

Lewis TRELAWNY-CASSITY

Empirical and Dialogical Proofs of God's  
Existence in *Laws 10*

Book 10 of the *Laws* is intended to prove that the gods exist, care for us, and are not persuaded by bribes (885b7-9). The arguments put forward concerning the gods in Book 10 are described as “our noblest and best prelude (*kalliston te kai ariston proimion*) on behalf of the laws” (887c1). In this paper I want to investigate how Plato establishes the fact that *nous*, "god, in the correct sense, for the gods" (897b2), exists.

Some scholars have noted the "empirical" character of Plato's arguments for the existence of god in *Laws 10*. While empirical facts do provide an important supplement to Plato's theology, they do not comprise the whole or even most important part of that theology. Instead of looking at the technical or empirical arguments for god's existence in *Laws 10*, I will examine how Plato's commitment to dialogical conversation, where partners in *logos* work towards a shared understanding of the subject at hand, plays a foundational role in establishing the central principles of his theology.

It may seem peculiar that an emphasis on the centrality of dialogue in human life can lead to theological commitments of any sort, but this claim makes more sense when one examines two central tenets of Plato's theology: the priority of soul to matter and the existence of *nous*, a term which is used synonymously with *theos*. By engaging partisans of ancestral piety and scientific materialism in dialogue, Plato gets each party to agree to view the other as an ensouled being capable of engaging in *logos*. Here, the soul, taken as an entity that can give and respond to reasons, is shown to have a phenomenological priority to matter.

*Nous* in its most exalted sense is the orderer of the cosmos, but it is also the virtue, Reason, by which human beings orient themselves in the world. Plato shows through the dialogue of *Laws 10* that human beings are able to orient themselves by *nous* through dialogical *logos*. Showing that *nous* exists as a constant possibility of human conversation and collective deliberation falls short of a deductive proof of the existence of either a cosmic demiurge or a traditional civic god. Nonetheless, this dialogical evidence of *nous* in human conversation is the essential starting point and core of Plato's theology.