular' religion I mean the religious beliefs and practices of the vast majority of Greeks of the time, or, to paraphrase Guthrie, the routine of religion which was accepted by most of the Greeks as a matter of course.¹ Previous studies of Greek religion in the

¹ Guthrie, 1950: 258. On this see Mikalson, 1983. Others would include under the term 'Greek religion' not only the beliefs and practices of what Nilsson terms the *Volksreligion* (1967: 784), but also virtually all claims about and descriptions of

philosophers by both religious historians and philosophers have tended to concentrate on the new theologies, the new concepts of god(s) developed by the ancient philosophers, and on the resulting philosophical criticisms of the mythological gods of Greek poetry. It has now for some time been fairly commonly agreed that these topics had little reference to or impact on the religion actually practised by Greeks of the time.² In this book I attempt to isolate, and describe how theoretically inclined philosophers understood and interpreted major components and concepts of the popular religion of their time. These include cultic practices such as sacrifice, prayer, and divination and also the ideas of *εὐσέβεια*, *ὁσιότης*, humans' relationships to the gods, and the religious aspects of morality. All fall under the category, as we shall see, of 'service to the gods'. In distinction from most work in this area, my starting point and point of reference throughout is not philosophical theory but Greek practised religion. From this different, indeed opposite, vantage point, I hope to discover more about both the nature of practised Greek religion and how the individual philosophers, especially Plato, fitted elements of that religion into their own philosophical theories.³ I offer one simple, concrete example of my approach, concerning one aspect of prayer. Xenophon in *Memorabilia* 1.3.2 gives this description of Socrates' usual practice:

the gods and their relationships to humans to be found in all the poetic and prose literature of the time. Thus Homer's Zeus, Plato's demiurge, and Xenocrates' *daimones* would all be part of the Greek religious experience. If one views the Greeks holistically and from the scholar's study, that might be a valid claim. If we wish, however, to understand the effect of religion on most individual Greeks in their daily life, we need, I think, to concentrate on practised religion, and that is my concern here. In this sense I study just that one aspect, but I think an important one, of ancient Greek religion as it is represented in the philosophical literature of its time.

² e.g. Herrmann, 2007: 385; Most, 2003: 308; Burkert, 1985: 305. For an attempt to see effects of philosophical rationalism in state cult, see Humphreys, 2004: 61–70. Note also Harrison, 2007: 382.

³ Among the relatively few general studies of this subject, Babut (1974) is the most comprehensive and helpful. Particularly valuable is Babut's distinction between gods (and practices) of cult and those of poetry throughout the book. Most, 2003, is an excellent introduction to the whole subject area. Most valuable for my purposes have been studies written on philosophy from the perspective of Greek religion itself, as, e.g. Price, 1999: 126–42; Burkert, 1985: 305–37; Meijer, 1981; Nilsson, 1967: 741–5, 767–71 and 1961: 249–309; Morrow, 1960; Reverdin, 1945; and Decharme, 1904.