

*THEOLOGIA, THEOLOGIKĒ* - A NOTE ON LACAN'S JUDGMENT ON THE SPEECH  
OF PHAEDRUS IN *SYMP.* 178A-180B

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Readers of Lacan's work will be familiar with his treatment in Book 8 of the *Seminar* of the uncommon nature of ἔρως in Plato's *Symposium*<sup>1</sup>. Discussing the speech of Phaedrus (*Symp.* 178A-180B) he says: 'Pour Phèdre, parler de l'amour, c'est en somme parler de théologie. Il est très important de s'apercevoir que ce discours commence par une telle introduction, car pour beaucoup de monde encore, et justement dans la tradition chrétienne par exemple, parler de l'amour, c'est parler de théologie.' (Lacan S8: 59, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1960). Lacan reiterates the point two or three times. Although seldom inclined to eschew repetition, the recurrence is nonetheless striking, not least as prima facie the remark seems innocuous enough. However, behind the question of whether or not for Phaedrus, as in the Christian tradition, love can reasonably be called a theological matter, lies a prior question about the meaning of the term θεολογία in Plato, which as we will show, necessarily demands a consideration of its use by Aristotle. On examination, Lacan's seemingly harmless remark reveals, if not an entire can, at least a few worms.

Although attested for the first time in Plato's *Republic*, the word θεολογία does not appear in the *Symposium*. Its meaning in *Rep.* 379a is often given as *theologia naturalis* or 'rational theology'; Liddle and Scott renders it with a nineteenth century inflection as 'the science of things divine'. Despite its elegance there are difficulties with this however, as Plato is referring in the passage to the cosmogonies of the poets (Homer, Hesiod); moreover, although Aristotle equates theology with 'first philosophy' (later termed metaphysics, so named from the title of his posthumously published lectures on being), he uses the word θεολογική for this, never θεολογία, which he reserves for mythology. A variety of scholarly opinions can be found to explain this divergence. To take a selection: Natorp (1833), Jaeger (1936/ 1947), Festugière (1949), Goldschmidt (1950), Vlastos (1970), Bodéüs ([1992] 2000), Dorion (1993), Naddaf (1996), Lefka (2003) and Bressan (2013). Before bringing to the fore various points from these studies we can summarise their positions fairly crudely as follows: Natorp argued that the whole of *Met.* K is an interpolation and does not belong to Aristotle who, he considered, had moved far beyond Plato's naïve theism. However, the distinguished classical philologist Werner Jaeger shows that *Met.* K is genuine and holds the view expressed in the translation of θεολογία in *Rep.* 379a as *theologia naturalis* seeing much more continuity between Plato and Aristotle; Festugière and Goldschmidt argue that Plato is using θεολογία as a synonym of mythology and that this is quite different from the rational theology denoted by Aristotle with θεολογική which he equates with 'first philosophy' - for which reason, its lexical history mirrors that of *philosophia* which also signifies a number of rather different things, at different times and in different contexts, for different authors. Malingrey in an erudite study of the word *philosophia* referred to Goldschmidt's 1950 article but seemingly without grasping the issue (1961: 60). Vlastos discusses directly *theologia* in Jaeger and argues against him but does not

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<sup>1</sup> On the general background to *Symp.* and dating see: Dover, K. J. (1965). The Date of Plato's 'Symposium' *Phronesis* 10 (1): 2-20.

refer to Festugière or Goldschmidt. Bodéüs, in what is a highly idiosyncratic study, is much more sympathetic to the opinion that Aristotle held a traditional view of the gods and had not simply moved beyond mythology to a rational approach to theology. Although his entire focus is on Book  $\Lambda$  of the *Metaphysics*, which is concerned with substance rather than with the gods, as Jaeger he sees a profound continuity between the theology of Plato and Aristotle. But whereas Jaeger conceives this continuity forwards, as it were, seeing Plato reading mythology critically and already beginning a natural theology which Aristotle then takes further, Bodéüs emphasises how deeply Aristotle still continued to hold on to the earlier mythologies of the gods. But it would be wrong to see Bodéüs in opposition to Jaeger, as their views are not mutually exclusive; it is more a question of emphasis. Four studies (Dorion, Naddaf, Lefka and Bressan) largely repeat the principle points in the debate, each adding a new, if secondary, insight. For example, Naddaf discussing the etymologies relies on a study of the logos in Heraclitus by Fattal (1986). This might well prompt readers of Lacan to prick up their ears. After all, Lacan had an interest in Heidegger's study 'Logos Heraklit Fragment 50' (GA 7, 211-34) and indeed had translated it. But although referring in the text to Heidegger's *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (GA 40) he does not mention the more detailed study of Heraclitus Fr 50. And, as Goldschmidt relies heavily on Chantraine (1933). Nevertheless, Naddaf concludes with what can roughly be seen as a middle position between that of Jaeger and Goldschmidt. He agrees with the former that Plato did construct a philosophical theology but that this is not to be found the *Rep.* but in a work from Plato's last period, the *Laws* (*Leg.* X).

Jaeger first set forth his position in his 1936 Gifford Lectures (OUP 1947), arguing the case from Augustine's reliance on Varro in his *de civ. Dei*. Three things need to be said on this. Firstly, we must remember that it was determined from the start of the Gifford lectures that their aim was to be to deal with the problems designated by the term natural theology. Secondly, that the foundation for Jaeger's view rests on his earlier study of Aristotle where he had discussed the authenticity of the *Metaphysics* Book K (1923; trans 1948) and is consistent with the more popular summary he gives in the second volume of his later *Paideia* (1943: 343). And thirdly, that it was a conscious reaction against nineteenth century readings of Plato and Aristotle that he felt (1) ignored the deeply religious perspective of the former; (2) overestimated the 'scientific' in the latter; and (3) stressed the lack of continuity between the two. In this sense Jaeger's position was a rejection of received opinion and specifically the neo-Kantian views of Natorp who in two articles both of which appeared in in 1888, had argued that the whole of *Met.* K and particularly 1-8 had been attributed to Aristotle spuriously. While others before him had contended that K or part of it was not from Aristotle's hand, none until Natorp, save for the sixteenth century Italian Francesco Patrizi in his *Discussiones Peripateticae* of 1581, had argued this from the conflation of  $\theta\epsilon\omicron\lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\alpha$  with  $\pi\rho\acute{\omega}\tau\eta$   $\phi\iota\lambda\omicron\sigma\phi\iota\alpha$  (Bressan 2013: 155).

We can perhaps simplify matters by saying that the two main interpretations of the meaning of *theologia* are represented on the one hand by Jaeger and on the other by Victor Goldschmidt. We have already noted that although Jaeger's study was not published until 1947, it had been delivered almost a decade earlier. But it is also significant that Goldschmidt's text, although published in 1950 (republished in 1970), was first delivered as a paper at the Association des Études Grecques on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1949 (Actes de l'Association *Revue des Études Grecques* tome 62, fasc. 291-3: xvii, 1949). In it, Goldschmidt argues directly against Jaeger's interpretation (cf. 21 n. 4; 24f; and 28 n.4).

Père Festugière, an eminent classicist of whose work we know Lacan was already well aware (see S3: 142, 1<sup>st</sup> February 1956), devoted an appendix to the second volume of his study of Hermes Trismegistus to the history of the word *theologia* (1949). In June 1948, Fr. Festugière had become a member of the committee of the Association (*Revue* 1949, vi). In the appendix he makes many of the same initial points as Goldschmidt but in an addendum on p. 609 refers six times to Jaeger's Gifford Lectures, crucially in relation to the history of the word *theologos*. That this was added just before publication suggests that hitherto he had missed it and only discovered it at the eleventh hour. The book was published in 1949 with the imprimatur dated 17<sup>th</sup> March 1949; that is to say, a month before Goldschmidt delivered his paper at the meeting of the Association des Études Grecques.

Given the sequence of events, it is just possible that Festugière did not know of Goldschmidt's forthcoming presentation, though unlikely as it was only a few weeks after he received the imprimatur for his book, and given their proximity in the Association. However, it is impossible that by the time Goldschmidt's article was published he did not know of Festugière's appendix with its addendum. Four years later, Festugière, largely based on his reading of *Leg. X*, had altered his position further still in the direction of Jaeger whose study he once again cites, (Festugière 1954: 48).

Goldschmidt says it is with Aristotle that we first find *theologos* (theologian) and its derivatives commonly used, and in two senses: (i) in relation to the gods (poetic myths), which cannot be considered philosophy; and (ii) in relation to the most noble part of philosophy – first philosophy or metaphysics. He says these two senses co-exist in Aristotle without opposition. But metaphysics is never called *theologia* but *theologikē*. Goldschmidt thinks that Aristotle did not want to use the suffix '-ogia' (discourse about; derived from *logia*, which is related to *logos*) because it would debase *logos* to the meaning of *verbum*. So he used the suffix '-ikos' (of or pertaining to). This argument is clearly weak for a number of reasons: both suffixes derive from same root (*logos*), a point Jaeger makes (1947: 4). He does not define *verbum* (there is no exact English equivalent as it means both 'word' and 'verb')<sup>2</sup> distinct from *logos* except by indicating that it corresponds to the suffix *-logia* in *theologia* but this makes little or no sense. In fact, as with English nouns and their French equivalents, the choice of *-ology* or *-ics* endings (e.g. psychology, mathematics) is inconsequential. But here we should note that Goldschmidt relies on Chantraine (1933: 319, 322; see Goldschmidt 1950: 22 n.1), a work that received extremely unfavourable reviews for being out of date, containing manifold errors, omissions, mistranslations and questionable explanations (e.g. McKenzie 1934), and was criticised for its inequality, specifically with regard to suffixes and aspects of suffixes, for its deficiency and for the author's reliance on his own intuition and outdated predecessors (Petersen 1934). Goldschmidt's decision to turn to Chantraine's study might have been just a matter of paying lip-service to a former mentor, as Pierre Chantraine had held the presidency of the Association des Études Grecques in 1948. But Chantraine's speculations on Greek suffixes was a very weak basis to ground the sustained reproach of Jaeger that permeates the entire study. But he had already warmed to the theme in his *La Religion de Platon* published in 1949 (Goldschmidt 1949: 42 n. 1). There are two further points to note: Jaeger's book is not restricted as is Goldschmidt's article to the sense of *theologia* in Plato and it only occupies the first chapter of *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*. And Goldschmidt does not refer to the

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<sup>2</sup> *Nomina declinare et verba in primis pueri sciunt* (Quintilian *Inst. Orat.* 1, 4.22).

*Symposium* or to Eros but to the *Tht.* (152d-e; 181b), *Soph.* (242d 5-6), *Tim.* (i, 204. 8ff; 19c, 7), *Rep.*(ii, 376d-e; 378a-d), *Crat.* and *Leg.* only.

Jaeger was not entirely alone in his view, however. Indeed, he had an eminent precursor at Oxford, in the person of the Aristotelian philosopher W. D. Ross. In 1924 Ross (1924: 356) in his commentary on *Met.* 1026<sup>a</sup> 19 – the passage runs through to 1064<sup>b</sup> 3 - had said something very similar; but importantly he qualified it in relation to the gods; at the same time, making the crucial point that Θεολογεῖν, θεολογία, θεολόγος in Aristotle always refers to the early cosmologists.

The designation of metaphysics as θεολογική is confined to this passage and the corresponding passage in *K*, 1064<sup>b</sup>3. Θεολογεῖν, θεολογία, θεολόγος in Aristotle always refer to the early cosmologists. But in *Pl. Rep* 379A θεολογία is used of rational theology. This way of naming metaphysics is connected with the view of it not as studying the general character of being as such, but as studying those beings which are χωριστὰ καὶ ακίνητα, in other words θεῖα.

Goldschmidt did not refer to Ross. But Jaeger did. Signalling the continuity of thought present in the intimation of truth expressed in the anthropomorphic gods of mythology and in metaphysics, he notices that Aristotle in *Met.* 983<sup>b</sup>28 speaks of Homer and Hesiod as πρῶτοι θεολογήσαντες (Jaeger 1947: 195 n. 28). Ross translated the passage as ‘those who first speculated about the gods’; Liddle and Scott cite it for ‘discourse on the gods’.

I have been unable to find any reference either to Jaeger or Goldschmidt in Lacan’s work. Nor in his biography. This is quite extraordinary given Lacan’s wide reading and it is very likely he knew both men. Given that Festugière and Goldschmidt were at Paris lecturing and publishing on this matter just a few years before his lecture of 30<sup>th</sup> November 1960 (S8), it seems reasonable to assume he knew about it. If this is correct, it puts Lacan’s remark in an entirely different light. As we have seen, by 1954 Festugière had drawn far closer to Jaeger and thus closer to the scholarly assessment of Ross. And less than two years later we find Lacan referring to him respectfully as ‘a very fine author’ with an ‘excellent knowledge of Greek Antiquity’ (S3: 142). On a first reading Lacan’s comment may seem at best innocuous, at worst a blunder. But might not his judgment on Phaedrus reflect, rather, a refined and considered position in relation to a recent controversy?

### Abbreviations

- de civ. Dei* Augustinus. *De civitate dei. Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* Vols 47 & 48. (Ed) B. Dombart, A. Kalb. Turnhout: Brepols, 1955.
- Met.* Aristotle. *Metaphysics*, 2 Vols. (trans) H. Tredennick. Loeb Classical Library 271, 287. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933, 1935.
- Crat.* Plato. *Cratylus* (trans) H. N. Fowler. Loeb Classical Library 167. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926.
- Leg.* Plato. *Laws*, Vol II. (trans) R. G. Bury. Loeb Classical Library 192. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926.
- Rep.* Plato. *Republic. Volume I: Books 1-5* (ed and trans) C. Emlyn-Jones and W. Preddy. Loeb Classical Library 237. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.

- Soph.* Plato. *Sophist* (trans) H. N. Fowler. Loeb Classical Library 123. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921.
- Symp.* Plato. *Symposium* (ed) J. Henderson, (trans) W. R. M. Lamb. Loeb Classical Library 165. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Tht.* Plato. *Theaetetus* (trans) H. N. Fowler. Loeb Classical Library 123. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921.
- Tim.* Plato. *Timaeus* (trans) R. G. Bury. Loeb Classical Library 234. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929.
- GA 7 Heidegger, M. [1951, 1954]. *Gasamtausgabe* Band 7. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000.
- GA 40 Heidegger, M. [1935, 1953]. *Gasamtausgabe* Band 40. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983.
- S3 Lacan, J. (1991). *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre III. Les Psychoses 1955-1956*. Texte Établi par J.-A. Miller. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
- S8 Lacan, J. (1991). *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre VIII. Le Transfert 1960-1961*. Texte Établi par J.-A. Miller. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

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