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Images of the World: Cosmology and Rhetoric in Plato's *Timaeus* and *Laws*

by

Daniel Esses

A dissertation submitted
in partial satisfaction of the requirements
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Abstract

Images of the World: Cosmology and Rhetoric in Plato's *Timaeus* and *Laws*

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Scholarship on the Platonic cosmologies generally focuses on what philosophical doctrines we can extract from the accounts of the gods and the cosmos featured in the late dialogues, especially the *Timaeus*. Such work aims to unearth what Plato really thought about the gods and their identity and what his perspective was on the origins of the natural world. In contrast, this dissertation investigates Platonic cosmology as a flexible rhetorical form that he used for various purposes in different contexts. Without denying the philosophical core and significance of the cosmologies, we can account for significant differences between them by examining how they speak to their target audiences' particular perspectives and needs. I devote my analysis to two dialogues in particular: the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*. These two dialogues, especially the *Timaeus*, are the ones scholars tend to single out as the best representations of Plato's natural philosophy and theology. The scholarly consensus seems to be that these are the dialogues one should focus on in order to understand what Plato really thought about the gods and the cosmos. Furthermore, their cosmologies are most often interpreted as self-standing and it is generally more difficult to see what particular role they play within their unique dramatic context. Focusing on the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* is necessary for showing how cosmology plays a distinctive persuasive role even in dialogues where that is not made explicit or especially clear.

The first chapter focuses solely on the *Timaeus*, especially the opening exchange that precedes Timaeus' cosmology. The opening exchange between Socrates, Timaeus and Critias raises a set of specific problems that Timaeus' cosmology later addresses. Timaeus presents a mythic cosmology in part because myth is a powerful protreptic resource that can orient non-philosophers toward a more philosophical viewpoint. In this case, Critias is a quasi-philosopher who stands to benefit from such a reorientation. Unlike his companions, Critias is more interested in politics—especially Athenian politics—than philosophy. Furthermore, Critias' framing of his story about Athens' victory over Atlantis reveals him as rather naïve. Critias is under the spell of his childhood myths, which portray Athens as a god-beloved, extraordinary polis. One of the aims of Timaeus' cosmology is to

deliver the philosophical challenge Critias' perspective calls for. Timaeus' unconventional deities, as well as his views on human nature and our place in the cosmos, are especially well suited to turn someone like Critias toward philosophy.

The second chapter discusses the gods of Timaeus' cosmology and compares Timaeus' theology with the Athenian Visitor's in the *Laws*, especially book X. It starts with an examination and comparison of how Timaeus and the Athenian position themselves vis-à-vis traditional religion. The different levels of deference to tradition that they show are explained by reference to their differing rhetorical and political agendas. Timaeus suggests that the traditional gods are less important and more difficult to understand than those deities his account focuses on, such as the Demiurge, to prompt Critias and others like him to see the traditional gods so important to them in a new light. The Athenian, by contrast, is more protective of the traditional pantheon and casts himself as a defender of established religious and cultural forms, even though his theology in book X focuses on vaguely identified celestial movers. His aim is not to challenge but to preserve piety in the ideal city he is designing. A detailed examination of Timaeus' novel deities—the Demiurge, the cosmos, and their subordinates—follows. The way Timaeus' theology casts the Demiurge and his creations as benefitting all humans alike while also remaining for the most part uninvolved and distant from human affairs stands in contrast with Critias' focus on Athena and her special bond with Athens. The Athenian's conception of the gods' relation to humans is notably different: though, unlike Timaeus, he does not describe the gods carefully designing our souls and bodies, he is more invested than Timaeus is in the notion that the gods pay attention to human affairs and punish wrongdoers. This is because he is presenting a theology to support civic religion and he recognizes that fear of the gods' wrath plays a major role in maintaining obedience to the laws.

The third chapter addresses the different perspectives on the polis and human society that Timaeus and the Athenian represent in their cosmologies and what that can tell us about the relationship between philosophy, cosmology and politics. On the one hand, Timaeus encourages us to think of our ultimate end as being completely independent of our political and social identity and affiliations; the conception of human happiness he advances within his cosmology is surprisingly apolitical. On the other hand, the Athenian endorses a view of human happiness and fulfillment in which the polis plays an indispensable role. It is fitting, therefore, that while the city is mostly absent from Timaeus' cosmology, the Athenian's invests justice in the polis with cosmic significance. Whereas Timaeus' avoidance of the political is part of his strategy to turn people like Critias toward a less parochial, more cosmopolitan perspective, the Athenian's attention to the city's significance for both the individual and the cosmos is in keeping with his use of cosmology as a supplement to civic religion. The ways the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* use cosmology complement one another: though they present philosophy and its relation to our happiness and ultimate end in a different light, taken together they illuminate philosophy's indispensability for proper political engagement and its longing to reshape the political realm.

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Introduction

The past two decades have seen a resurgence of scholarly interest in Platonic cosmology and theology.[1] There is broad agreement among scholars of various stripes that interpreting what Plato's dialogues say about the natural world and the gods is crucial for understanding their author's philosophical outlook. Given the tremendous volume of work on Plato's cosmologies, it may appear that this issue has been fully explored. It seems unlikely that any exciting new research on Platonic thought could emerge from further consideration of such a widely discussed dimension of the dialogues.

But there are good reasons to continue examining and reflecting on these ostensibly well-worn topics. For all the work that has been done on Platonic cosmology and theology, there is no consensus on the right interpretation of Plato's natural philosophy and his views about the divine. Who or what is god for Plato? Was the creation of the cosmos a distinct event taking place at a particular time or has the natural world always been ordered as it is now? Is the source of this order a transcendent intellect that belongs to the intelligible realm, or the immanent rational soul of the cosmos itself? These are the questions that absorb most students of this facet of Plato's thought, and the literature features a host of powerful arguments for and against various answers to them. The reconstruction of Plato's beliefs about such matters remains contested in spite of the abundance of sophisticated and detailed interpretations.

What makes settling on the right reading of Plato's cosmology and theology so difficult is that Plato himself never seems to settle on a single, unified view of the cosmos and the gods. His apparent spokesmen say different things about these matters across various dialogues, and Plato offers no guidance for how we should make sense of these inconsistencies. There is no wide agreement about how to interpret Plato's cosmology and theology because the dialogues present no such thing as a unified cosmology or theology. There are undoubtedly significant points of agreement across all of Plato's cosmologies, especially in the notion that some rational deity—rather than blind chance or necessity—orders and governs the natural world. The goodness of the god(s) is also taken as axiomatic throughout the dialogues. But none of this is ever laid out in a systematic way, and the core ideas are developed differently in each occasion. A few basic points aside, inconsistency and disunity characterize Platonic cosmology and theology.

The present study has developed in part as an attempt to account for such inconsistency and disunity. While most of the scholarship seems animated by a desire to unearth the systematic core that underlies all of Plato's cosmologies and tends to explain away divergences between cosmologies, my aim is to focus on these and reveal them as philosophically significant. Plato changes what his characters say about the cosmos and the

[1] The numerous commentaries, monographs and edited volumes focusing on cosmology and theology published within this period include: Sallis 1999; Zeyl 2000; Kalkavage 2001; Laurent 2003; Reydams-Schils 2003; Natali and Maso 2003; D. Miller 2003; Johansen 2004; Karfík 2004; Robinson 2004; Carone 2005; Bordt 2006; Mayhew 2008; Mohr and Sattler 2010; Broadie 2012; Gordon 2012; Lefka 2013; Van Riel 2013; and O'Meara 2017. A plethora of chapters, articles and dissertations on Platonic cosmology and theology, too many to list here, have also appeared in this period.

gods from one dialogue to another not because he is either confused or constantly changing his theories, but rather because cosmology is an adaptable form of discourse that can play a persuasive role in a variety of contexts and in the service of various ends. Like every other aspect of Plato's writing, the cosmologies ought to be examined in light of the dramatic context in which their author embeds them. Recognizing the cosmologies' rhetorical dimension will allow us to gain a better understanding of why they diverge from one another. Though the dialogues that feature cosmological discourses—the *Statesman*, the *Timaeus*, the *Philebus*, and the *Laws*—are not as vividly dramatized as Platonic favorites such as the *Republic* and the *Symposium*, they are dramas nonetheless and reading them as such can shed light on their content. My aim in the following pages is to implement this approach to Platonic cosmology and demonstrate its capacity to yield fresh insights.

I limit my examination to only two of the four dialogues that prominently feature a cosmology: the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*. There are two related reasons why I restrict the scope of my investigation. First, these two dialogues, especially the *Timaeus*, are the ones scholars tend to single out as the best representations of Plato's natural philosophy and theology.[2] The consensus is that these are the dialogues one should focus on to understand what Plato really thought about the gods and the cosmos, while the *Statesman* and the *Philebus* contribute little more than some helpful details and clarification.[3] Second, because the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* tend to be seen as containing more transparent expositions of Plato's views about the cosmos and the gods, their cosmologies are most often interpreted as self-standing and it is generally more difficult to see what particular role they play within their unique dramatic context. The cosmologies of the *Statesman* and the *Philebus*, by contrast, are more clearly flagged as advancing the inquiry they are part of: in the *Statesman*, the Eleatic Visitor explains quite directly that he has presented his myth of the cosmos' cycles to show that the god, not human statesmen, should be regarded as a genuine herdsman of men (see esp. 274e1-275c7); in the *Philebus*, Socrates launches into his cosmological excursus to illuminate his fourfold ontology of the limit, unlimited, mixture, and cause, and to reveal reason as the highest form of cause (see esp. 30d6-e3). An exploration of how cosmological content responds to dramatic context is less essential for the *Statesman* and the *Philebus* because they orient our reading of their cosmologies more clearly than the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* do. By focusing on the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*, I can show how cosmology plays a distinctive persuasive role even in dialogues where that

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[2] Cornford (1937), for example, is simply titled *Plato's Cosmology*, even though it is a commentary solely focused on the *Timaeus*. Similarly, Johansen (2004) is titled *Plato's Natural Philosophy* even though it features minimal discussion of dialogues other than the *Timaeus*. Though the cosmology of *Laws* X has not received the same level of attention as the *Timaeus*, it has its partisans: for example, Jirsa (2008) 240, following Solmsen (1936) 218 and Naddaf (2004), claims "one could hardly find a better place to search for Plato's views on gods and divinity" than *Laws* X.

[3] Hackforth (1945) 37-58, for example, makes ample use of the *Timaeus* cosmology to elucidate the cosmological passage in the *Philebus*. Menn (1995) and Mohr (2005) reconstruct Plato's theology and cosmology mainly from the *Timaeus* while using the *Statesman* and the *Philebus* to fill gaps in the *Timaeus*' treatment and clarify its doctrine.

is not made explicit. Furthermore, I can show that cosmology is put to contrasting and complementary rhetorical ends in these two dialogues.

My discussion proceeds in three chapters. In the first, I focus solely on the *Timaeus*, in particular the opening exchange that precedes Timaeus' cosmology. Though recent scholarship on the dialogue increasingly recognizes the philosophical relevance of the *Timaeus*' frame and finds thematic continuity between it and Timaeus' cosmology, my view is that the opening exchange between Socrates, Timaeus and Critias raises a set of specific problems that Timaeus' cosmology later addresses. I begin by challenging the widespread assumption that the *Timaeus*, unlike most Platonic dialogues, represents a conversation solely among philosophers. Timaeus presents a mythic cosmology in part because myth is a powerful protreptic resource that can orient non-philosophers toward a more philosophical viewpoint. In this case, Critias is a quasi-philosopher who stands to benefit from such a reorientation. Unlike his companions, Critias is more interested in politics—especially Athenian politics—than philosophy. Furthermore, Critias' framing of his story about Athens' victory over Atlantis reveals him as rather naïve. Critias is under the spell of his childhood myths, which portray Athens as a god-beloved, extraordinary polis. Even if he seems completely unaware of it, myths are very important for Critias and he takes very seriously how they portray deities such as Athena. So Critias is not simply a political man; he stands for a form of Athenian piety and confidence in the city's superiority, moral and martial, that would be at home in not only the Periclean era but also the early fourth century. This type of partisanship is an intellectual blind spot that can lead to catastrophe. One of the aims of Timaeus' cosmology, I argue, is to deliver the philosophical challenge Critias' perspective calls for. Timaeus' unconventional deities, as well as his views on human nature and our place in the cosmos, are especially well suited to turn someone like Critias toward philosophy.

In the second chapter, I discuss the gods of Timaeus' cosmology and compare Timaeus' theology with the Athenian Visitor's in the *Laws*, especially book X. I begin with a discussion of Timaeus' position on traditional gods such as Athena and Poseidon. Then, I compare his stance toward the traditional pantheon with the Athenian's and discuss how their differing rhetorical and political agendas motivate their contrasting approaches. Timaeus suggests that the traditional gods are less important and more difficult to understand than the deities in his account, such as the Demiurge, to prompt Critias and others like him to see the traditional gods that are so important to them in a new light. The Athenian, by contrast, is more protective of the traditional pantheon and casts himself as a defender of established religious and cultural forms, even though his theology in book X focuses on vaguely identified celestial movers. His aim is not to challenge, but to preserve piety in the ideal city he is designing. Following the discussion of these contrasting approaches to the traditional deities, I examine in detail Timaeus' novel deities: the Demiurge, the cosmos, and their subordinates. Timaeus' gods, I argue, reflect distinctly philosophical values and a vision that can serve as a powerful counter to Critias' parochialism. In particular, the way Timaeus' theology casts the Demiurge and his creations as benefitting all humans alike while also remaining largely uninvolved and distant from human affairs stands in contrast with Critias' focus on Athena and her special bond with Athens. Last, I turn to the Athenian's theology. Even though he portrays the gods in fundamentally the same way as Timaeus does, particularly with respect to their

nature and activities, his conception of their relation to humans is notably different from Timaeus'. The Athenian does not describe the gods carefully designing our souls and bodies, but he is more invested than Timaeus in the notion that the gods pay attention to human affairs and punish wrongdoers. This is because he is presenting a theology to support civic religion and he recognizes that fear of the gods' wrath plays a major role in maintaining obedience to the laws.

In the third chapter, I address the different perspectives on the polis and human society that Timaeus and the Athenian represent in their cosmologies and what that can tell us about the relationship between philosophy, cosmology, and politics. First, I discuss the contrasting viewpoints on human happiness and our ultimate end that Timaeus and the Athenian advance in their cosmologies, focusing mainly on how they conceive of the contribution our social environment makes to our achieving happiness. On the one hand, Timaeus encourages us to think of our ultimate end as independent of our political and social identity and affiliations; the conception of human happiness he advances within his cosmology is surprisingly apolitical. On the other hand, the Athenian endorses a view of human happiness and fulfillment in which the polis plays an indispensable role. It is fitting, therefore, that while the city is mostly absent from Timaeus' cosmology, the Athenian's invests justice in the polis with cosmic significance. I argue that whereas Timaeus' avoidance of the political is part of his strategy to turn people like Critias toward a less parochial, more cosmopolitan perspective, the Athenian's attention to the city's significance for both the individual and the cosmos is in keeping with his use of cosmology as a supplement to civic religion. I end with a reflection on how the *Timaeus*' and the *Laws*' uses of cosmology complement one another: though they present philosophy and its relation to our happiness and ultimate end in a different light, taken together they illuminate philosophy's indispensability for proper political engagement and its longing to reshape the political realm.

The arguments of my dissertation are, of course, difficult to make in the abstract. Those who incline toward skepticism of rhetorical readings of the cosmologies are unlikely to find the general outlines of my analysis in this introduction convincing on their own. My task and hope in the chapters that follow is to offer a detailed and convincing examination of the cosmologies that demonstrates the benefits of my approach.

Chapter 1: Timaeus' Cosmology as Protreptic and Provocation

In this chapter I build my case for a rhetorical reading of the *Timaeus*' cosmology. First, I consider the cosmology's status as a μῦθος—a myth—to show that it is not a specialist-oriented discourse but one that is made to appeal to a wide audience. This appeal is one of many indications that the *Timaeus* is not, as much of the scholarship suggests, a dialogue between accomplished philosophers only. Next, I examine Socrates' unusual loquacity in the dialogue as another sign that the *Timaeus* does not present a straightforward exchange between philosophers: Socrates' surprising break from his preferred question-and-answer form does not suggest like-mindedness among the dialogue's participants. Instead, I argue, it suggests Socrates' unwillingness to provoke or challenge his interlocutors directly. The truncated version of the *Republic* that Socrates presented on the day prior to the conversation of the *Timaeus*, which retreats from that previous work's most radical proposal, philosopher-kings, also suggests Socrates is holding back in the *Timaeus*.

The reasons for Socrates' strange conduct become clearer when we take a closer look at his interlocutors in the *Timaeus*, particularly Critias. As he introduces his fantastic tale of ancient Athens' victory over Atlantis, Critias gives readers several indications of his naïveté and unphilosophical perspective. Most importantly, Critias is: a) devoted to the civic myths of his childhood, though he does not seem to understand their status as myths; and b) convinced that his native city, Athens, enjoys a unique relation with the goddess Athena that makes its potential for virtue unparalleled. I end the chapter with a sketch of how Timaeus' cosmology addresses the problems displayed by Critias, which I develop in the subsequent chapters.

i. Who is the Target Audience of Timaeus' Cosmology?

In scholarship on Platonic cosmology, it is a widespread commonplace or assumption that the Athenian's arguments in *Laws* X are a more exoteric and accessible version of Plato's natural philosophy, while the *Timaeus* presents a more esoteric and demanding discourse on the topic.[4] There is much to recommend this view, and it must be at least partly right. To begin with, Plato seems to encourage such an approach by the noticeably different ways he presents the rhetorical and dramatic situations of these two dialogues. The Athenian's arguments and incantations in *Laws* X are directed at impious youth within Magnesia and developed in the presence of the decidedly unphilosophical Cleinias and Megillus. By contrast, Timaeus delivers his cosmogony before an audience that, according to Socrates, shares a similar background in philosophy and politics "by nature and upbringing (φύσει καὶ τροφῇ)" (19e8-20a1).

Once we turn our attention to the content of Timaeus' speech, its core assumptions and methodology seem to confirm that its primary intended audience should be

[4] E.g. Hackforth (1936) 6; Moreau (1939) 56-59, 84; Vlastos (1939) 78-79; Brisson (1974) 56; Carone (1994) 275, 295-296; Menn (1995) 17-18, 36; Kahn (2013) 214-219.

philosophically advanced.[5] In this dialogue Plato appears not to be holding back in any way, lending credence to the view that Timaeus' account represents the author's true thought about the origins and structure of the physical world with unparalleled accuracy. By comparison to what we find in *Laws* X—or in any other Platonic dialogue, for that matter—the Timaean cosmology comes off as undeniably sophisticated and esoteric.

However, we should be careful to recognize that the relatively esoteric nature of Timaeus' account does not necessarily make it either primarily intended for an audience familiar with Platonic philosophy or a transparent exposition of Plato's doctrine. Timaeus' cosmology does contain, of course, much material that would appeal almost exclusively to a very learned and philosophical audience. But there are good reasons to also see it as designed in such a way as to challenge and affect even those who are strangers to Platonic philosophizing. In particular, the account's mythic form and its protreptic potential suggest that its notional audience is not restricted to accomplished philosophers.

(α) Timaeus' μῦθος

Let us consider first why it matters that Timaeus' cosmology is a μῦθος, a myth.[6] No feature of the speech is as significant for appreciating its potential popular appeal. By that I do not mean that myth inherently has low cognitive or philosophical value. What

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[5] This is made clear already in Timaeus' proem, where he uses the familiar Platonic distinction between what always is and what comes into being to argue that the cosmos has been generated (27c1-29d3). He also essentially assumes that its creation is the work of a benevolent divine craftsman. No such metaphysical distinctions can be found in *Laws* X, and there the Athenian does not take it for granted that the world is under the care of gods, but labors to prove it. Furthermore, Timaeus discusses explicitly the method that ought to guide the study of causes in nature, indicating that he sees cosmology as a special discipline governed by specific norms and standards of argument and research. Indeed, he demonstrates the application of such a methodology to a wide variety of natural phenomena, which are discussed in far greater detail within his account than they are in any other Platonic discourse. Within these very detailed discussions we find Plato, via Timaeus, engaging with the physical theories of his predecessors with a depth unparalleled in his oeuvre. Last, Timaeus' focus on the mathematical structures at the heart of cosmic order involves complex mathematical theory and likely reflects the interests and concerns of Plato's affiliates in the Academy. Since Plato's students and collaborators would have recognized their own intellectual concerns reflected in the lengthy technical mathematical discussions in Timaeus' cosmology—discussions that would very likely confound or repel a lay audience—we would be justified in assuming that they would have been an important target audience for the account. By contrast, in the *Laws* the Athenian includes no advanced or technical material at all in his arguments. These arguments do not even presuppose the very basic education in astronomy that the Magnesians would receive in their youth (cf. VII. 820e8-822c9).

[6] Burnyeat (2005) presents a compelling case for reading Timaeus' cosmology as a myth. See also Johansen (2004) 48-68.

makes myth important, rather, is its power as a rhetorical tool, a means of guiding non-philosophers (including philosophers-to-be) toward the truth.[7] As Socrates puts it in the *Republic*, myth is a crucial instrument for "molding (πλάττειν)" the souls of the young in such a manner as will enable them to behave virtuously when they mature (II.420c2-5). In the *Statesman*, the Eleatic Visitor describes rhetoric as a craft that enables statesmanship to govern because it possesses "the ability to persuade the crowd and the mob (πλήθους τε καὶ ὄχλου) by the telling of myths rather than instruction (διὰ μυθολογίας ἀλλὰ μὴ διὰ διδαχῆς)" (303e10-304d2). Myth's power lies in its persuasiveness and its ability to work on the non-rational aspects of our nature.

There are several distinctive features of myth that render it singularly effective in shaping or altering people's perspectives without appealing to their rational side. But the following are especially worth noting in this context: first, myth is poetic and inherently pleasant to hear, charming its recipients at an aesthetic level; second, it belongs most properly to the domain of religion, as it narrates the actions of divine or semi-divine beings and vividly portrays their character and power. This gives myth distinctive emotional force, as it shapes and elicits in its audience the most fundamental forms of awe, fear and hope.[8]

These features of mythic discourse are undeniably present in Timaeus' cosmogony. With regard to the aesthetic appeal of the account, we should note that Timaeus' descriptions of the Demiurge, the Receptacle and the various stages of the cosmos' construction rely heavily on metaphorical and imagistic language. These descriptions are far removed from a plain mode of exposition, and Timaeus' presentation shows a preference for poetic and rhetorical beauty over directness.[9] Timaeus' aim is not to present these entities or principles in the most transparent and accurate manner possible. The religious and emotional force of Timaeus' account, in turn, hardly needs to be argued for: as a narrative about the origins and activities of a host of deities, as well as how humans relate to these deities, it is at least partially meant to cultivate a deep sense of awe in its recipients and mold their desires and aspirations. By presenting his cosmology as a myth, then, Timaeus endows it with features that are characteristic of exoteric or popular, not esoteric philosophical discourse. In other words, the choice of a mythic mode of exposition suggests that Timaeus does not intend his account of cosmic origins to be interesting or relevant only to advanced philosophers.

This argument—that many key features of Timaeus' discourse are specifically designed to appeal to a wide and likely non-philosophical audience—does not deny that much of the material that Timaeus includes in his account would most likely be of interest to especially erudite recipients. Like any genuinely philosophical myth, Timaeus' cosmogony is a ποικίλος λόγος, a variegated and polymorphous discourse designed to

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[7] On this facet of Platonic myth, see Morgan (2000) 164-184; Nightingale (2002); Collobert (2012) and Most (2012).

[8] Here I essentially follow Brisson (1998) 75-85, though he emphasizes the effects of myth on the appetitive part of the soul specifically.

[9] Scholars who emphasize the poetic elements of Timaeus' cosmology include Shorey (1901); Cornford (1937) 31-32; Hadot (1983); Miller (2003) 21-22; Pender (2010); Regali (2010) and Sedley (2010).

engage virtually every aspect of our nature, from the lowest to the highest.[10] It operates at different levels at once. Its contents and form are designed to challenge and educate philosophers and non-philosophers alike. The recognition that much of Timaeus' account seems purposely aimed at a specialist audience, then, is compatible with the notion that much of it is also designed to move a non-philosophical audience and somehow reconfigure their perspective on the cosmos. In a sense, then, the cosmology of the *Timaeus* is both exoteric and esoteric; it represents a complex philosophical vision, but it does not lose sight of the needs and psychology of a wider public.

It might be objected that, even though the link between the mythic form of Timaeus' account and its potential to appeal to a non-philosophical audience is plausible, it is not necessary, so that there may not be as much purpose to the formal characteristics of the cosmology as I claim there is. The account may exhibit features characteristic of exoteric philosophical discourse, but it could still be primarily or even exclusively intended for an audience of expert philosophers. It is, after all, reasonable to suppose that Plato was too brilliant a writer to present his deepest cosmological insights in dry expository prose, without any rhetorical or poetic embellishment. Furthermore, we could see the richly imagistic language Timaeus often resorts to as an interpretive challenge specifically devised for an audience of philosophers. Many of Plato's followers in the Academy seem to have taken Timaeus' language as such a provocation, since they thought stripping away the mythic elements of Timaeus' cosmology was necessary for retrieving Plato's genuine cosmological teachings.[11] Given the readiness with which many of Plato's earliest interpreters read past the more poetic elements of Timaeus' cosmology without ascribing to them, as far as we know, any special function or significance, the ostensibly exoteric dimension of the account may not be particularly relevant for understanding the dialogue's intended audience.

I agree that it is practically inconceivable that Plato would have presented any kind of teaching in a straightforward but dry treatise. And his followers in the Academy may well have been right to demythologize the *Timaeus*. It is certainly possible that Plato actually expected his students to look beyond and discard the mythic elements of Timaeus' account, though that can be no more than a conjecture.

All the same, even if several of the earliest interpreters of Timaeus' cosmology responded to its form in a way that was appropriate for them as philosophers, that does not mean that their response is the only one that it is the text's purpose to elicit. What we know of the immediate reception of the *Timaeus* is obviously valuable evidence for understanding what value it may have had for a philosophical audience, but there is no compelling reason to grant this audience interpretive monopoly over the text.[12] Though reading past Timaeus' imagistic language may be a perfectly adequate philosophical

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[10] See *Phaedrus* 277b5-c6 on ποικίλοι λόγοι, together with Rowe (1986) and Nightingale (1995) 133-171.

[11] For sympathetic discussion of the immediate reception of the *Timaeus*, see Dillon (1997) and (2003).

[12] Indeed, these readers appear to have met with criticism from at least one of their contemporaries: in *de Caelo* 279b33-280a10, Aristotle rejects the claim that the temporal generation of the cosmos (presumably in the *Timaeus*) is merely a didactic device.

response to it, it also behooves us to reflect on the power his images have *as images* to affect those who are susceptible to myth's charms.

(β) Protreptic in Timaeus' Cosmology

The cosmology's mythic form aside, the way it makes the case for the philosophical life as the path to genuine happiness closely aligns it with proptreptic discourse, which "exhorts its audience to adopt one way of living that leads to a specific kind of happiness and dissuades them from alternative ways of living which are detrimental to that happiness."[13] Protreptic, of course, aims to win over those who have not yet committed themselves to philosophy—potential rather than actual philosophers.

First, we should consider how Timaeus' explicit claims about what philosophy and science can contribute to our lives constitute precisely this kind of exhortation. At 46e7-47b3, for example, Timaeus asserts that sight has been given to us to fulfill "a function of supreme benefit (μέγιστον … εἰς ὠφελίαν ἔργον)," since it allows human beings to contemplate the motions of the celestial bodies. This led to the development of "number, our awareness of time, and investigation of the nature of the universe (ἀριθμόν, χρόνου δὲ ἔννοιαν περί τε τῆς τοῦ παντὸς φύσεως ζήτησιν)," which have yielded "philosophy, a good greater than which none either has or will ever come to our mortal race as a gift from the gods (φιλοσοφίας γένος, οὗ μεῖζον ἀγαθὸν οὔτ᾽ ἦλθεν οὔτε ἥξει ποτὲ τῷ θνητῷ γένει δωρηθὲν ἐκ θεῶν)." Why are philosophy and the contemplation of celestial motions so valuable? For Timaeus, studying the order of the heavens is the only means by which we may establish rational order within ourselves (42c4-d2, 47b7-c4, 90c7-d4). Without these studies, we may be unable to lead a truly rational life. Such a life includes behaving in accordance with reason and, more importantly, the proper care and nourishment of our rational faculty. The philosophical study of nature simultaneously forms our whole character and develops our rationality, making it the highest form of self-care and the only path to the best life available to us. Near the end of his speech, Timaeus even encourages us to think of our rational faculty as a "guardian spirit (δαίμων)" each of us has from god (90a3-4). If someone dedicates their life to the pursuit of wisdom and truth, it is "absolutely necessary (πᾶσα ἀνάγκη)" that he will share in immortality to the extent that a human being can "and, since he is constantly tending to his divine part and keeping well ordered the spirit that lives with him, be exceptionally happy (ἅτε δὲ ἀεὶ θεραπεύοντα τὸ θεῖον ἔχοντά τε αὐτὸν εὖ κεκοσμημένον τὸν δαίμονα σύνοικον ἑαυτῷ, διαφερόντως εὐδαίμονα εἶναι)" (90b6-c6, cf. 68e6-69a5). Whoever comes to have a properly ordered rational faculty is not only supremely happy, but actually "reaches the goal of the best life offered to humans by the gods, for both the present and the future (τέλος ἔχειν τοῦ προτεθέντος ἀνθρώποις ὑπὸ θεῶν ἀρίστου βίου πρός τε τὸν παρόντα καὶ τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον)" (90d5-7).

In these passages, Timaeus is clearly advocating for philosophy conceived in a distinctive way, as a specific course of study that transforms one's character and perspective on the world. Against the grain of contemporary appraisals of astronomy and

[13] Collins (2015) 39.

the other exact sciences, which regarded such learning as either useless or useful only to the extent that it could sharpen our intellectual and discursive abilities,[14] Timaeus affirms that it is the highest activity for a human being, that no one is happier than those who dedicate their lives to understanding the cosmos. It is unlikely that Timaeus casts philosophy as such a supremely beneficial undertaking simply to congratulate or confirm the choice of those who, like him, have already chosen to devote their lives to study. Rather, Timaeus' rhapsodic presentation of the philosopher's achievement must be aimed at those who can be persuaded, but are not yet convinced, that nothing is as advantageous as philosophical inquiry. If parts of Timaeus' cosmology seem primarily designed to inspire potential students to dedicate themselves to the study of nature, its notional audience must include potential converts in addition to specialists.[15]

Since trying to dissuade one's audience from pursuits other than philosophy is almost as important an element of protreptic discourse as positive advertising, we should also take into account how Timaeus attempts to dissuade.

About those who neglect their rational faculty and surrender to their appetites or ambitions instead, Timaeus says that they can think only mortal thoughts, becoming as mortal as a human being can become (90b1-5). This is a fairly mild claim, given that it presents non-philosophical ways of life as inferior only because they cannot immortalize us. Non-philosophers miss out on something wonderful, but there is no indication that they suffer greatly on account of this.

Of far greater apotreptic force are Timaeus' descriptions of the post-mortem fate of non-philosophers' souls. Men who do not lead rational and virtuous lives, he claims, would be first reincarnated into women, and if they fail to desist from vice then "they would keep on changing (ἀεὶ μεταβαλοῖ) into a beastly form (θήρειον φύσιν) resembling their character and never gain a respite from their toils (πόνων)" until they established rational order in their lives (42b5-d2). Timaeus provides a fuller picture of what happens to souls after death at 90e3-92c3, where it is clear that only philosophers escape karmic demotion when their lives are over. Though the main point of these passages is presumably to explain how women and nonhuman animals came into being, the possibility of punitive reincarnation should also inspire fear in non-philosophers and impel them to try to cultivate their rationality. By affirming that the consequences of living philosophically or otherwise extend beyond death, these passages could play a significant role in dissuading Timaeus' audience from underestimating the value of philosophy. Timaeus gives his

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[14] Xenophon's Socrates is mostly skeptical of the value of natural inquiry and recommends pursuing geometry and astronomy only to the extent that these may prove useful in practical undertakings such as land management and travel (*Memorabilia* I.1.10-16, IV.7.2-8). In the *Antidosis*, Isocrates claims that although most people think that geometry and astronomy are completely useless, his own position is that they genuinely benefit their students by sharpening their minds, thus serving as a propaedeutic for the study of rhetoric (261-76). Natali (1987) offers a useful overview of the variety of opinions concerning the usefulness of natural research and the exact sciences in classical Athens.

[15] I am not the first to recognize the protreptic value of *Timaeus* 89d2-90d7: Iamblichus uses this passage in his *Protrepticus* (30.13-30.19); and Gaiser (1959) 213-214 includes it in his survey of protreptic in Plato.

audience reason to think that neglecting philosophy necessarily is detrimental in the long run even if he does not offer a clear description of the unhappiness that afflicts non-philosophers.[16] Parts of his speech, then, exhibit both the exhortatory and the dissuasive facets of philosophical protreptic.

Timaeus presents a forceful case for philosophy as the most—if not the only—choiceworthy way of life. Considering that this is a message that accomplished philosophers would not need to hear, it is difficult to believe that his speech is meant to appeal to them alone. Together with the cosmology's mythic form, this strongly suggests that Timaeus' account anticipates a wide and diverse audience rather than an exclusively philosophical one, the difficulty of some of its content notwithstanding.[17]

(γ) To Whom Does Timaeus Address his Cosmology?

Why, then, does Plato have Timaeus present his cosmology to an internal audience that seems to consist entirely of philosophers? One possible explanation for this incongruity is that Plato does envision a fairly wide audience for the *Timaeus*, even if it is supposed to represent an exchange between accomplished philosophers. It makes sense, one the one hand, to have Timaeus speak to such an audience within the dialogue, given that much of his cosmology is difficult and likely beyond the ken of laypersons. On the other hand, Plato must have Timaeus convey his understanding of the cosmos in a way that can move a wide audience, even if it seems out of place within the context of the dialogue, because his potential readership is naturally more diverse than any private meeting could be. Thus, the cosmology's mythic form and its protreptic potential may have nothing to do with the dialogue's internal dynamic and rhetorical situation, reflecting only Plato's writerly awareness of the various types of recipients his published work can encounter.

Another possibility, which I favor, is that Timaeus does not even address an exclusively philosophical audience within the dialogue itself. If this is so, those features of his cosmology that target lay recipients might represent an attempt on Timaeus' part to orient one or more of his interlocutors toward a philosophical perspective or insight that they lack. Such skepticism about what the dialogue's surface tells us about its characters may seem unnecessary, and this is a genuine difficulty of an interpretation along these lines. Nevertheless, the dialogue does give us several reasons to entertain such doubts. This matters greatly for what we make of Timaeus' cosmology: our assessment of what shortcomings or misconceptions his interlocutors exhibit should not only bolster our notion

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[16] Cf. the discussion of how the myths of judgment in the *Gorgias*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Republic* give us different reasons to recognize injustice as detrimental to our happiness in Annas (1982).

[17] Would the more technical parts of Timaeus' cosmology scare away or bore to tears recipients less interested in mathematics than members of Plato's Academy? Not necessarily. Whereas it would be more difficult for them to understand what Timaeus is talking about, they might still find his expertise impressive and captivating. Undoubtedly, the *Timaeus* has fascinated and moved many a reader with a fairly weak grasp of geometry and ratio theory.

that it is designed to appeal to an audience that includes non-philosophers, but it should also help us understand more precisely what it can offer such an audience (aside from encouragement to take up natural philosophy).

In the sections that follow, I discuss how the frame of the *Timaeus* suggests that the dialogue does not represent an exchange between philosophers only, in spite of Socrates' collective description of his and Timaeus' interlocutors as philosophers "by nature and upbringing" (19e8-20a1). First, I focus on the conceit of the "feast of speeches," prominent as it is in the dialogue's opening pages. This figure marks Socrates' exchange with his companions in the *Timaeus* as special, something quite unlike the kind of conversation he usually prefers in Plato's dialogues. It is the first sign, I argue, that Socrates' interlocutors perhaps do not think of philosophy in the same way as he does. Second, I turn to Socrates' summary of his contribution to the feast, a noticeably truncated version of the discussion he reports in the *Republic*. Paying special attention to the parts of the discussion of the *Republic* Socrates has omitted from his speech, I contend that the summary at the beginning of the *Timaeus* suggests that Socrates is not as ready to propose and explore radical, provocative ideas in this dialogue as he is when conversing with Glaucon, Adeimantus and the rest. Next, I turn to Critias, whose concerns and outlook are foregrounded through a significant portion of the dialogue's frame (20d7-27b6). In agreement with many recent interpretations of the *Timaeus*,[18] I argue that Critias displays some deeply unphilosophical traits. I certainly do not see him as an enemy of philosophy, but I take him to mirror certain features of conventional Athenian thought that are at odds with the Platonic philosophical perspective. Above all, Critias comes off as naïve: he is given to idealizing his native city and, with a childlike trust in its civic mythology, imagines that it enjoys a special relationship with Athena. He stands for the type of person who is susceptible to the mythic charm of Timaeus' cosmology and most needs the philosophical reorientation it can provide. After examining the *Timaeus*' rhetorical situation in this chapter, in subsequent ones I discuss how Timaeus' cosmology offers Critias—and readers of the dialogue who are like him—a more philosophical yet accessible perspective on the nature of the gods and humans' place in the cosmos.

ii. The Feast of Speeches

What does Socrates think about his interlocutors in the *Timaeus*? To get a sense of this, we must pay attention not only to how he describes them but also to how he talks to them. Socrates' very first lines in the dialogue, where he describes his interlocutors as "my guests yesterday and hosts today (ἡμῖν … τῶν χθὲς μὲν δαιτυμόνων, τὰ νῦν δὲ ἑστιατόρων)" (17a1-3), suggest he is addressing them in an unusual manner. Timaeus echoes Socrates' opening lines enthusiastically at 17b2-4, when he tells him that since he and his companions "were entertained by you with fitting hospitality yesterday (χθὲς ὑπὸ σοῦ ξενισθέντας οἷς ἦν πρέπον ξενίοις)" they are now eager "to feast you in return

[18] E.g. Ferrari (1995) 396-397, Reydams-Schils (2001), Miller (2003) 21, Howland (2007), Broadie (2012) 116-172. Welliver (1977) is an early, if somewhat idiosyncratic, exponent of this view.

(ἀνταφεστιᾶν).” He reveals immediately afterward that Socrates entertained him and his companions with a speech, which they will repay by discussing the subjects he has assigned to them (17b5-6). The conceit of the ‘feast of speeches’ recurs several times throughout the dialogue’s opening pages (19c1-3, 21a1-3, 27a2-3, 27b7-8), clearly marking that Socrates’ exchange with his interlocutors is special.

The figure of the verbal banquet illustrates what makes this give and take so remarkable. Plato’s readers should be aware that he has Socrates and others use this figure of speech in several other dialogues to characterize various forms of verbal displays. In *Gorgias* 447a3-6, Socrates and Callicles refer to Gorgias’ rhetorical demonstration as a “feast (ἑορτή).” As the dialogue unfolds it becomes increasingly clear that Socrates is not particularly impressed or interested in that kind of entertainment. Along similar lines, at *Phaedrus* 227b6-7 Socrates asks Phaedrus if Lysias “feasted (εἱστία)” his guests with speeches. Subsequently he endeavors to release Phaedrus from the spell of the meretricious words that entertained him earlier. In another example, from the *Republic*, it is Thrasymachus rather than Socrates who introduces his figure to describe the misuse of language. Having become frustrated with what he perceives as Socrates’ disingenuous manipulation of the discussion, Thrasymachus gives up the exchange, telling him “Have a feast of the argument! (εὐωχοῦ τοῦ λόγου)” (I.352b3-4, cf. 354a10-11).[19] In all of these works, banquets of words are consistently contrasted with genuine, probing philosophical dialogue. That Socrates should so gladly participate in one is exceptional, a striking deviation from his usual conduct.[20]

Of course, this feasting is in important respects unlike those that the other dialogues cast a negative light on. Given the philosophical depth of Timaeus’ speech at least, we can rest assured that Socrates has not developed a newfound fondness for empty display pieces. It would be wrong to ignore, however, that the hospitality gifts Socrates and his companions exchange are, as monologues, closer in their form to rhetorical performances than they are to philosophical dialogue.[21] It is definitely strange for Socrates to be eager to participate in such an exchange, even if with bona fide philosophers, as it is not customary

[19] A further occurrence of the figure does appear at *Lysis* 211c10-d1, but it is not as relevant. It is Ctesippus, not Socrates, who uses feasting language, and it is to complain about being excluded from the conversation Socrates is having with Menexenus and Lysis. It does not appear to imply any substantive criticism of the conversation itself.

[20] Although it is true that Socrates’ unusual behavior can be seen as Plato’s way of announcing that in the *Timaeus* and its projected sequels he is experimenting with a new type of literary production, I find it hard to believe that it is no more than that. Even if we take the *Timaeus* and the *Critias* as Plato’s literary experiments, it should be appropriate and productive to interrogate their worth and shortcomings from a philosophical perspective, evaluating them by the standards suggested established by Plato’s previous output and situating them within his overall philosophical vision.

[21] Schoos (1999) also treats the ‘feast of speeches’ figure as a red flag of sorts and discusses some of the same evidence from Plato’s other works. I do not agree with his conclusion, however, that this raises doubts about the status of Timaeus’ account.

for him to either deliver speeches of his own or receive others' speeches without asking any questions.[22]

(α) Can Monologues Be Socratic?

Concerning Socrates' role as a monologist, we should first of all point out that throughout the Platonic corpus he does make the occasional uninterrupted speech. Monologue is certainly not anathema to him.[23] Nevertheless, Socrates' speeches are always somehow embedded in a searching question-and-answer conversation. They always appear in a setting where their smooth, uninterrupted flow stands in stark contrast with the uneven rhythms of Socrates' questioning, which is full of false starts and new beginnings and often fails to reach a satisfying conclusion. This contrast is obviously formal, but it is substantive as well: whereas someone delivering a speech has full control and knowledge of what he will say, Socrates' interrogation of his interlocutors is characterized by an errant openness, as its direction depends on the answers they give no less than his own commitments. Whereas monologue is an effective means of setting forth definite views on a subject, questioning makes such views its starting point and aims to test their truth. Of necessity, the monologist cannot address as attentively the needs and opinions of his interlocutors as the philosophical questioner can. Whether a philosopher engages with his interlocutors via monologue or Socratic dialogue, then, makes all the difference, as these embody two very different—if not opposing—notions of the one's intellectual status and achievement.[24]

Many of Plato's dialogues reveal that Socrates thinks of himself as a questioner rather than a speechmaker, and that this is central to his conception of his own practice as a philosopher. None, perhaps, does so in as arresting a manner as the *Theaetetus*, where Socrates describes himself as a practitioner of the art of intellectual midwifery. As he describes his craft, Socrates denies having any wisdom of his own. While he knows how to deliver other people's ideas and "test (βασανίζειν)" those ideas for truth, of his own condition he says: "I am barren of wisdom and the charge that many have leveled against me, that I question others but do not reveal any views about anything because I have nothing wise to say (αὐτὸς δὲ οὐδὲν ἀποφαίνομαι περὶ οὐδενὸς διὰ τὸ μηδὲν ἔχειν

[22] Consider Phaedrus' remark in the eponymous dialogue when Socrates pauses during his first speech on love: "Without a doubt, Socrates, an unusual verbal fluidity has taken hold of you (παρὰ τὸ εἰωθὸς εὔροιά τίς σε εἴληφεν)" (238c6-7). As someone who is familiar with Socrates, Phaedrus is surprised that he has launched into a continuous speech to rival Lysias'.

[23] Socrates does profess to be unable to make or follow long speeches at *Protagoras* 335c1-6, but he is clearly exaggerating there.

[24] For a stimulating reflection on the *philosophical* significance of questioning and openness, see Gadamer (2004) 355-363. Dixsaut (2013) offers a stimulating account of the kinship between philosophy and digression as transcending the distinction between monologue and dialogue. On the literary significance of the Platonic Socrates' questioning, see Stokes (1986) 1-36; on disunity and irresolution in Plato's dialogues, see Cotton (2014) 225-262.

σοφόν), is true" (150b9-c7). To some degree, this is too strong a formulation to fit Socrates' conduct throughout all of the dialogues, as he does sometimes reveal his opinions to his interlocutors.[25] But he never presents those opinions as authoritative or wise, nor does he engage others in dialogue so as to reveal his convictions to them. Socrates never starts a discussion from what he thinks, and it is only the context of examining or challenging others' opinions that he expresses or endorses definite views. His unflagging interest in what others have to say suggests that his refusal to claim genuine wisdom is sincere, and so does his preference for short questions and answers over long speeches. It is strange, therefore, that the *Timaeus* shows us a Socrates who is happy to entertain an audience that is potentially wiser than him with a speech. Even if we surmise that Socrates has found an extraordinarily appreciative audience in Timaeus and the others, it still seems farfetched that their receptiveness would draw him out of his usual humility and reticence.

(β) Does Socrates Appreciate Others' Speeches?

Socrates claims at 20b1-4 that his interlocutors' eagerness to hear him speak about politics was not the only reason he did so: "when you asked me to discourse about matters of political organization (ὑμῶν δεομένων τὰ περὶ τῆς πολιτείας διελθεῖν), I indulged you eagerly (προθύμως ἐχαριζόμην) because I knew that, should you be willing, nobody else would deliver a more adequate follow-up speech (τὸν ἑξῆς λόγον οὐδένες ἂν ὑμῶν ἐθελόντων ἱκανώτερον ἀποδοῖεν)." The follow-up speech Socrates wants to hear from his companions should portray in motion the city whose structure he described on the previous day, "competing in a contest with other cities for the prizes cities tend to compete for (ἄθλους οὓς πόλις ἀθλεῖ, τούτους αὐτὴν ἀγωνιζομένην πρὸς πόλεις ἄλλας)" by conducting a war and dealing with other cities in a manner that would reflect its education (19c2-8). Socrates does not really explain why he does not deem himself "able to praise the city and its men fittingly (τοὺς ἄνδρας καὶ τὴν πόλιν ἱκανῶς ἐγκωμιάσαι)," but he suggests that what sets him apart from his interlocutors is his lack of political experience (19d1-20b1). Socrates' unusual loquacity, it seems, is motivated by a desire to hear in return the kind of speech his current company is uniquely capable of producing.

And yet, for Socrates to want to listen to others discourse at length is, as I have already pointed out, no less unusual than his own willingness to do so. The apparent explanation the *Timaeus* offers for Socrates' readiness to deliver a speech to his interlocutors ultimately raises more questions than it answers. Socrates' usual commitment to interrogation not only leads him to avoid, for the most part, giving speeches in his own voice, but it also entails a preference for hearing people give answers to his questions over being their passive auditor.

Two passages from the *Protagoras* are especially instructive on this issue. First, there is Socrates' criticism of the public orators (δημήγοροι):

[25] On the continuities between Socrates' midwifery and his conduct elsewhere in the Platonic corpus, see Burnyeat (1977).

> εἰ δὲ ἐπανέροιτό τινά τι, ὥσπερ βιβλία οὐδὲν ἔχουσιν οὔτε ἀποκρίνασθαι οὔτε αὐτοὶ ἐρέσθαι, ἀλλ᾽ ἐάν τις καὶ σμικρὸν ἐπερωτήσῃ τι τῶν ῥηθέντων, ὥσπερ τὰ χαλκία πληγέντα μακρὸν ἠχεῖ καὶ ἀποτείνει ἐὰν μὴ ἐπιλάβηταί τις, καὶ οἱ ῥήτορες οὕτω, σμικρὰ ἐρωτηθέντες δόλιχον κατατείνουσι τοῦ λόγου.
>
> If someone asks one of them a question, they can neither answer nor ask questions of their own, just like books. If someone questions even a small part of what they have said, orators behave just like bronze bowls, which when struck ring for a long time and go on until someone stops them. Being asked a little question, they go off on a long-distance speech. (329a2-b1)

A few pages later, Alcibiades levels similar but more pointed criticism at Protagoras himself, whom he accuses of "spinning out a lecture (μακρὸν λόγον ἀποτείνων) for each question, beating back the arguments and not consenting to be accountable (ἐκκρούων τοὺς λόγους καὶ οὐκ ἐθέλων διδόναι λόγον), delaying (ἀπομηκύνων) instead until most of the listeners have forgotten what the question was about (ἐπιλάθωνται περὶ ὅτου τὸ ἐρώτημα ἦν)" (336c5-d2). Taken together, these passages suggest that Socrates' misgivings about oratory are grounded on the notion that a proficient rhetorician can use his skill to evade accountability to his audience and conceal from them that he does not fully understand what he is talking about. Speeches can all too easily become tools for protecting a deceptive appearance of wisdom and authority.[26] Recognizing this is crucial for someone with a genuine desire to learn, as it enables him to see that verbal fluidity is not a marker of wisdom and speeches can conceal as much, and sometimes more, than they communicate. It does not behoove a philosopher to be a neutral, unsuspecting consumer of speeches.

The point here is not that people who make speeches do not have anything thoughtful to say, or that it is impossible to learn anything at all by listening to them. The idea that rhetorical skill and wisdom are separable is not to be confused with a claim that the two are mutually exclusive. Rather, the point is that we cannot learn from a speech by simply listening to it. We must interrogate it or the person delivering it to make sure that whatever truth we find in it is not illusory. This is the stance we should adopt toward every speech, regardless of our prior estimation of the speaker. The risk of deception or misunderstanding is intrinsic to the monologue form itself. Wise people certainly can make speeches, but their audience will not learn from them without asking questions. Indeed, within the process of questioning we also test our own comprehension of what we have heard, as respondents may confirm or challenge our interpretations. Questioning is the appropriate response to every speech, and it should not be seen as merely a means for drawing out potential charlatans. As Socrates puts it in the *Hippias Minor*, it is especially people who appear to be wise that he is interested in questioning (369d2-e2, cf. 372a6-c8).

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[26] The *Protagoras* is not the only dialogue that suggests this much. Indeed, this is precisely what Socrates criticizes Polus for at *Gorgias* 448d1-e4, and his instructing Gorgias to give the briefest possible answers to his questions at 449b4-8 is meant to forestall any recourse by Gorgias to rhetorical razzle-dazzle.

(γ) Explaining Socrates' Newfound Appreciation of Speeches

Socrates has a strong preference for question-and-answer conversation that is rooted in his conception of himself as a learner and a lover of wisdom. There is, then, no obvious or easy way of squaring the inquisitive Socrates we are familiar with from Plato's other dialogues with Socrates as we find him in the opening pages of the *Timaeus*, where he is eager to hear a series of speeches. We cannot appeal to the unusual receptiveness and philosophical background of Socrates' interlocutors in the *Timaeus*, since that should amplify rather than dampen his interest in posing questions to them. At the same time, we should not simply see Socrates' newfound thirst for speeches as inexplicable or unmotivated, giving up completely on the question of whether the Socrates of the *Timaeus* can be harmonized with the Socrates of the other dialogues. Rather, we should scrutinize what Socrates says and attempt to better understand the dramatic and rhetorical situation of the *Timaeus*.

Even if it is not particularly helpful to know that Socrates speaks at length in order that his interlocutors may repay him with speeches of their own, what kind of speech he wishes to hear from them is significant. His request is that they complete what is ostensibly his political vision by portraying his ideal city in action and eulogizing it duly (19c2-d2). This is very strange: not only does Socrates essentially lecture his interlocutors, but he is also confident that they will find his claims agreeable enough to produce the follow-up speech he wishes to hear. A Socrates who is willing to offer a positive vision of the ideal polity and is also confident that a group of men who have political experience and philosophical interests of their own will find it compelling is the opposite of the Socrates who claims to have no wisdom to share. What could motivate Socrates to abandon his usual humility for such remarkable assuredness? Why would he see his interlocutors as candidates to celebrate and enhance his apparent political vision instead of partners for learning and discovery through questioning? This seems even harder to explain than Socrates' newfound desire to give and listen to speeches.

If Socrates can so confidently assign his interlocutors topics for their speeches and expect them to complement and celebrate his political vision, their attitude toward him may be more than merely receptive. His request for a follow-up speech suggests that he does not expect them to want to pose questions or challenge him about his claims from the previous day. The atmosphere between the interlocutors is one of unanimity, rather than friendly openness. Nowhere else in the Platonic corpus do we find characters in such close agreement with Socrates as we do in the *Timaeus*. Socrates is portrayed conversing with very receptive interlocutors elsewhere, such as Glaucon and Adeimantus in the *Republic* and Simmias and Cebes in the *Phaedo*, but they still demand clarifications and further arguments from him frequently even if they enjoy listening to what he has to say.

Perhaps this is to be expected if Socrates is indeed speaking with an unusually philosophical group. In dialogues like the *Republic* and the *Phaedo*, Socrates' interlocutors challenge and ask him questions because their grasp of the arguments is not on the same level as his, so we should not expect characters whose intellectual profile resembles Socrates' more closely to talk to him the same way. The unfamiliar atmosphere of unanimity that the first pages of the *Timaeus* project could therefore be read as support for the idea that this is a gathering of philosophers only. Yet Socrates' interlocutors in the

Republic and the *Phaedo* do not ask questions simply because they cannot follow Socrates. They also ask questions because he constantly provokes them to reflect on the arguments. That is to say, receptive interlocutors like Glaucon demand explanations from Socrates because of both their inability to follow him on certain points and his own efforts to inspire in them concern for the arguments.

Another possibility is that in the *Timaeus* Socrates avoids the more provocative approach he adopts in other dialogues because at least some his interlocutors are, regardless of their eagerness to hear what he has to say, unlikely to respond well to his questioning. In spite of Socrates' labeling them all as philosophers, some of them may be less interested in a genuinely philosophical perspective than his interlocutors in the *Republic* and the *Phaedo*.

We cannot decide this either way based on the evidence cited thus far. The feasting motif suggests cordiality and harmony between the participants rather than the kind of estrangement we might expect if they did not share the same perspective. Socrates' desire to hear a speech from his interlocutors is also difficult to explain if he has reservations about them. Yet all of this is so unusual that our suspicion is warranted—if not demanded—by the text. The exchange between Socrates and his interlocutors in the *Timaeus* raises pointed questions about the possibility of philosophical exploration in the absence of searching questions. In doing so, it invites us to think carefully about how the speeches and exchanges the dialogue contains may not only contribute to such exploration but also fall short of it in some respects. Rather than take everything the *Timaeus* presents us with at face value, we ought to interrogate it with an eye to how it reflects a peculiar rhetorical context and agenda.

In the next sections, I examine further evidence that the dialogue presents Socrates and Timaeus speaking in a context that places significant constraints on them. First, I consider Socrates' summary of his speech from the previous day (17c6-19b2), arguing that this noticeably selective outline of the *Republic* points to the specific concerns and limitations of at least one of Socrates' interlocutors. Socrates and Timaeus, I claim, face an audience that is far more interested in politics than they are in philosophy. Then, I examine how Critias exemplifies such an outlook and its shortcomings.

iii. Socrates' Summary

As any reader familiar with Plato's work will notice, the superlatively virtuous city that Socrates describes in *Timaeus* 17c6-19b2 closely resembles the utopia he and his companions construct in the first half of the *Republic*.[27] Indeed, the similarities are so strong that many readers, including some in antiquity, have interpreted Socrates' summary in the *Timaeus* as an indication that the speech with which he entertained his companions on the previous day must have been the report he gives in the *Republic*.[28]

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[27] Böckh (1807) 189-197 and Archer-Hind (1888) 56-60 catalogue the correspondences (and some divergences) in their commentary on the passages in question.

[28] The earliest instance of a reader making this inference is to be found in Proclus' *Commentary on the Timaeus* (I.8.30-9.13 Diehl). Modern commentators who assume that

That interpretation, however, becomes more difficult to maintain when we begin to reflect on all of the material from the *Republic* that is completely missing from Socrates' summary in the *Timaeus*.[29] The search for a definition of justice; the account of the soul's structure and the effects of justice and injustice on it; the idea that philosophers should rule and the discussion of their advanced education; and the explorations of corrupt regimes are all missing. Whereas Proclus, the earliest exponent of such a reading we know of, does not even remark on the selectiveness of Socrates' synopsis, modern scholars who agree with him on the dialogue's dramatic date have attempted a few explanations for it. Some (e.g., Archer-Hind) have focused especially on the absence of the discussions of the forms and the philosophers' education that occupy the middle books of the *Republic*, claiming that Plato does not refer to them in the *Timaeus* because they no longer reflect his views. But such an explanation is based on too crude an understanding of Plato's philosophical development and too naïve a hermeneutic to be satisfactory. Others (e.g., Taylor) have offered the more sensible argument that Socrates only summarizes the material that is directly connected to the follow-up speech he wishes to hear. The purpose of the summary is to bridge the political theory of the *Republic* and the narratives of the *Timaeus* and the *Critias*, and no discontinuity is implied if it includes only as much as it needs for that purpose.

It is plausible that the kind of follow-up speech Socrates demands in the *Timaeus* would not be an adequate sequel to the discussion of the *Republic* taken as a whole. Yet neither Socrates nor his interlocutors indicate that their recollection of the previous day's discussion is selective in any specific way. In fact, at 17b8-9 Timaeus explicitly asks Socrates to review what he said "from the beginning (ἐξ ἀρχῆς)," which suggests a comprehensive rather than a selective summary. At 19a1-b2, when at the end of the recapitulation Socrates asks Timaeus whether "we are still missing something that was said (τι τῶν ῥηθέντων) and is being omitted (ὡς ἀπολειπόμενον)," Timaeus claims that nothing has been omitted since "these were the very things that were said (αὐτὰ ταῦτ' ἦν τὰ λεχθέντα)." Given that Socrates' summary is bookended by statements about its completeness, it is far more natural to regard it as a representation of the preceding day's proceedings that is accurate and complete. The synopsis is not incomplete, but the account itself must have been, at least when compared to the full text of the *Republic*. The conversation of the *Timaeus* does not follow the *Republic* readers are familiar with, but a significantly truncated version of it.

Indeed, what institutions would make for the finest city is only one of several important topics that dialogue touches on. Within Socrates' conversation with Glaucon and the others, the exploration of political structure is subordinated to the investigation of the

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type of dramatic continuity between the *Republic* and the *Timaeus* include Archer-Hind (1888) and Taylor (1928), among others. See Ausland (2000) 196 n. 45 for a list of scholars in this camp.

[29] Another problem is that the *Republic* and the *Timaeus* seem to take place during festivals that are months apart in the Athenian calendar, as Cornford (1937) 4-5 points out. Though I am inclined to agree with Cornford on this matter, I think that the mismatch between Socrates' summary in the Timaeus and the content of the *Republic* is enough to establish that he is not recapitulating his report in that dialogue.

soul's internal order and how justice and injustice affect it.[30] This is not to say that in the *Republic* Socrates is uninterested in politics—the lengths to which he takes the discussion of the ideal city's institutions strongly suggests the opposite. But Socrates' introducing the construction of an exceptionally virtuous city as a resource for thinking about moral psychology—rather than a matter that should be explored for its own sake—indicates that in that dialogue he is not exclusively, and perhaps not even primarily, interested in political institutions. Socrates' exclusive focus on politics in the discussion that he summarizes in the *Timaeus*, as well as his request for a follow-up speech, is therefore surprising. For even if his selectiveness in that discussion helps to contextualize the narrative that will exhibit the martial prowess of his city, this suggests an interest in politics that is more focused but less enriched by other, more fundamental concerns than it is in the *Republic*. The backdrop of the *Republic* may encourage us to see the Socrates of the *Timaeus* as pursuing a more specific and circumscribed goal, but it also hints that he is somehow avoiding more fundamental philosophical questions.

(α) A Major Omission: Philosopher-Kings

Perhaps nothing suggests as strongly that in the *Timaeus* Socrates has taken a less daring path than in the *Republic* than his leaving philosopher-rulers out of his description of the ideal city. The omission is poignantly highlighted. Consider his remark when he touches on his proposals for the sharing of spouses and children at 18c6-8: "This is easy to remember, given the strangeness of what was said (τοῦτο μὲν διὰ τὴν ἀήθειαν τῶν λεχθέντων εὐμνημόνευτον)." This is the only point in his entire summary where Socrates mentions the unfamiliar nature of the ideal city's institutions, a major theme of *Republic* V. There, Socrates addresses the outlandishness of his proposals through the conceit of the three waves of paradox: these threaten to overwhelm the argument with ridicule, each being more daunting than the previous (V.457b7-d5, 472a1-7, 473c6-9). The elimination of private families corresponds to the second wave, as it comes after the arguments for equality in education and occupations for women and men but before those that advocate philosophical rule. By having Socrates single out the absence of private families among the guardians as an especially unusual, and thus memorable, proposal while saying nothing about philosopher-rulers, Plato makes it quite clear that Socrates did not present to his interlocutors in the *Timaeus* the most paradoxical of the *Republic*'s measures. Furthermore, since the institution flagged as unusual in the *Timaeus* summary is only the *second* most unusual of Socrates' proposals in the *Republic*, there is a suggestion that, relative to his approach in the *Republic*, in the *Timaeus* Socrates is not just being selective—he is actually holding back.

Here we must consider what leads Socrates to introduce the notion of philosopher-rulers in the *Republic* and some key points he makes while discussing the idea. First, we should bear in mind how strong a relation Socrates establishes between this final radical

[30] In particular, the analogy of the large and small letters suggests that the political inquiry is undertaken to understand the effects of justice and its opposite (II.368c4-369a10, cf. IV.434d2-435a3).

proposal and the ones that precede it: until philosophers assume political power, he claims, the constitution he has been discussing with his companions "will never arise to the extent that it can and see the light of the sun (μή ποτε … φυῇ τε εἰς τὸ δυνατὸν καὶ φῶς ἡλίου ἴδῃ)" (V.473c11-d2, cf. VII.540d1-541b1). Within the argument of *Republic* V, the idea that philosophers should rule is not just another odd proposal. It is the essential measure; without it, all the other measures would amount to little more than wishful thinking. Its outlandishness is both called for by and helps to justify Socrates' recommendations for the guardians' lifestyle and education, giving the argument coherence and unity it would lack otherwise. Socrates' omission of philosopher-rulers, then, must indicate more than mere selectiveness on his part—it suggests an avoidance of questions about the practicability of the ideal city and the wide gulf that separates the philosopher's perspective from that of most people.

The introduction of philosopher-rulers is not just meant to explain how the perfectly just city could come into being. As the most formidable wave of paradox, it raises further and deeper questions of its own about philosophers' relation to the realm of politics. Socrates' defense of this thesis spans more than two books, wherein he offers several arresting descriptions of what it means to live and think like a philosopher. Even if it emerges as a kind of digression, this portrait and defense of the philosopher is the heart of the *Republic.* Without it, that work would not be the provocative meditation on the transformative effect philosophy can have on individuals and cities that it is. Socrates' omission of any discussion of philosopher-rulers, then, indicates an avoidance of questions beyond what the ideal city must be like. His deepest thoughts on the best way of life available to us and the place of political service within it are also left out. As much as Socrates' summary in the *Timaeus* recalls the *Republic*, it also denotes a retreat of sorts from that dialogue's most provocative and fundamental insights.

(β) Why the Philosopher-Kings are Missing

Socrates' avoiding discussion of philosopher-kings tells us something about the audience he faces. Much of what Socrates says in his discourse on the philosopher in the middle books of the *Republic* may be more unsettling than obvious to some of his partners in the *Timaeus*. Recall that he collectively describes them as men who are both philosophical and political "by nature and upbringing" (19e8-20a1). By contrast, one of the major themes in Socrates' account of the philosopher's nature and education in the *Republic* is how deeply alienated he must be from the world of politics, especially in cities as they currently are. From one dialogue to the other, then, Socrates' thoughts about the relation between philosophy and politics appear inconsistent. Given how forcefully the *Timaeus* claims the *Republic* as its backdrop, it is unlikely that this is simply a matter of Plato's development. If we pay close attention to Socrates' claims in the *Republic*, we can see that they would be off-putting to those who think of themselves as both philosophers and politicians, and therefore inappropriate in the context of the *Timaeus*.

First of all, consider Socrates' articulation of the paradox of philosophical rule: cities will have a genuine reprieve from their troubles only when philosophy and political power are united "and the many natures of those who nowadays (νῦν) pursue these

separately (χωρὶς) are prevented by force from doing so (ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἀποκλεισθῶσιν)" (V.473c11-d6). Here Socrates marks the ideal of philosophical government as the complete opposite of the current state of things, where a career in politics seems to exclude a life of philosophy and vice-versa. Part of an explanation of why philosophers are not at home in politics emerges at VI.487c4-d5, when Adeimantus challenges Socrates' idea that philosophers would make the best statesmen by reference to how they appear to most people:

> ὅσοι ἂν ἐπὶ φιλοσοφίαν ὁρμήσαντες μὴ τοῦ πεπαιδεῦσθαι ἕνεκα ἀψάμενοι νέοι ὄντες ἀπαλλάττωνται, ἀλλὰ μακρότερον ἐνδιατρίψωσιν, τοὺς μὲν πλείστους καὶ πάνυ ἀλλοκότους γιγνομένους, ἵνα μὴ παμπονήρους εἴπωμεν, τοὺς δ' ἐπιεικεστάτους δοκοῦντας ὅμως τοῦτό γε ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐπιτηδεύματος οὗ σὺ ἐπαινεῖς πάσχοντας, ἀχρήστους ταῖς πόλεσι γιγνομένους.
>
> Everyone who pursues philosophy—not those who dabble in it while they are young as part of their education and eventually abandon it, but the ones who spend a long time in it—most of them become misfits, not to say utterly vicious, and even the ones who seem most reasonable, under the pressure of the study you commend, become useless to their cities.

Socrates' response acknowledges and elaborates on the general public's hostility toward philosophers, even as it endeavors to illustrate how misguided it is (VI.487d6-489c10). Socrates broaches the resentment philosophers face again at several points in the subsequent arguments (VI.493e2-494a10, 496c5-d5, VII.516e8-517a6, 517d4-e2), sometimes even alluding to his own trial and death. Socrates appears to speak primarily about Athens here, but his comments are broad enough to suggest that virtually all cities are hostile to philosophers. For Socrates' interlocutors in the *Timaeus* to have somehow managed to overcome such an obstacle and make themselves useful to their cities seems miraculous, if not dubious, in light of this background.

The public's hostility is only one facet of philosophers' estrangement from politics in the *Republic*. Philosophers also shun political engagement because they have a dour view of its effect on one's character. According to Socrates, the goals and values that prevail in the world of politics are essentially antithetical to those by which philosophers live: when people endowed with a philosophic nature enter politics, they are corrupted by the mob mentality that prevails in that realm and end up superlatively vicious characters instead of upright philosophers (VI.492a1-495b6). Involvement in politics demands internalizing the values of the many, which is necessarily incompatible with the pursuit of wisdom. A genuine philosopher, Socrates elaborates, can recognize "the madness of the majority (τῶν πολλῶν …τὴν μανίαν)" and see that "nobody (οὐδεὶς) does anything sound (ὑγιὲς), as it were, in the administration of public affairs," consequently avoiding government to stay unsullied by lawlessness and injustice (VI.496c6-e2). He emphasizes that this is a universal problem when he claims: "not a single constitution from among those current (μηδεμίαν τῶν νῦν) is worthy (ἀξίαν) of the philosopher's nature" (VI.497b1-2). Indeed, even in the ideal city philosophers will not gladly labor in politics, because they regard ruling "not as something that is fine (καλόν τι), but as compulsory

(ἀναγκαῖον)" (VII.540b2-5, cf. 520e2-3). The background of the *Republic*, then, both raises questions about how Socrates' interlocutors could have managed to become involved in politics and makes it difficult to imagine their motivations for doing so.

The incompatibility of the philosophical and political lives is a major theme in Socrates' discussion in the *Republic*, and it is difficult to square with his suggestion in the *Timaeus* that his interlocutors have significant experience in both. As I have already remarked, it is unlikely that this merely reflects a change in Plato's political philosophy. Socrates offers his interlocutors in the *Timaeus* a radical and challenging image of the ideal city that in most respects resembles that of the *Republic*. What Socrates avoids is focused commentary on the education and perspective that define the philosopher. The reason for this is that Socrates' interlocutors in the *Timaeus* seem to consider themselves philosophical, though their primary interest is politics—this is, after all, what they want to hear him talk about. They may be philosophers according to a broader, less precise conception of philosophy than the one Socrates develops in the *Republic*. Without espousing a restrictive definition of what it means to be a philosopher, Socrates can appear more sanguine about political engagement. More importantly, though, a direct discussion of what makes one a philosopher may be too contentious a topic for a group of men who deem themselves philosophical without necessarily agreeing about what that means. The Socrates we find in the *Timaeus* does not disagree with the Socrates from the *Republic*: he simply faces a different audience.

We should recognize, however, that Socrates' interlocutors in the *Timaeus* are quite different from one another. Timaeus in particular seems to be a philosopher very much after the model offered in the *Republic*, since his speech includes manifestly Platonic metaphysics and reveals how well versed he is in the mathematical studies appropriate for a genuine philosopher. That Socrates regards him as a true and accomplished philosopher is apparent in his emphatic praise of his achievements. Timaeus not only "is from Locri, a city in Italy governed by excellent laws (εὐνομωτάτης)" and "has occupied the most important offices and positions of honor (τὰς μεγίστας … ἀρχάς τε καὶ τιμὰς) in the city," but he has also, in Socrates' opinion, "attained the summit in all of philosophy (φιλοσοφίας … ἐπ᾽ ἄκρον ἁπάσης ἐλήλυθεν)" (20a1-5). Socrates does not say anything that suggests that we should regard Timaeus with suspicion; in fact, he vouches for his philosophical credentials. Timaeus' political service is still striking in light of the *Republic*'s depiction of politics as completely inhospitable to philosophers, but Locri's excellent constitution may be far more agreeable to a philosopher than most, thus allowing Timaeus to be an exception to the rule. There are good reasons, then, to regard Timaeus as a philosopher not in only a vague sense, but according to a conception that is basically the same as the one Socrates promotes in the *Republic*. Socrates refers to him as a philosopher most likely because he truly regards him as one.

Timaeus, though, is not the only character Socrates addresses in the dialogue, and it is noteworthy that Socrates talks to him and about him in a distinctive manner. At the very opening of the conversation, Socrates addresses only Timaeus directly, reviewing the previous day's discussion specifically with him. It is not clear why, but Socrates may somehow be closer to Timaeus than he is to Hermocrates or Critias, even if Timaeus is only a visitor in Athens. Furthermore, whereas Socrates commends Timaeus' achievements unambiguously, what he says about Critias and Hermocrates is vague. When

it comes to their achievements, Socrates does not sound as confident as he does in Timaeus' case. Of Critias, he says only that "all of us in this city must know that he is not unpracticed in the subjects we speak of (που πάντες οἱ τῇδε ἴσμεν οὐδενὸς ἰδιώτην ὄντα ὧν λέγομεν);" of Hermocrates, he says that the many people who bear witness that "his nature and education are suitable for all these matters (πρὸς ἅπαντα ταῦτ᾽ εἶναι ἱκανὴν)" must be trusted (20a6-b1). Even if it would be somewhat perverse to doubt Timaeus' intellectual achievements, the way Socrates describes his two other interlocutors fits nicely with the idea that they are philosophical only in a broad sense.

We may doubt, then, that Critias and Hermocrates are full-fledged Platonic philosophers. They are the ones whose interest is in politics rather than the whole of philosophy. Hermocrates, of course, does not say anything of substance in the dialogue's frame (though his presence in the dialogue is, as I argue later, significant). Critias, on the other hand, dominates the dialogue after Socrates' request for a follow-up speech and before Timaeus' monologue (20d7-27b6), which allows us to examine his character and concerns. Not only does he have precisely the kind of narrative Socrates wishes to hear, but he is also eager to present it to the group as his contribution to the feast of speeches. Critias is perfectly content to keep the exchange's focus on utopian politics; this, it seems, is what he truly enjoys hearing and talking about. Socrates' selective discussion from the previous day may be taken to reflect and to an extent be adapted to Critias' specific interests. What motivates Socrates to take such an approach is unclear, but the way Critias introduces his account suggests that advancing a distinctly philosophical vision is not what he is enthusiastic about. His interest in political discussion is not properly philosophical, and the narrative he is eager to present is one he has a particular personal attachment to, which he values for reasons that do not qualify as theoretical. In the following sections, I explore Critias' understanding of his story and its significance to illuminate the specific type of perspective he represents. I argue that his is a markedly unphilosophical viewpoint, and that what first appears as an interest in politics on his part is ultimately an inability to transcend the constraints his native city and sense of civic identity impose on his thinking.

iv. Critias

Who is Critias? As soon as he is named, we wonder whether he is the same Critias who was Plato's uncle and a leading member of the ruthless Thirty Tyrants. Indeed, a number of scholars identify Critias in the *Timaeus* with the tyrant.[31] Yet many have also resisted this identification, mainly on the grounds that it poses significant problems of chronology: to put it in the simplest terms, the Critias of the *Timaeus* sounds too much like

[31] Again, Proclus is the earliest representative of this view whose work has been preserved (I.70.20-71.15 Diehl). Modern proponents include: Rosenmeyer (1949); Vidal-Naquet (1964); Gill (1977) 295; Clay (1997); Dušanić (2000) and Johansen (2004) 33 n. 19, 196. It should be noted that even though these scholars agree about Critias' identity they do not necessarily agree about its significance.

an old man to be plausibly identified with the eventual tyrant.[32] I am inclined to think that Plato leaves Critias' exact identity indeterminate on purpose, that Critias stands for, as Sarah Broadie puts it, "a fusion of several generations of historical Critiases, or … an intergenerational abstraction, a sort of *daimôn* of the house."[33] The Critias of the *Timaeus* both recalls and resists identification with the Critias of the Thirty; he invites our suspicion but does not allow us to easily peg him as a villain. To grasp what he ultimately represents, we have to pay close attention to what he says. Critias' words, I argue, suggest a personality that is naïve and enthralled by civic and familial traditions (rather than the emulousness and arrogance the tyrant Critias displays in the *Charmides*).

(α) Critias' Notion of Truth

Consider, first, how Critias introduces his story: it is "an account that is very unusual, but absolutely true (λόγου μάλα μὲν ἀτόπου, παντάπασί γε μὴν ἀληθοῦς)" (20d7-8). The key terms here are λόγος and ἀληθής. In the subsequent pages Critias insistently remarks on his narrative's status as a λόγος rather than a μῦθος on account of its historical veracity. Scholars have found in Critias' emphasis on the literal truthfulness of his narrative an indication that he does not quite understand Socrates' request, which makes no reference to truth.[34] This strikes me as a reasonable interpretation, but I would add that this mistake is very informative about Critias' character. To begin with, Critias' conception of truth, which presupposes that only what exists in time and space is real, is at odds with Socrates' and Timaeus' metaphysical commitments. More importantly, though, Critias' insistence on the historical truth of his account, rich as it is in content that is better suited for myth and poetry than historiography, highlights his uncritical and naïve stance. Regardless of his meticulous attention to the story's transmission, a nod to historical research and method, Critias is a man under the spell of the myths of his childhood, which portray Athens as a god-beloved and extraordinary city.

What is Critias' conception of truth, and how is it not properly philosophical from a Platonic perspective? To understand this, we must focus on the distinction he draws between λόγος and μῦθος, as well as how his notion of what kind of knowledge he thinks is most worth having shapes that distinction. Consider, first, Critias' narrative of Solon's trip to Egypt. When Solon reached Saïs, he says, he wanted to learn from the city's priests about "antiquities (τὰ παλαιὰ)," so he began talking to them "about the most ancient of our traditions (τῶν τῇδε τὰ ἀρχαιότατα)" (21e7-22a6). Critias refers to Solon's narration of the ancient accounts as "myth-telling (μυθολογεῖν)" accompanied by "genealogical reconstruction (γενεαλογεῖν)" and an attempt "to reckon the time (τοὺς

[32] Burnet (1914) 338 n. 1 seems to be the earliest proponent of this view. Those who follow him include: Taylor (1928) 23; Cornford (1937) 1-2; Welliver (1977) 50-57 and Lampert and Planeaux (1998) 95-100. For a balanced discussion, see Brisson (1998) 27-29.
[33] Broadie (2012) 153.
[34] E.g. Gill (1977) 289-291; Osborne (1996) 185; Reydams-Schils (2001) 43-48; Johansen (2004) 27-29, 45-46; Broadie (2012) 161-163.

χρόνους ἀριθμεῖν)" that has elapsed since the events portrayed in the myths (22b1-3). Solon's enthusiasm for antiquities has a certain charm and is commendable as a display of intellectual curiosity. But the intellectual work he engages in seems shallow by comparison with philosophical inquiry, which is aimed at determining how we should live rather than the identity of our most remote ancestors and how long ago they lived.[35] Solon, the man responsible for importing Critias' story from Egypt to Greece, comes off as somewhat naïve, a fairly uncritical enthusiast of historical reconstruction.

Of course, Solon is only one character in Critias' account of the story's transmission. We should not readily assume that his perspective and Critias' are the same. Perhaps Critias has a more sophisticated outlook. Indeed, he reports the criticism of Solon's historical knowledge voiced by one of the Egyptian priests, who were responsible for the preservation of Critias' account in the first place. The priest's criticism, however, raises questions of its own. According to the priest, Greeks have childlike souls "because in them you do not have a single ancient belief drawn from a long-standing tradition (δι' ἀρχαίαν ἀκοὴν παλαιὰν δόξαν) or any knowledge that has become hoary with age (μάθημα χρόνῳ πολιὸν)" (22b4-8). Egyptians, by contrast, possess knowledge of the most ancient events:

> ὅσα δὲ ἢ παρ' ὑμῖν ἢ τῇδε ἢ καὶ κατ' ἄλλον τόπον ὧν ἀκοῇ ἴσμεν, εἴ πού τι καλὸν ἢ μέγα γέγονεν ἢ καί τινα διαφορὰν ἄλλην ἔχον, πάντα γεγραμμένα ἐκ παλαιοῦ τῇδ' ἐστὶν ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς καὶ σεσωσμένα.
>
> All of the events we know of by report—whether they have occurred among you, here or elsewhere—anything noble or of significance or distinguished in some other way that has happened, are all recorded in writing in our temples and preserved from ancient times. (23a1-5)

The priests are no less guilty than Solon is of fetishizing antiquity, and the longevity of their traditions makes them even more zealous in their devotion to it. Whereas Solon's childlike eagerness to learn bears some resemblance to philosophical wonder, the Egyptians' proud confidence in their knowledge is the opposite of that.[36] Critias' belief in the historical veracity of the ancient story he intends to retell suggests that he accepts and shares the Egyptians' confidence in their traditions, and that he shares their and Solon's enthusiasm for the antique.

The priest's ideas about myths and their significance are also troubling. According to him, Solon's genealogies "hardly differ from children's myths (παίδων βραχύ τι διαφέρει μύθων)," given that they are based on a very incomplete grasp of past events (23b1-6). The priest's understanding of myths as both a means of representing what one does not have direct knowledge of and a narrative form that is especially suited for

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[35] Cf. *Theaetetus* 174e5-175b4.

[36] Critias' Egyptians are exactly what in the *Phaedrus*' myth Thamus fears they will become after the invention of writing: they appear and fancy themselves wise without actually being so (275a6-b). For a far more positive (but, in my view, mistaken) appraisal of Solon and the Egyptians, see Capra (2010) 208-209.

children overlaps with some of Plato's thinking on the matter. But there is a deeply unPlatonic strain to the priest's position as well. The priest (like Solon, though he is more sanguine) seems to assess the value of myths based on how well they represent what happened long ago. The educational, soul-forming power of myth is not something he seems particularly interested in or even aware of. This is especially clear in the priest's exegesis of the myth of Phaethon, who scorched the earth's surface when he attempted to drive Helios' chariot: "This is told in the form of a myth (μύθου … σχῆμα ἔχον λέγεται), but the truth (τὸ δὲ ἀληθές) is that there is a deviation of the celestial bodies that move around the earth and as a consequence of that destruction by great fires on the earth recurring in long intervals of time (διὰ μακρῶν χρόνων γιγνομένη τῶν ἐπὶ γῆς πυρὶ πολλῷ φθορά)" (22c6-d3). For the priest, the way to get at the truth behind a myth is to identify what events it may depict, replacing mythic accounts of those events with scientific ones. Whatever truth he finds in the myth is strictly factual, as if the purpose of this type of story were simply to convey information about past events. Since scientific inquiry and ancient records are more reliable sources than myths, it is easy for the priest to dismiss the latter as fit for the childlike and unknowing.

From a Platonic perspective, myths do not reveal the truth of particular events, but rather illuminate in various ways humans' position in the cosmos. This is apparent in Plato's use of myth throughout his works, but it emerges with special force in Socrates' criticism in the *Phaedrus* of intellectuals who, like Critias' Egyptians, offer scientific explanations of myths. He has no time for such interpretations of myths, he says, because he is far more interested in learning about himself, "whether I am a beast more complex and furious than Typhon or a simpler and more peaceful animal sharing naturally in a divine and humble lot" (229e1-230a6). Socrates dismisses approaching myth as a source of information about historical events because truth about particular facts is neither what myths should convey nor what he finds most valuable. As his reference to the monstrous Typhon here and his mythic palinode later in the dialogue show, myths are true insofar as they can illuminate who we are and what our place in the world is. For Socrates, we should not approach myths with the clinical detachment of the demythologizers: the best way to interpret myths is by taking them to be above all about ourselves.[37] With their antiquarian focus on particular events and persons, Critias and his sources seem completely indifferent to myth's power to illuminate our condition.

This may seem like too harsh an assessment of the type of knowledge Critias and his Egyptian priests value so highly. Though the wisdom they hold dear is different from the wisdom a Platonic philosopher pursues, must we regard the two as incompatible? My point is not that a philosopher in the Platonic mold should be indifferent to historical inquiry and knowledge of particular events, and I take it that the study of history can indeed be incorporated into philosophical learning. Critias' story in particular depicts a series of supposedly historical occurrences *and* supports the general notion that orderliness and restraint are advantageous while greed and ambition are ruinous. This general point is, of course, perfectly at home in Platonic ethics. Nevertheless, in Critias' (and his sources') eyes, that is not where the story's truth lies. Just as the truth of Phaethon's story amounts to

[37] For my understanding of Socrates' position in the *Phaedrus* I am indebted to the analyses in Griswold (1986) 36-44; Ferrari (1987) 10-12; Werner (2012) 30-43.

what it tells us about a meteorological event, rather than a lesson about the consequences of ignoring our limitations, likewise the truth that the priest and Critias identify in the Atlantis tale is mere factual accuracy. While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with valuing factual accuracy, Critias and the priest seem unaware of a different, deeper standard of truth, and that is what sets them apart from the Platonic philosophical standpoint. Critias is, as far as we can tell, incapable of conceiving of any truth or reality beyond the empirical. He thinks that the accuracy of our thought and words depends on their corresponding to particular beings or events, rather than the transcendent principles underlying these. This does not reflect the idea of truth we would expect of a Platonic philosopher.[38]

Critias' insistence on his story's veracity makes him seem naïve more than anything else, not unlike the childlike Solon he tells his companions about. His description of the effect the narrative had on him when he first heard it and continues to have on him now is especially telling: "I heard it then with much pleasure and amusement (μετὰ πολλῆς ἡδονῆς καὶ παιδιᾶς), and the old man told me about it eagerly, since I asked him again and again, so that the story has remained within me like the burnt-in designs of an indelible painting (ὥστε οἷον ἐγκαύματα ἀνεκπλύτου γραφῆς ἔμμονά μοι γέγονεν)" (26b7-c3). Critias is not attached to the story because he finds in it any deep philosophical significance or lesson. Rather, the reason why Critias has retained the story so well for so long lies in the pleasure he felt when he first heard it. As a child, Critias would not have been capable of grasping the story's deeper meaning,[39] so it was not a rational motivation that led him to memorize it. The simile he uses to describe how the story has stayed in his mind throughout his life underscores that his memory is a passive medium that has been etched on, which suggests the very opposite of a dynamic and evolving understanding of what the story is about. Even listening to Socrates seems not to have provoked Critias or revealed anything new to him; it has simply transported him back to his childhood and motivated him to retrieve as precisely as possible the story he heard then.

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[38] Cf. Reydams-Schils (2001) and (2011); Miller (2003) 21; Broadie (2012) 163. According to Johansen (2004) 35-45, Critias makes up the story for the occasion and does not actually believe in its truth. Though Critias does appear to admit that he is improvising at *Critias* 107d9-e1, in the *Timaeus* he comes off as absolutely committed to his story's factual accuracy. I agree with Broadie (2012) 148 that Critias comes off as far more thoughtful in the *Critias* than he does in the *Timaeus* and find her suggestion the two dialogues present different facets of the same character plausible. It is also possible, as Reydams-Schils (2001) 45-46 points out, that Plato has Critias assume different poses in the two dialogues and his claims to be improvising in the *Critias* are a pretense motivated by his rivalry with Timaeus. Ultimately, only the side of Critias that actually appears in the *Timaeus* should affect our reading of the dialogue, and the *Critias*' incompleteness makes it difficult to grasp the meaning of the whole sequence and the *Timaeus*' place within it.

[39] Cf. *Republic* II.378d7-e1.

(β) Critias, Historiography and Myth

Critias' naiveté makes it difficult to see him as a genuine philosopher, but the dialogue also provides us with some evidence suggesting that he has genuine intellectual concerns. Though he is not a distinctly philosophical voice within the *Timaeus*, Critias could be a representative of the historian's point of view, as Broadie suggests.[40] There is, of course, the emphasis on historical veracity I have already discussed, but that is not the only way in which Critias echoes distinctly historiographic concerns and standards. To begin with, his talk of "the city's ancient deeds (παλαιὰ ἔργα) that have vanished owing to the passing of time and the destruction of men (ὑπὸ χρόνου καὶ φθορᾶς ἀνθρώπων ἠφανισμένα)" (20e5-6, cf. 21d5-7, 22b6-c3) clearly reflects worries about the accessibility of events that took place in a remote past and without a reliable historical record.[41] The Egyptians, by contrast, have written records of ancient events (23a1-5, 24a1, d7, e1, 27b4), and they are the ultimate source of his account. This portrayal of Egypt as a store of invaluable information about the remote past clearly recalls Herodotus' treatment of that civilization and his interrogations of the priests at Memphis and the wise men of Thebes and Heliopolis—though we should note that, unlike Solon and Critias, Herodotus takes care to present himself as more than an uncritical reporter of the Egyptian traditions.[42] We may even hear echoes of Thucydides' dedication to precise reporting when Critias mentions Solon's desire to learn the details of the account "with accuracy (δι' ἀκριβείας)" and the Egyptians' promise to satisfy it (23d1-4, 23e6-24a2).[43] At several points and in many ways, then, Critias sounds just like a historian.

That resemblance, however, does not indicate that Critias thinks like a historian or represents historical writing in the style of Herodotus or Thucydides. For although Critias' talk of written records and accurate reporting suggests the methods of historical research, the credulousness with which he accepts the historical verity of his account belies his apparent interest in source criticism. By his own account, Critias is convinced of the story's veracity because it made a powerful impression on him as a child—not because he has thought carefully about its sources and transmission. It is quite unlikely that as a boy of ten he was able to ask his grandfather kinds of questions a genuine historian would pose to his sources, even if he was eager to imbibe every single detail of the account. The kind of trust that Critias places on a cherished story from his nonage implies the very opposite of

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[40] Broadie (2012) 120-121, 148, 150-153. It is worth pointing out that Broadie bases her positive appraisal of Critias on how he appears in the dialogue named after him, which she regards as quite different from how he comes off in the *Timaeus*.

[41] Cf. Herodotus, *Histories* I.5.3-4; Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* I.21.

[42] For Herodotus' treatment of Egypt, the entire second book of his *Histories* is of course relevant, but II.3-4, 51-59 and 99-143 are especially significant for the portrait of Egypt as a source of Greek culture and historical information.

[43] For Thucydides' influential valorization of ἀκρίβεια, see his *History of the Peloponnesian War* I.22.1. For a succinct discussion of the intellectual context, significance and influence of this passage, see Marincola (1997) 63-86; see also Crane (1996) 34-74 for a discussion of the contrast between Thucydides' ἀκρίβεια and Herodotean and Hippocratic claims of precision and accuracy.

the critical approach to evidence characteristic of the Greek historians. His remarks on the story's pleasantness stand in especially sharp contrast with Thucydides' denigration of accounts that are delightful to hear as opposed to those that are austere but useful (I.22.4), but it is difficult to imagine even Herodotus as capable of such unexamined confidence in any traditional story.[44] Critias' way of presenting his story is so different from how historians present their material that it is quite farfetched that Plato could have envisioned his Critias as a representative of their enterprise.

The content of Critias' story is also in key respects quite unlike what we find in Herodotus or Thucydides. Most strikingly, traditional Olympian deities have a much more considerable role in Critias' story than they do even in Herodotus, who shows unusual interest in myth and theological speculation for a historian. First, Critias has no problem reporting that the founder (ἀρχηγός) of Saïs and the first Athens was Athena (21e4-6). The Egyptian priest elaborates on this when he explains the similarities between the social arrangements still observable in Saïs and those of the earlier Athens. Aside from a brief remark giving the goddess credit for the cities' mastery of the art of war (24b4-7), the priest makes a bolder, more sweeping claim:

> ταύτην οὖν δὴ τότε σύμπασαν τὴν διακόσμησιν καὶ σύνταξιν ἡ θεὸς προτέρους ὑμᾶς διακοσμήσασα κατῴκισεν, ἐκλεξαμένη τὸν τόπον ἐν ᾧ γεγένησθε, τὴν εὐκρασίαν τῶν ὡρῶν ἐν αὐτῷ κατιδοῦσα, ὅτι φρονιμωτάτους ἄνδρας οἴσοι· ἅτε οὖν φιλοπόλεμός τε καὶ φιλόσοφος ἡ θεὸς οὖσα τὸν προσφερεστάτους αὑτῇ μέλλοντα οἴσειν τόπον ἄνδρας, τοῦτον ἐκλεξαμένη πρῶτον κατῴκισεν.
>
> This whole social order and structure the goddess established for you first when she founded your city, after she chose the spot where you were born with special attention to the temperate climates there, which would bring forth men of outstanding wisdom. Yes, being herself a lover of wisdom and a lover of war, the goddess chose the place that would yield men most like herself, and founded a city there first. (24c4-d3)

According to the priest, Athena did far more than found ancient Athens: she was also essentially the Athenians' mother and educator. He even refers to the earlier Athenians explicitly as the goddess' "offspring and pupils (γεννήματα καὶ παιδεύματα)" (24d5-6).

What is most remarkable here is that Critias and the priest essentially treat Athena as the one fundamental cause for the original Athens' extraordinary success. From social structures to climate, every condition that enabled the ancient Athenians to become supremely virtuous was either chosen or devised by Athena herself. Even if the priest says that the Athenians improved on Athena's laws and thus contributed to the conditions of their success, he downplays their effort and merit by adding that this is "just as one would expect (καθάπερ εἰκὸς)" from men so closely related to the gods (24d3-6). Athena planned with the utmost care for the Athenians to become virtuous, so we can fairly say they were

[44] Corcella (2006) offers a useful overview of how skepticism and the concern for the proper method for reconstructing the past are defining features of historiography as a genre.

destined to prove extraordinary. Focusing as much as he does on Athena's actions and decisions, the priest encourages viewing the Athenians' outstanding deeds more as effects of her providential care than the product of their own, freely chosen desire to excel. With Athena playing such a crucial role, Critias' story clearly emphasizes divine agency in history.[45] Even if the story about Athens' defeat of Atlantis is about human action, the men it depicts enjoy a proximity to the gods both in their character and as their nurslings that makes them seem superhuman in comparison with later generations. Critias' narrative describes events from a stage of human history that seems quite different and distant from the one he and his interlocutors inhabit.[46]

By contrast, Herodotus and Thucydides focus on recognizably human characters and actions, either excluding or pushing to the background divine or heroic interventions. In Thucydides' work, of course, the gods are notably absent and exert no influence on human affairs.[47] Furthermore, in his so-called Archaeology (I.1-23) he dismantles the notion of a bygone age of heroes, arguing that Greece's original inhabitants were comparatively weak and poor.[48] Herodotus shows greater interest in myth and theological speculation than Thucydides, but he too emphasizes human responsibility and avoids discussing the actions of the gods or their supposed offspring.[49] Given how significant a role Critias lets the gods play in his account, he does not appear to share the historians' interest in exploring how distinctly human choices and motivations determine historical events. Although it focuses on the defeat of a great empire just as the works of Herodotus and Thucydides do, Critias' story does not offer the analytic perspective on the growth and downfall of civilizations that we find in their histories.[50] On numerous counts, then, Critias

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[45] The gods remain very much at the fore in the *Critias* narrative of how Athens and Atlantis came into being. Even Atlantis' downfall is explained by reference to the (inevitable) dilution of their divine pedigree and Zeus' decision to punish the resulting lack of order (121a7-c5).

[46] It is worth pointing out, as I discuss below, that Critias nevertheless insists on identifying the ancient city with the current Athens and regarding its citizens as real Athenians (20e4-5, 21d4-7, 23b6-c2, cf. 26c7-d5, 27a2-b6). Cf. Ferrari (1995) 396-397, who contrasts Critias' idolatry of the past with the *Statesman*'s placement of the golden age in an altogether different cosmic cycle.

[47] This is not to say that Thucydides has no interest in religion as a social phenomenon, but simply that his explanations never involve divine causes. Furley (2006) offers a thorough discussion.

[48] See esp. I.3 and I.11. Crane (1998) 125-134 offers a lucid analysis of Thucydides' claims and their intellectual context.

[49] On stories about the gods, see esp. II.3.2. I am persuaded by the discussions of the gods and divine causes in Lateiner (1989) 64-67, 189-210. On the gods' children and the distant, heroic past, see esp. I.5.3, III.122.2 and VI.53.2. As Baragwanath (2012) shows, Herodotus is not only aware of the epistemic inaccessibility of the remote past, he also illustrates the ways in which the historical actors he is concerned with shape and use stories about the heroic past to suit their particular needs.

[50] Even if Herodotus and Thucydides do not offer the same diagnosis of imperialism, both their texts evince a clear interest in accounting for the growth and decay of societies as a

is too dissimilar from intellectuals like Herodotus and Thucydides to serve as their representative.

Insofar as Olympian, anthropomorphic gods and their children are at the center of the drama of Athens and Atlantis, Critias' story is much closer to the Homeric epics than it is to historiography.[51] It is exactly what Critias refuses to call it: a myth. Critias' careful recounting of how the story has been preserved and transmitted does not make its content any less fantastic and implausible. Though his language occasionally recalls that of rigorous historical research, he shows none of the historians' interest in reconstructing past events on the basis of what is probable. If anything, Critias' nods in the direction of historiography make it all the more noticeable that he can be so credulous and take so seriously what Herodotus and Thucydides would regard as a fanciful tale.

Rather than representing a historian's perspective, Critias stands for a certain susceptibility to myth, notwithstanding his ostensibly negative stance toward some stories. Even if he seems completely unaware of it, Critias is someone for whom myths are very important and who takes very seriously how gods like Athena and Poseidon are portrayed in the stories of his childhood. For Critias, what makes the story so appropriate for the occasion is not necessarily its veracity, but the fact that it celebrates Athena: by recounting it, he can indulge Socrates "and at the same time praise the goddess justly and truly, as if by signing a hymn, on her festival (καὶ τὴν θεὸν ἅμα ἐν τῇ πανηγύρει δικαίως τε καὶ ἀληθῶς οἷόνπερ ὑμνοῦντας ἐγκωμιάζειν)" (21a1-3). If Critias makes Athena responsible for the conditions that enabled the ancient Athenians to attain the peak of virtue, that is not simply meant to reveal that he is too reliant on myth to be a proper historian. Rather, it is part and parcel of the piety that motivates him to repay Socrates with a speech that will honor their city's patron goddess.

Although Critias' reliance on hallowed traditions and his conviction in the verity of patently mythic material appears naïve, to regard him as merely uncritical is too one-sided and negative. In a more positive vein, we can appreciate his attachment to tradition and myth as a feature of his piety. This is not to deny that Critias is in important respects too credulous. The point, rather, is that his credulity is not mere stupidity, as it is intimately connected to how Critias conceives of the gods and his obligations to them. Though Critias is undeniably invested in myths because they are the stories that gave him great pleasure and captivated his imagination when he was a child, the reasons for their enduring significance in his life go beyond that: these stories also shape his religious outlook, his ideas of what goods the gods bestow upon us as well as how we should honor and express our gratitude to them.

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general phenomenon. Lateiner (1989) 211-227 provides a useful overview of Herodotus' analytic concerns, including a comparison with Thucydides' project.

[51] Cf. Gill (1979) 75. Capra (2010) takes the *Timaeus* and the *Critias* as Plato's attempt to rewrite both Homeric and Hesiodic epic on a massive, ambitious scale, but he is not as interested in Critias' appropriation of historiographic language and ideas.

(γ) Critias' Athenian Piety

How, then, does Critias think about the gods, especially Athena, and why does that matter? As discussed above, Athena plays a major role in Critias' Egyptian tale as the founder and benefactress of both ancient Athens and Saïs. These cities owe Athena their existence as well as their excellent laws, their military prowess and their love of wisdom. Insofar as he focuses on a deity's beneficence and providential care for humans, Critias' outlook seems completely in harmony with Platonic thinking about the gods. Yet his focus on Athena's beneficence should be taken to reflect conventional Athenian piety rather than a philosophically grounded conviction in the goodness of the gods. Athena, of course, played a prominent role in Athenian civic mythology as the city's benefactress and protectress. To begin with, Athena was the foster-mother of the mythical common ancestor of all Athenians, Erichthonius, who had been born from the Attic soil itself.[52] Athena was therefore seen as a maternal figure for the whole of Athens, a deity with an ongoing commitment to the city's safety and wellbeing. This view of her is attested in Athenian literature from the archaic and classical periods. There are, first of all, the following verses by none other than Solon:

> ἡμετέρη δὲ πόλις κατὰ μὲν Διὸς οὔποτ' ὀλεῖται
> αἶσαν καὶ μακάρων θεῶν φρένας ἀθανάτων·
> τοίη γὰρ μεγάθυμος ἐπίσκοπος ὀβριμοπάτρη
> Παλλὰς Ἀθηναίη χεῖρας ὕπερθεν ἔχει·
>
> "Our city will never be destroyed according to Zeus'
> dispensation or the designs of the blessed immortals;
> for such a great-hearted guardian, born of a powerful father,
> Pallas Athena, keeps her hands over it …" (fr. 4 West 1-4).

A choral passage from Aeschylus' *Eumenides* also describes the Athenians as under the constant protection of Athena:

> χαίρετ', ἀστικὸς λεώς,
> ἵκταρ ἥμενοι Διὸς
> παρθένου φίλας φίλοι,
> σωφρονοῦντες ἐν χρόνωι·
> Παλλάδος δ' ὑπὸ πτεροῖς
> ὄντας ἅζεται πατήρ·
>
> "Farewell, people of the city!
> You sit beside Zeus'
> virgin daughter, loving and being loved by her,
> keeping a sound mind through time;

[52] For a succinct yet thorough overview of the ancient sources on Erichthonius, his central role in Athenian autochthony myths, and the frequent but erroneous identification of him with Erectheus, see Shear (2001) 55-60.

and as you stay beneath Pallas' wings
her father respects you …" (997-1002)

The image of Athena these poets advanced also featured prominently in Athenian temples built after the Persian Wars, when confidence in the goddess' favor seems to have been at its peak.[53] Critias' Athena, then, is very much in line with traditional and contemporary Athenian views of the goddess.

To be sure, Critias' story is Plato's invention, not a genuine Athenian civic myth. Additionally, very few people are familiar with the story in the dialogue's fictional world. Nevertheless, Critias' account echoes real Athenian mythology quite clearly even when it diverges from it. For example, by harping on Athena's role as the founder of the original Athens, Critias' story clearly diverges from real Athenian lore. But it does so in a way that fully conforms with widespread notions of the goddess as a kind of parent figure to the city. Critias' identifying the whole of the original Athens, instead of a first Athenian king like Cecrops or Erichthonius, as autochthonous is also distinctive. Yet here again we find agreement amongst the differences: as with Erichthonius, Athena "nurtured (ἔθρεψεν)" the first Athenians (23d7). Furthermore, when Critias' Egyptian priest says that Athena founded Athens "after she received your seed from Earth and Hephaestus (ἐκ Γῆς τε καὶ Ἡφαίστου τὸ σπέρμα παραλαβοῦσα ὑμῶν)" (23e1-2), he is clearly alluding to the myth of Erichthonius' birth from Hephaestus and the Earth after the former's failed attempt to rape Athena. Although Critias' story is more than a mere rehashing of Athenian myths, then, it is nevertheless very much a variation on themes from these myths. Even if Critias' story diverges from Athens' mythic repertoire in several regards, it still displays a fundamentally traditional perspective on Athens' origins and relation to Athena.

It may be objected that Critias' Athena is far more philosophical than she is in Athenian myth, since in his story she founds an Athens that matches Socrates' ideal polity and is described as "a lover of war and a lover of wisdom (φιλοπόλεμός τε καὶ φιλόσοφος)" (24c7-d1), just like Socrates' guardians.[54] Critias' view of the goddess appears to harmonize Socrates' philosophical outlook with Athenian traditions: ostensibly, her role in Critias' story lends Socrates' political vision greater authority than it would otherwise have, so that we could see Critias as modifying Athenian mythology in the service of a philosophical ideal. It is not quite accurate, however, to see Critias' portrayal of Athena as simply augmenting the authority of Socrates' discourse. If Critias is genuinely committed to the truth of his account, he cannot see Socrates' discussion as simply a philosophical investigation. For Critias, the superiority of the constitution Socrates described was already established because Athena bestowed it upon the original Athenians millennia ago. When Critias speaks of Athena as the original source of the constitution Socrates outlined, the implication is that he—along with anyone who finds his story convincing—should regard Socrates' words as a sacred text of sorts, a faithful representation of the gift the goddess herself gave Athens long ago. The perspective

[53] Herington (1963) tracks the role of Athena in Athenian literature and cult during the archaic and classical periods.

[54] Johansen (2004) 38-39 claims that Plato appropriates the figure of Athena to represent his own philosophical ideals here, but that strikes me as an overstatement.

toward Socrates' ideal polity Critias promotes through his story is not merely supportive, but rather one of unquestioning acceptance. Regardless, then, of how Critias' Athena suggests that he is quite friendly to philosophy, it also raises some doubts about how reflective he is and, more generally, about the possibility of putting conventional Athenian piety in the service of philosophy.[55]

Despite all that sets Critias' story apart from real Athenian myths and traditions, it still adheres to conventional Athenian ideas about Athena and her relationship with Athens. The particular myth Critias is entranced with may differ from the mythology common to the rest of Athens, but the impact on his outlook is the same: no less than any other Athenian, he is confident that his city shares a unique bond with the goddess. This is evidenced not only in the content of his story, but also, of course, in his eagerness to join his fellow Athenians in celebrating Athena during her festival. The unfolding festival must be more important to Critias than it is to any of his interlocutors, as he is the first one to mention it. He feels a much stronger obligation to honor Athena than any of them, including Socrates. Unwilling to let the plan of the feast of speeches interfere with his intention to celebrate the goddess, he brings the ostensibly philosophical banquet in line with the civic festivities: as he sees them, both Socrates' and Timaeus' accounts function as preludes to his own encomium (26c7-d5, 27a2-b6). Critias' commitment to taking part in the city festival is notable, and it underlines how seriously he takes his identity as an Athenian and Athens' relation to Athena. He does nothing to set himself apart from his fellow Athenians and their communal worship of Athena. What we first identified as Critias' interest in politics is ultimately a desire to glorify his native city.

(δ) The Festival and Its Significance

Unfortunately, the *Timaeus* does not make the precise identity of the festival clear, and there is scholarly disagreement about which festival the dialogue refers to. Proclus again offers the earliest commentary we have on this issue. Thinking that Socrates' interlocutors in the *Timaeus* are his (unnamed) audience in the *Republic*, which takes place on the day after the Bendideia, he proposes that the festival in question must be the lesser Panathenaia, "since it was celebrated around the same time (περὶ τὸν αὐτὸν χρόνον) as the Bendideia" (I.83.25-27 Diehl, cf. I.26-10-20, 85.26-30). This, however, cannot be right: the Bendideia took place on Thargelion 19 and the Panathenaia, both the Lesser (yearly) and the Greater (every four years), on Hecatombaion 28—over two months apart

[55] Cf. Broadie (2012) 160: "[G]iven what Critias independently knows about the divine foundation of the original Athens, he is in a position to be aware that entering into the Socratic reasoning would be a way of seeing something of Athena's mind. But either he is aware of this but not interested, or he is not aware of it. And if the latter, this can only be because he is not on the lookout for such insights; but that, again, is the mark of a mind for which they hold no interest."

from each other.[56] As it is highly improbable that Plato was confused about the Athenian festival calendar, the dramatic date of the *Timaeus* must be placed either immediately after the *Republic* or during a Panathenaic celebration, but not both.

Scholars who agree with Proclus about the relative dates of the *Timaeus* and the *Republic* think the problem can be resolved by identifying the *Timaeus* festival with a different celebration, the Plynteria, which Proclus confused with the Panathenaia.[57] This is not, however, an entirely satisfactory solution. First, the Plynteria would have taken place soon after the Bendideia, but not soon enough: the festivals were six, not two, days apart.[58] More importantly, it is probably mistaken to place the *Timaeus* immediately after the *Republic*, given how narrow in focus Socrates' summary in the *Timaeus* appears when we compare it to the broad-ranging discussion of the *Republic*. While it is possible that Proclus confused the Plynteria and the Panathenaia, his identification of the latter festival as the background for the *Timaeus* may be well taken.

Indeed, if we are not committed to the idea that the *Timaeus* should be assigned a dramatic date immediately after that of the *Republic*, it is perfectly acceptable that its date coincides with a Panathenaic celebration. And the more we consider the character of the Panathenaia, the likelier it seems that this is the festival in question. Proclus' likening Critias' story to the Panathenaic *peplos* is particularly illuminating:

> ἄλλος οὖν οὗτος πέπλος ὑπ᾽ αὐτοῦ πόλεμον ἔχων, ἐν ᾧ νικῶσιν οἱ τρόφιμοι τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς, ἀνάγεται τῇ θεῷ, ὥσπερ ἐκεῖνος ὁ τῶν Παναθηναίων πέπλος ἔχει τοὺς Γίγαντας νικωμένους ὑπὸ τῶν Ὀλυμπίων θεῶν, καὶ ὕμνος ἀποδίδοται τῇ θεῷ δίκαιος καὶ ἀληθής·
>
> This, then, another *peplos* that features a war, in which Athena's nurslings emerge victorious, is being dedicated to the goddess, just like the *peplos* from the Panathenaia features the Giants being defeated by the Olympian gods, and it is offered to the goddess as a just and true hymn. (I.85.12-16)

There is, of course, no mention of Athena's *peplos* within the *Timaeus*. Regardless of that, the parallel Proclus identifies can shed light on the nature of the Panathenaia as well as what makes Critias' story an appropriate offering. First of all, the scenes embroidered on the *peplos* that the Athenians dedicated to Athena every Greater Panathenaia illustrate the festival's primary mythic *aition*: supposedly, the Panathenaia was first celebrated by Erichthonius to commemorate Athena's victorious role in the Olympians' battle against the

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[56] Cornford (1937) 5 points this out. Modern scholarly reconstructions of the Athenian festival calendar, such as Mommsen (1898), Mikalson (1975) and Parke (1977), support Cornford's judgment.

[57] E.g. Taylor (1928) 45; Festugière (1966) 121 n. 2 and Hadot (1983) 116-117.

[58] For a judicious discussion of ancient evidence for dating these festivals, see Mommsen (1898) 488-99.

Giants.[59] To celebrate Athena's feats in the Gigantomachy was to affirm her role as a defender of the cosmic order and a punisher of hubristic violence. It was important for the Athenians to honor Athena's achievement not only because of their special, quasi-familial connection with her, but also because of the paradigmatic value of her conduct. Consider the following lines from Aristophanes' *Knights*:

> εὐλογῆσαι βουλόμεσθα τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν, ὅτι
> ἄνδρες ἦσαν τῆσδε τῆς γῆς ἄξιοι καὶ τοῦ πέπλου,
> οἵτινες πεζαῖς μάχαισιν ἔν τε ναυφάρκτῳ στρατῷ
> πανταχοῦ νικῶντες ἀεὶ τήνδ' ἐκόσμησαν πόλιν·
>
> We wish to praise our ancestors, since
> they were men worthy of this land and the *peplos*,
> who in battles on foot and in naval expeditions
> always and everywhere emerged victorious and honored our city. (565-68)

Being 'worthy of the *peplos*' is clearly a civic ideal here. Furthermore, the reference to military feats makes it clear that those who lived up to that ideal were men whose conduct in war was analogous to Athena's in the Gigantomachy. In their defense of Athens and Greece against foreign invaders, especially the Persians, the Athenians could see a reenactment of the Olympians' vanquishing of the chaotic Giants. According to David Castriota, moralizing representations of the Gigantomachy were widespread in fifth-century Athens because they were an especially effective means of signaling "that the Olympians had always supported and inspired the Athenians in their righteous struggles against arrogant lawlessness and disorder."[60] As a narrative of how the Athenians defeated the greedy and hubristic Atlantids, Critias' story fits this general pattern perfectly: even in the very remote past the Athenians were behaving like the gods' surrogates in the human realm, acting in a manner worthy of Athena herself. Though it celebrates an Athenian victory, it serves as a hymn to Athena herself because this human victory should be understood as an imitation of her own achievement.

The Panathenaia, then, leads us back to the deep influence myth has on Critias. Like his fellow Athenians, Critias takes myth as his framework for making sense of both his city's origins and its role in the world. In addition to being Athena's descendants, the Athenians are her surrogates in the human realm, following her example and counting on her support. Like Athena, the Athenians are naturally brave and warlike. Their martial feats have similar cosmic implications as her defeat of the Giants: chaos and violence must yield to lawful order. Critias' pious reverence toward Athena is thus inextricably bound to his adoration of his city and ancestors. This is why he finds it appropriate to exalt her by celebrating them. Although Critias' entrancement with the stories of his childhood marks him as uncritical, it also underpins his love of Athens and his confidence that it is a city

[59] The festival was not, as many modern scholars tend to affirm, a celebration of Athena's birthday. See Vian (1952) 246-259; Shear (2001) 31-42; Parker (2005) 255, 268; Sourvinou-Inwood (2011) 271-280.
[60] Castriota (1992) 142.

favored by as powerful a goddess as Athena. This kind of attachment to one's native city is not a vice in any straightforward sense—we could even say that no political community could dispense with it. Critias' earnest patriotism is not to be dismissed, or even recognized as an unambiguous flaw. Though he lacks the intellectual acuity we might expect from a philosopher, Critias' heart may be in the right place after all.

But Critias is not just in love with his native city, he also idealizes it. He is enthused with a fantastic Athens, rather than Athens as it really is. His viewpoint is more closely aligned with Athenian ideology than philosophical critique, in spite of the correspondences between his ideal Athens and Socrates' utopia. As I argue in the next section, Critias' encomium to the original Athens features unmistakable echoes of contemporary Athenian panegyric oratory, casting the city as extraordinarily virtuous in much the same terms. Although Critias locates his version of Athens in a remote past, he demonstrates a confidence in Athens' superiority, moral and martial, typical of not only the Periclean era but also the early fourth century. The presence in the dialogue of Hermocrates, who led the defeat of Athens' most ambitious attempt at expansion during the Peloponnesian War, serves to remind readers of the contradiction between Athens' idealized self-conception as a liberator and the realities of its imperialist ventures. Hermocrates reminds us of the darker side of the idealization Athenians like Critias displayed; he helps us recognize Critias' form of patriotism as a significant intellectual blind spot.

v. Athenian Ideal and Reality

(α) The Significance of Critias' Idealized Athens

Critias clearly extols an ideal Athens rather than the real one. It is less clear, however, why he chooses to extol an Athens so different from the one he lives in. Nicole Loraux, for example, sees Critias' encomium as a philosophical subversion of the fairly self-congratulatory patriotism evidenced in panegyric and other genres of political speech, especially the funeral oration. According to her, through Critias Plato eulogizes his ideal polity from the *Republic* in order to illuminate "the gap that separates deserved from erroneous praise, even when they are strangely similar."[61] Kathryn Morgan takes a similar approach, arguing that Critias' story features panegyric commonplaces so prominently because it is to serve as a charter myth for helping Athens reform itself in the image of Plato's ideal.[62] In this interpretation, Critias' praise of Athens is part of Plato's rhetorical strategy for making a wider Athenian public more amenable to his politics.

These interpretations are unsatisfactory for several reasons. First, both assume that Critias speaks from a genuinely philosophical perspective and advances Plato's political agenda. As I have already argued, though, there are good reasons to resist identifying Critias as a philosophical voice within the dialogue.

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[61] Loraux (2006) 376-377. Cf. Rowe (1999) 272-277; Johansen (2004) 38-39.
[62] Morgan (1998).

More significantly, Critias' Athens' finest moment, the single-handed defeat of Atlantis, is virtually identical to one of the real Athens' most celebrated achievements, the repulse of Darius' invading army at Marathon in 490 BCE. As Sarah Broadie points out, if the one achievement that is singled out to demonstrate the superiority of a city organized like Socrates' ideal is recognizably copied from Athens' known historical record, that actually makes it *more* difficult to establish that model's superiority to Athenian democracy.[63] Critias even describes his Athens' magnificent deed in terms that closely echo panegyric accounts of Marathon. Consider, for example, the following claims Isocrates makes in the *Panegyricus*: generally speaking, throughout their history the Athenians have endured many great and terrible trials, "some on behalf of their own land and some for the freedom of others (τοὺς μὲν ὑπὲρ τῆς αὑτῶν χώρας, τοὺς δ' ὑπὲρ τῆς τῶν ἄλλων ἐλευθερίας)" (52); at Marathon in particular, instead of waiting for other Greeks "they made the shared war their own and faced those who despised the whole of Greece with only their own force (τὸν κοινὸν πόλεμον ἴδιον ποιησάμενοι πρὸς τοὺς ἁπάσης τῆς Ἑλλάδος καταφρονήσαντας ἀπήντων τὴν οἰκείαν δύναμιν ἔχοντες)" (86).[64] Critias' Athens likewise fought Atlantis "at times as a leader of the Greeks, but at other times, when the others deserted it, by necessity on its own (τὰ μὲν τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἡγουμένη, τὰ δ' αὐτὴ μονωθεῖσα ἐξ ἀνάγκης τῶν ἄλλων ἀποστάντων)" (25b7-c2). Emerging victorious, "it prevented those who had not yet been subjugated from being enslaved (διεκώλυσεν δουλωθῆναι) and generously set everyone else free (τοὺς δ' ἄλλους … ἀφθόνως ἅπαντας ἠλευθέρωσεν)" (25c4-6). Clearly, the terms with which Plato has Critias frame his Athens' outstanding achievement highlight the similarities between that victory and the real Athens' stand at Marathon, making it difficult to tell why we should regard the earlier Athens as superior.

Since panegyrics celebrating Athens' successes in the Persian Wars were a staple of the Panathenaic festival, the context in which Critias delivers his eulogy to the ancient Athenians would also make the parallels clear. As Proclus states, it is notable that Critias does not mention the Persians at all while praising Athens, "even though many were certainly accustomed to talk incessantly in their Panathenaic speeches about the Persian army and the Athenians' victories by land and sea (πολλῶν γοῦν εἰωθότων ἐν τοῖς Παναθηναϊκοῖς λόγοις ἄνω καὶ κάτω τὸν Περσικὸν στόλον θρυλεῖν καὶ τὰς Ἀθηναίων νίκας κατά τε γῆν καὶ κατὰ θάλατταν)" (I.172.1-5). This difference aside, for Proclus Critias' encomium and ordinary panegyrics follow a very similar scheme, revealing the same truth and complementing one another in glorifying Athens:

> ἐπεὶ δὲ ὁ Περσικὸς στόλος ἀπὸ τῆς ἀνατολῆς ἐπὶ τοὺς Ἕλληνας ὡρμήθη καὶ διαφερόντως Ἀθηναίους, αὐτὸς ἀπὸ τῆς δύσεως εἰσήγαγε τὸν Ἀτλαντικὸν

[63] Broadie (2012) 142-144. I take it that this claim is not dependent on Broadie's argument that the *Timaeus* needs to be read as taking place in an alternate reality where the battle of Marathon never happened (129-140), which I do not find persuasive.

[64] This vision of Athens as unique in its willingness to take risks on behalf of the rest of Greece is typical of funeral oratory as well, and Critias could be taken to be echoing this genre as well. Walters (1980) offers a penetrating discussion of this feature of funeral orations and its significance.

> πόλεμον, ἵν᾽ ὥσπερ ἐκ κέντρου τὴν Ἀθηναίων πόλιν θεωρήσῃς τὸ ἐφ᾽ ἑκάτερα βαρβαρικὸν ἀτάκτως κινούμενον σωφρονίζουσαν.
>
> Since the Persian expedition set out to attack the Greeks, and especially the Athenians, from the east, he introduced the war with Atlantis from the west, so that you may see the Athenians' city chastening as if from the center the barbarians advancing in a disorderly fashion on either side. (I.172.10-14)

Even though Proclus is inclined to see Critias' story as a philosophical improvement on conventional panegyrics, he also acknowledges that these accounts of Athenian victory over the Persians convey essentially the same message as their philosophical counterpart. For him, the Atlantis story and traditional accounts of Athens' repulses of Persian forces complement one another. Taken together, they offer a compelling vision of the Athenians as the protectors of order in the human realm.

Comparing Critias' story with the conventional accounts it resembles is necessary to grasp the story's full meaning, and it also shows that these accounts have their own philosophical value. Though Proclus offers too charitable an appreciation of Athenian panegyric, it is noteworthy that he ultimately emphasizes the parallels between their representation of Athens and Critias' and does not identify any substantive differences.

It is unlikely, then, that Critias' story is somehow supposed to compete with the panegyrics it closely echoes. Even if the Athens Critias wishes to praise belongs to the remote past and is quite unlike the Athens he lives in, his purpose is not to detract from the contemporary Athens' glory by comparing it with its fantastic former self.[65] In fact, an important reason why Critias is so enthusiastic about his story is precisely that it is about Athens, his own city.[66] Before saying anything about how the city he intends to speak of resembles Socrates' ideal polity, he announces that his speech will describe the marvelous ancient feats "of this very city (τῆσδ᾽ … τῆς πόλεως)" (20e4-5, cf. 21d4-7). Regardless of the time elapsed and the differences between the earlier and the current Athens, Critias' repeated use of the vivid demonstrative ἥδε suggests that the latter can still regard the former's deeds as its own. And the original and the contemporary Athens share more than just their geographic location. The Egyptian priest tells Solon:

> τὸ κάλλιστον καὶ ἄριστον γένος ἐπ᾽ ἀνθρώπους ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ παρ᾽ ὑμῖν οὐκ ἴστε γεγονός, ἐξ ὧν σύ τε καὶ πᾶσα ἡ πόλις ἔστιν τὰ νῦν ὑμῶν, περιλειφθέντος ποτὲ σπέρματος βραχέος …
>
> You do not know that the finest and noblest among human races lived in your land, and from them you and your entire city now are descended, since a few of their offspring survived. (23b6-c2)

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[65] *Critias* 110e4-111d8 may be adduced as evidence that Critias does think that Athens is now but a shadow of its former self. Note, however, that Critias' comments there are restricted to the quality of the soil and that he is confident that even the Athens' current land is outstanding in its ability to feed humans and beasts.

[66] Cf. Broadie (2012) 163-164.

The implication is that, regardless of how much Athens has changed, all current Athenians are entitled to regard those who defeated Atlantis as their ancestors. They can feel pride in being the victors' descendants. Furthermore, as he introduces his story, Critias never contrasts the greatness of the ancient Athens with the state of current Athens. Though he certainly dwells on the similarities between the earlier Athens and Socrates' model city, Critias' focus is on celebrating his city's valor rather than lamenting the transformations it has undergone. Critias, then, both emphasizes the persistence of Athens' identity through millennia and forgoes directly contrasting its ancient and current incarnations. In light of this, it is implausible that what motivates him to recount the story is the conviction that Athens should strive to become more like Socrates' ideal polity. Rather, Critias seems most interested in honoring Athens for what it once was, regardless of its current character and circumstances.

If Critias intends to praise a remotely ancient Athens, it is not because his purpose and outlook are all that different from conventional panegyrists'. Even if more traditional encomia of Athens do not necessarily reach as far back into the past as Critias does, they too show a preference for dwelling on Athens' glorious past. Rather than acting as a critique against this common way of idealizing Athens, Critias and his story represent an exaggerated version of it. In spite of his story's strangeness, the vision of Athens that Critias presents ultimately magnifies a fairly widespread tendency to celebrate the city as extraordinarily virtuous through a selective retelling of its history. No less than any ordinary panegyric, this story would easily satisfy a popular audience's desire to hear their city and its achievements praised, and it would be just as effective in confirming their perception of Athens as uniquely altruistic and brave. Rather than challenge the stories Athenians liked to hear about their own virtue, it would complement them.

(β) Hermocrates as a Warning

Does Plato give any indication that there are significant problems in this tendency to idealize Athens and its past? The presence of Hermocrates of Syracuse, who should remind readers of Athens' catastrophic Sicilian expedition of 415-413 BCE, clearly points us in this direction. In Thucydides' *History*, Hermocrates not only successfully leads Sicily in resisting Athens' attempt to conquer the island, but he also comes off as an especially acute critic of Athens' imperial designs and misleading rhetoric. Consider the cynical, albeit accurate, assessment he offers of the growth of Athens' power after the Persian Wars:

> ἡγεμόνες γὰρ γενόμενοι ἑκόντων τῶν τε Ἰώνων καὶ ὅσοι ἀπὸ σφῶν ἦσαν ξύμμαχοι ὡς ἐπὶ τοῦ Μήδου τιμωρίᾳ, τοὺς μὲν λιποστρατίαν, τοὺς δὲ ἐπ᾽ ἀλλήλους στρατεύειν, τοῖς δ᾽ ὡς ἑκάστοις τινὰ εἶχον αἰτίαν εὐπρεπῆ ἐπενεγκόντες κατεστρέψαντο. καὶ οὐ περὶ τῆς ἐλευθερίας ἄρα οὔτε οὗτοι τῶν Ἑλλήνων οὔθ᾽ οἱ Ἕλληνες τῆς ἑαυτῶν τῷ Μήδῳ ἀντέστησαν, περὶ δὲ οἱ μὲν σφίσιν ἀλλὰ μὴ ἐκείνῳ καταδουλώσεως, οἱ δ᾽ ἐπὶ δεσπότου μεταβολῇ οὐκ ἀξυνετωτέρου, κακοξυνετωτέρου δέ.

> Yes, when [the Athenians] became leaders with the consent of the Ionians and all the allies who were their colonists with the purpose of punishing the Mede, they made all of them their subjects, accusing some of desertion, others of fighting against each other, and still others of whatever specious charge they could level in each case. And it was neither for the sake of the Greeks' liberty that these men fought the Mede, nor did the Greeks fight for their own freedom; the Athenians did it to enslave the Greeks to themselves instead of him, and the Greeks to change their master for one wiser, but wiser for worse. (VI.76.3-4)

As Hermocrates sees it, after the Persian Wars Athens' self-presentation as the liberator of Greece was a pretext for advancing its own imperial designs. In reality, Athens was the very opposite of what it pretended to be, resembling the Persians—and, in Critias' story, Atlantis—more than its former self. Although Hermocrates offers no such analysis in the *Timaeus*, which presumably takes place several years *before* the Sicilian expedition, the dialogue's earliest readers would have been familiar with his role in thwarting that campaign.

Hermocrates does not need to say anything of substance in the *Timaeus* to serve as a reminder of one of Athens' most reckless and catastrophic military undertakings. His mere presence points to concrete Athenian moral and strategic failure, marking how fantastic and unreal Critias' vision of Athens is. As a reminder of how readily our infatuation with our ancestors' achievements can help justify wrongdoing—or at least distract us from recognizing wrongdoing for what it is—Hermocrates' presence allows readers of the *Timaeus* to see a certain tragic irony in Critias' ideal Athens. With the help of historical developments Critias himself could not be aware of, Plato's readers would be able to recognize the pitfalls of his proclivity for dwelling on an ideal past.

(γ) Critias as a Type

Critias is not just a non-philosophical character. He articulates an outlook that, while apparently benign in some respects, ultimately nurses potentially catastrophic delusions. His perspective therefore calls for philosophical challenge and reorientation, even if he is not a straightforwardly morally dubious character. Whatever may be wrong with Critias, he does not come off as an out-and-out imperialist, and I doubt that the *Timaeus* is designed as an intervention in Athenian foreign policy specifically.[67] Rather, Critias' problem is that in his devotion to Athens and his confidence in its exceptional status he seems either unwilling or unable to attend to his city's current condition and policies. Though it may seem perverse to fault Critias for his patriotism, we must recognize that Critias' attachment to his native city leaves him without the resources to distance himself from the fictions Athens tells about itself and examine their political uses and effects. This is a form of powerlessness, a fundamentally passive way of belonging to the city. It is not unique to Critias, of course, and that is why he is a significant character:

[67] It is possible, nevertheless, that the work subtly echoes (without actually entering) mid-fourth-century debates about Athenian imperialism, as Morgan (1998) 114-118 argues.

in his comfortable embeddedness in his native city and its institutions, Critias exemplifies what from the Platonic perspective is a widespread, universal problem. Through Critias we can see that the civic myths and rites that establish concord in a city by molding citizens' souls can render them all too docile and trusting. His intellectual shortcomings ultimately reflect the tendency and power of civic mythologies and institutions to confine citizens to a blinkered, complacent view of their city. What people like Critias need is to recognize this confinement for what it is. They need an opportunity to examine their city from the outside. The risks of going without such a challenge are great, as Hermocrates' presence reminds us.

If Critias represents a perspective that calls for a philosophical challenge, however, why does Socrates fail to engage him directly? For one thing, an outright challenge or refutation likely would not have a salutary effect on someone like Critias, given how deeply seated his attachment to his city and its myths is. A direct challenge would also be out of place in the congenial atmosphere of the feast of speeches. More importantly, Socrates may not be in the best position to formulate the kind of challenge Critias needs to hear: in his own way, he too is quite attached to Athens and takes his identity as an Athenian seriously.[68] Socrates does nevertheless offer Critias a subtler provocation by responding with ironic enthusiasm for his story. Since his turn in the feast of speeches has already passed, there is not much that he can do. If anyone is to challenge Critias, it must be Timaeus, and Socrates' irony may well be an invitation for him to do precisely that. In the next section, which concludes this chapter, I examine Socrates' response to Critias and reflect on why Timaeus is in an ideal position to orient Critias toward a more philosophical perspective. Some aspects of his cosmology, I argue, may be especially provocative for someone in Critias' position. My project in the next two chapters is to discuss these features of Timaeus' cosmology in depth.

vi. Responding to Critias

Nothing would better confirm my claim that the opening pages of the *Timaeus* present Critias as someone whose perspective calls for philosophical challenge than Socrates or Timaeus somehow formulating such a challenge. Neither of them, alas, does this in an evident or unambiguous manner; if anything, Critias' interlocutors seem to welcome his story with warm enthusiasm. When we take a close look at the precise wording of Socrates' response, however, we can detect some irony in his endorsement of

[68] An especially forceful expression of this can be found in *Apology* 29c6-31c3. As Schofield (2006) 26 points out, Plato's portrayal of Socrates in both the *Apology* and the *Crito* suggests "Socrates never questioned his own identity as a citizen of Athens, and never conceived that that identity could be challenged or compromised by his philosophical activity…. If he cannot continue philosophizing as a citizen of Athens, he cannot continue philosophizing."

the story and see that he may not be as satisfied with it as he pretends to be.[69] This is how Socrates reacts when Critias asks whether the story is to his liking:

> Καὶ τίν᾽ ἄν, ὦ Κριτία, μᾶλλον ἀντὶ τούτου μεταλάβοιμεν, ὃς τῇ τε παρούσῃ τῆς θεοῦ θυσίᾳ διὰ τὴν οἰκειότητ᾽ ἂν πρέποι μάλιστα, τό τε μὴ πλασθέντα μῦθον ἀλλ᾽ ἀληθινὸν λόγον εἶναι πάμμεγά που. πῶς γὰρ καὶ πόθεν ἄλλους ἀνευρήσομεν ἀφέμενοι τούτων; οὐκ ἔστιν, ἀλλ᾽ ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ χρὴ λέγειν μὲν ὑμᾶς, ἐμὲ δὲ ἀντὶ τῶν χθὲς λόγων νῦν ἡσυχίαν ἄγοντα ἀντακούειν.
>
> Well, Critias, what account could we take up instead of this one? It would be quite appropriate for the festival of the goddess unfolding now on account of its connection with her, and its being not a fabricated myth but a true account is all-important, I suppose. How, then, and where will we find other speeches if we give these up? There is no way, but you should all speak in good fortune and I, in return for yesterday's discussion, should keep quiet and listen. (26e2-27a1)

Taken by itself, this sounds like a ringing endorsement, but once we reflect on Socrates' words in the context of his earlier request and Critias' description of the story their irony becomes apparent. Consider, specifically, Socrates' emphasis here on both the story's appropriateness for honoring Athena and its historical veracity: although in his request for a follow-up speech Socrates makes no mention of the festival or historical truth, Critias takes very seriously his account's historicity and its connection to Athena when he introduces it. When Socrates expresses his approval of the story, he does so in terms that are Critias' rather than his own. Instead of remarking on how Critias' narrative will satisfy his desire to see his ideal city in motion, Socrates simply repeats the criteria by which Critias judges the story to be worth telling. His enthusiasm here is not sincere: it mirrors Critias' eagerness back to him with a bit of exaggeration. In spite of appearances, Socrates and Critias do not see eye-to-eye about the kind of story the present situation calls for.

Not surprisingly, Critias gives no indication of noticing the irony in Socrates' endorsement. This is just as well: the feast can go on without disturbance and Socrates can stay within his assigned role as auditor. Socrates knows that it is his turn to fall silent and therefore he cannot discuss the suitableness of Critias' story with him, so he calls attention to Critias' odd framing of his story in a subtle, indirect manner that is unlikely to register with him. This is not to say, however, that Socrates ironizes here only for himself. Although Socrates does not yet know that Timaeus will be the next to speak, he is probably the one Socrates hopes will hear his gentle sarcasm. Timaeus is a consummate philosopher, so he should be as capable as Socrates of orienting Critias toward a more critical and genuinely philosophical perspective on his native city. Confident in Timaeus' ability to hear his irony and respond to Critias in a suitable manner at some point in the feast, Socrates can stand back and keep quiet without worrying that Critias' Athenocentric worldview will go unchallenged. Socrates may even be eager to see how Timaeus responds to Critias in his speech. His preference for question-and-answer exchanges aside, Socrates may be able to learn much by listening to Timaeus as he navigates the complex rhetorical

[69] Other scholars have found irony in Socrates' response to Critias' story, including: Reydams-Schils (2001) 47; Johansen (2004) 45-46; and Broadie (2012) 161-163.

situation of the feast. At least part of what motivates Socrates to participate in this unusual exchange must be that he gets to watch a philosopher who is—especially in his dedication to astronomy and the scientific study of nature—very different from him at work.

Does Timaeus hear Socrates? Does his speech include any material that will challenge Critias' perspective on Athens and the world? Timaeus does hear Socrates, I think, and his speech is in many respects ideal for orienting someone like Critias toward a more philosophical understanding of the world, the gods, and humans. Of course, his aims in presenting his cosmology extend beyond offering Critias suitable intellectual provocation: the monumentality and comprehensiveness of Timaeus' account enable it to transcend the particular context in which he presents it.

All the same, we should not ignore how appropriate Timaeus' cosmology is for turning the likes of Critias toward a philosophical perspective. To begin with, in its form Timaeus' cosmology is, as I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, a myth. Generally speaking, myth is the most effective form of discourse for communicating philosophical insight to a wide, non-specialist audience. Within the particular context of the *Timaeus*, Critias is childlike and susceptible to the charms of myth, so we can imagine that the cosmology will dazzle and move him.

The content of Timaeus' speech obviously matters greatly as well. As I discuss in the next chapter, Timaeus frames the greater part of his account of how the cosmos came into existence specifically as a theology, discussing various gods' natures and their contributions to cosmic order. The deities he focuses on are not traditional Olympians like Critias' Athena, but a fairly unconventional set that includes the famous Demiurge and the cosmos itself. Timaeus' gods embody various philosophical and ethical ideals, so that his discussions of their characters and activities seems especially well suited to turn someone like Critias toward a more sophisticated conception of divinity. Perhaps most importantly, Timaeus presents his audience with gods whose relations to human beings should challenge the traditional views of divine solicitude and favoritism exemplified in Critias' views of Athena and her relation to the Athenians.

Chapter 2: Tradition, Innovation and Divine Care in the *Timaeus* and *Laws* Theologies

In this chapter, I discuss the gods of Timaeus' cosmology and compare Timaeus' theology with the Athenian Visitor's in the *Laws*, especially book X. First, I examine what Timaeus says in his cosmology about traditional gods such as Athena and Poseidon. Then, I compare his stance toward the traditional pantheon with the Athenian's and discuss how their different approaches reflect their differing rhetorical and political agendas. Following this comparison, I offer detailed examination of Timaeus' novel deities: the Demiurge, the cosmos, and their subordinates, considering each of their natures, activities, and relations to human beings of each of them. Timaeus' gods, I argue, reflect distinctly philosophical values and a vision that can serve as a powerful counter to Critias' parochialism. After my discussion of Timaeus' gods, I turn to the Athenian's theology. Even though the Athenian portrays the gods in a similar way as Timaeus does, particularly with respect to their nature and activities, his conception of their relation to humans is notably different from Timaeus', especially with regard to how the gods supervise human affairs. I argue that the reason for these differences also lies in the two characters' confronting very different audiences and pursuing different goals with their cosmologies.

i. The Philosophers and the Traditional Pantheon

(α) Timaeus and the Traditional Pantheon

Throughout most of his cosmology Timaeus speaks of gods who do not belong to the traditional pantheon. The two most important gods he discusses, the Demiurge and the cosmos itself, are quite unlike the gods of poetry or cult.[70] They are noticeably different from Critias' Athena. It is not clear, however, what Timaeus makes of the conventional pantheon and what relationship, if any, he sees between his gods and traditional deities. Generally speaking, Timaeus' focus on a set of gods that is different from those featured in Critias' story need not imply a substantive disagreement between them: since they tell different types of stories, their focus on different gods may be just a matter of genre. Gods like Athena and Hephaestus are appropriate characters in an epic-style narrative about a heroic past, but the Demiurge and the astral gods would be out of place in such an account. Likewise, Athena would not have anything to do prior to or during the physical world's creation. It is possible, then, that Timaeus holds the traditional gods in the same esteem as Critias does and his account is not really meant to challenge ordinary conceptions of divinity.

We can get a better sense of whether this is the case by examining Timaeus' explicit comments about the traditional gods and how he explains their marginal position in his cosmology. Aside from brief remarks on the Muses as the source of harmony at

[70] Lefka (2013) 80-90, 434-441 interprets the *Timaeus* as suggesting that the cosmos itself should be identified with Ouranos, but no other scholar identifies the cosmos with a traditional deity.

47d2-7, all of Timaeus' commentary on the conventional pantheon is contained in the following passage:

> περὶ δὲ τῶν ἄλλων δαιμόνων εἰπεῖν καὶ γνῶναι τὴν γένεσιν μεῖζον ἢ καθ' ἡμᾶς, πειστέον δὲ τοῖς εἰρηκόσιν ἔμπροσθεν, ἐκγόνοις μὲν θεῶν οὖσιν, ὡς ἔφασαν, σαφῶς δέ που τούς γε αὑτῶν προγόνους εἰδόσιν· ἀδύνατον οὖν θεῶν παισὶν ἀπιστεῖν, καίπερ ἄνευ τε εἰκότων καὶ ἀναγκαίων ἀποδείξεων λέγουσιν, ἀλλ' ὡς οἰκεῖα φασκόντων ἀπαγγέλλειν ἑπομένους τῷ νόμῳ πιστευτέον. οὕτως οὖν κατ' ἐκείνους ἡμῖν ἡ γένεσις περὶ τούτων τῶν θεῶν ἐχέτω καὶ λεγέσθω. Γῆς τε καὶ Οὐρανοῦ παῖδες Ὠκεανός τε καὶ Τηθὺς ἐγενέσθην, τούτων δὲ Φόρκυς Κρόνος τε καὶ Ῥέα καὶ ὅσοι μετὰ τούτων, ἐκ δὲ Κρόνου καὶ Ῥέας Ζεὺς Ἥρα τε καὶ πάντες ὅσους ἴσμεν ἀδελφοὺς λεγομένους αὐτῶν, ἔτι τε τούτων ἄλλους ἐκγόνους.
>
> Concerning the other gods, it is beyond us to know and describe their origin, but we should believe those who have spoken before us, who were descendants of the gods, as they claimed, and surely knew their own parents. It is impossible, then, to distrust the children of the gods, even though they speak without likely or conclusive proofs. No, we should follow custom and believe them, seeing as they claim to be reporting family matters. Let us thus accept what they say about the origins of these gods and report it. Ocean and Tethys were the children of Earth and Heaven, and from them were born Phorcys, Cronus, Rhea and the others who were with them. And from Cronus and Rhea were born Zeus, Hera and all the gods we know are called their siblings, and from them still others are descended. (40d6-41a3)

Immediately afterward, Timaeus makes the following distinction between the celestial and the traditional gods: the former "revolve conspicuously (περιπολοῦσιν φανερῶς)" while the latter "appear only to the extent that they wish (φαίνονται καθ' ὅσον ἂν ἐθέλωσιν)" (41a3-4). This passage implies that, notwithstanding the traditional gods' absence from his cosmology, Timaeus still recognizes their divinity and gives them a place in his pantheon. Yet there is some ambiguity in Timaeus' expression of deference to traditional theogonies, and the traditional deities' status within his pantheon is unclear. Most of the dialogue's interpreters regard this passage as a bit of playful ironizing.[71]

Before addressing the question of whether Timaeus is being serious in the passage, it should be made clear that his claims are not restricted to any specific tradition's account of divine origins, but apply to all established mythic theogonies.[72] Though Timaeus' allusion to the divine parentage of those who spoke about the births of the other gods can

[71] Major commentaries that find irony in this passage include: Archer-Hind (1888) 136-137, Taylor (1928) 245-247, Cornford (1937) 138-139, and Brisson (1974) 105. Karfík (2004) 139-145 and Sedley (2010) 247 n. 3 are notable dissenters. Without weighing in on this debate directly, Lefka (2013) 434-450 joins the latter group in emphasizing Plato's reverence toward traditional cult and deities.

[72] Cf. Taylor (1928) 246, who claims "Timaeus is thinking more of Orphicism than of anything else." Cornford (1937) broadly follows Taylor's approach.

be taken as a pointed allusion to Orpheus and Musaeus, who claimed such parentage, the brief genealogy he offers at 40e5-41a3 is especially reminiscent of Hesiod, who did not.[73] Timaeus offers a composite image of theogonic mythmaking, meant to recall an entire way of thinking about the gods rather than a specific representative of it. Additionally, though Timaeus' remarks may apply specifically to mythic genealogies like Hesiod's or Orpheus', that does not mean that they have no bearing on popular or civic religion.[74] It is ultimately irrelevant that Athena and other gods that were central to Athenian cult, for example, go unmentioned in Timaeus' brief genealogy, given that it focuses on the eldest and most prominent members of the traditional pantheon and is presented as no more than an outline. The kind of deities whose origins Timaeus declines to discuss in his account can include all familiar figures from popular mythology.

The scope of Timaeus' remarks at 40d6-41a3, then, covers not just theogonic poetry, but all myths about the gods of established Greek religion. This is the closest Timaeus gets to offering direct commentary on popular conceptions of the gods and piety. If this passage really were completely ironic, we could see it as a thorough dismissal of popular Greek thinking on the gods. How we interpret it stands to shape our entire understanding of Timaeus' stance to customary Greek worship, so it is crucial to consider why so many scholars deny its seriousness.

The most forceful and detailed argument in favor of the ironic reading, which is worth quoting at length, is Taylor's:

> This passage is purely, though politely, ironical. Note the emphasis laid on the statement that, not to speak of conclusive proofs (ἀναγκαῖαι ἀποδείξεις), the persons who supply the information have not even εἰκότες λόγοι for their statements, the sarcastic use made of the obviously false assumption that a man *must* know who his father was, the reminder that if we let the stories go unchallenged it is only out of a good citizen's respect for 'usage' (ἑπομένους τῷ νόμῳ πιστευτέον), and, on the top of all this, the emphasis laid a second time on the point that the genealogy given is only what someone else has said (κατ' ἐκείνους, e3). (245)

Taylor makes at least two strong points. First, he is right that Timaeus' argument for trusting earlier stories about the gods is terribly weak: claims about divine parentage are obviously not unassailable. Second, although Timaeus encourages us to believe the established myths, he nevertheless makes it clear that they fall short of his own standards of probable storytelling. Timaeus' respect for traditional accounts seems half-hearted, if not entirely feigned. At the same time, Taylor's qualifying Timaeus' claims as "purely … ironical" and "sarcastic" seems too one-sided and exaggerated. A written text cannot convey sarcasm unambiguously. It is also difficult to understand why Timaeus would want

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[73] See Pender (2010) 225-226 for a discussion of the Hesiodic echoes here. Along similar lines, Sedley (2010) 247 n. 3 refers to 40e5-41a3 as "an outline synthesis of Hesiodic and Orphic theogony in five generations."

[74] Taylor (1928) 246 and Cornford (1937) 139 argue for a strong distinction between Timaeus' genealogy at 40e5-41a3 and popular religious beliefs.

to be seen as simply mocking old stories about the gods. Furthermore, in order to plausibly ascribe such noticeable sarcasm to Timaeus, Taylor has to assert, on thin grounds, that Timaeus' irony is aimed mainly at Orphic theogonies and has no bearing on popular religion. Though the ironic reading has much going for it, it has significant shortcomings as well.

Do alternative interpretations of Timaeus' comments on the traditional deities fare better under scrutiny? The most thorough argument in favor of taking 40d6-e4 at face value is that offered by Filip Karfík, who raises several valid points.[75] Karfík points out that an ironic reader of our passage cannot avoid the conclusion that Timaeus thinks that only the cosmic deities he discusses in his account are true gods, while traditional deities are unworthy of the title. Denying the reality of the established gods is something Plato carefully avoids throughout his works, so it would be very strange for him to adopt such a radical position now. Regardless of whatever religious innovations his characters advocate for, they never push for wholesale replacement of established deities and forms of worship. For Karfík, the traditional deities count as genuine gods and have a place in Timaeus' pantheon. Their place in his pantheon is likely lower than that of Demiurge and celestial gods, who are the genuinely older divinities, but that is never stated outright. What matters most for Karfík, then, is that Timaeus does make room for the traditional deities in his pantheon, even if he leaves their status within it undefined.

Karfík's strongest point is that having Timaeus deny the existence of established deities would be out of tune with the respect toward traditional religion that Plato's characters tend to show. At the very least, Timaeus' deference to tradition has to be believable, and therefore cannot be obviously sardonic. We should note, however, that Karfík does not address the strongest claims Taylor makes in favor of the ironic reading. Even if we deny that Timaeus is actually attacking conventional religion at 40d6-e4, it is still difficult to see him as wholeheartedly endorsing it. Timaeus' argument for believing the old myths remains unsatisfactory, and he does not make much of an effort to convince us of the old stories' truth. His pointing out that the established myths lack plausible arguments also undermines their credibility, making it clear that they have nothing to back them except the weight of tradition. Though Timaeus seems to accept their authority, he cannot help but admit that the old stories are not as believable as his own. To advance a likely cosmogonic myth, Timaeus does not need to reject conventional ideas about the gods and their birth, but he cannot genuinely incorporate them into his account either. Timaeus ultimately makes very little room for traditional deities in his account in comparison to the place he gives the Demiurge and his creations. Karfík may be right that the gods of popular religion do have a place in Timaeus' cosmic scheme, but his emphasis on Plato's ostensible religious conservatism prevents him from fully appreciating what a provocative, innovative step Timaeus takes in having his cosmic gods eclipse the traditional pantheon.[76]

Ultimately, Timaeus' stance toward the gods of popular religion is more complicated than either the ironic reading or its critics suggest. Rather than deny or

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[75] See Karfík (2004) 139-145.

[76] Cf. Lefka (2013) 431-434, who stresses Plato's notion of a single divine nature as a revolutionary feature of his theology.

question the existence of the traditional gods, Timaeus suggests that they are less important and more difficult to understand than those he focuses on. Though he does not poke fun at established conceptions of the gods, he clearly implies that his own theology is more credible and that the gods he describes are worthier of his audience's belief and attention. He respects tradition enough not to criticize it directly, but not enough to let it have the last word about the nature and identity of the gods. Timaeus' comments on the traditional pantheon assure his audience that his gods are not meant to replace the old ones without concealing how innovative his theology is. In mentioning the trust owed to the old myths, Timaeus' aim is not to tell us what he (or Plato) believes or not, but to make it clear that one need not abandon those myths to accept his account. That would make his theology easier to accept for anyone who regards the traditional gods as very important. This applies to Critias in particular, but Timaeus' cosmology should affect and challenge anyone whose piety is informed by custom and traditional myths.

(β) The Athenian Visitor and the Traditional Gods

Comparing Timaeus' approach to the traditional pantheon with the Athenian Visitor's in *Laws* X can help us better understand how much a Platonic character's perspective on the matter depends on the dramatic and rhetorical context he is operating in and his aims. Unlike Timaeus' cosmology, the Athenian's is addressed at an audience that consists mainly of the traditionalist Dorians who will populate the city he has been designing, rather than Athenians like Critias who, although not quite philosophical, are friendly toward philosophy.[77] I argue that the different choices Timaeus and the Athenian make in presenting their cosmologies, including how they speak of the traditional pantheon, have a lot to do with the type of interlocutors and audience they face.

The Athenian presents his cosmology at a fairly advanced point of his conversation with Kleinias and Megillus, two old Dorians from Crete and Sparta who want to hear his thoughts about good political institutions and laws. After a long discussion of how serious crimes like temple robbery and murder will be dealt with in Magnesia in book IX, the Athenian turns in book X to what could embolden people to commit such transgressions: impiety (885b2-9). Impiety is the social ill his cosmology is meant to remedy. This is the problem that motivates his discussion of the gods and their role in the cosmos.

Unlike Timaeus, the Athenian does not present a single, continuous myth. Instead, he presents a set of arguments and semi-mythical 'incantations' (ἐπῳδαί) designed to counter various forms of impiety. A remarkable feature of the Athenian's arguments and incantations in *Laws* X is their vagueness about the gods' number and identity. There is no figure comparable to Timaeus' Demiurge in the Athenian's cosmology, even if he does briefly and mysteriously refer to an unidentified god who cares for the whole universe and arranges all things with a view to its safety and excellence (903b4-6; cf. 902e4-7). In the first set of arguments the Athenian presents, which are supposed to prove that the gods

[77] For discussion of the *Laws*' dramatic context, see: Pangle (1980) 379-396; Nightingale (1993); Welton (1995); Bobonich (1996); Gill (2003); Miller (2013); Munn (2013); Salem (2013); C. Zuckert (2013); and M. Zuckert (2013).

exist, he focuses mainly on 'soul' (ψυχή) in the abstract: soul is self-moving motion, the eldest of all things and the primary cause of all motions (892a2-b1, 896a5-b3). When soul joins with 'reason' (νοῦς), it guides everything the best way possible, and it is the best soul that supervises the whole cosmos and guides its regular motions (897b1-c9). Only after establishing that soul must be responsible for the sun's and the other astral bodies' regular motions does the Athenian claim that "the soul or souls (ψυχὴ … ἢ ψυχαὶ)" behind these motions should be identified as god(s) (899a7-b9). It is unclear whether the Athenian thinks that each celestial body moves itself and has its own soul or is moved by a single soul that encompasses the whole cosmos and governs its motions by itself, which makes it difficult to tell whether he speaks of a single god or many. He does not, at any rate, refer to the cosmos or the celestial bodies as distinct, identifiable gods the way Timaeus does. As the Athenian switches back and forth between referring to one or many souls and a single or many gods, the gods' number and identity do not appear particularly important to him.

This is not to deny that the Athenian's theology agrees with Timaeus' on fundamental points: both of them see the heavens' regular motions as the work of at least one rational soul and regard the whole cosmos as beautifully ordered by a providential deity. But since the Athenian does not clearly single out, as Timaeus does, a Demiurge or cosmic soul, it is far less pressing for him to explain how his cosmic deities are different from and related to the gods of myth and cult. Thus, his cosmology mostly avoids comment on the traditional gods' status and place in the cosmos, with the exception of a few references to Hades and the Olympians' justice (904d1-2, e3, 905b1). Essentially all of the Athenian's opinions about the Olympians and other traditional gods are found outside of his cosmology. As we examine what the Athenian says about the traditional deities elsewhere, we will have a better understanding of why he avoids exploring their relation to the cosmic gods in his cosmology.

The Athenian refers to traditional gods and traditional religion in an unambiguously positive and reverential tone throughout the *Laws*. At the very beginning of his conversation with Kleinias and Megillus, he acknowledges that both of his interlocutors' native cities accept individual gods as their laws' authors—Zeus for the Cretans and Apollo for the Spartans (I.624a1-5). Though he invites critical reflection on potential flaws in the Dorian law codes, the Athenian never seriously challenges or undercuts his interlocutors' piety. In fact, he seems to cultivate and take advantage of their piety at various points in the dialogue when he suggests that their conversation is inspired and guided by some divine power (e.g. III.682e10, IV.722c6-7, VII.811c6-10). The Athenian's approach strongly suggests that he regards piety as indispensable for maintaining a deep appreciation of the law and lawmaking.

Aside from how he talks to his interlocutors, the Athenian's designs for the religious and communal life of the utopian colony Magnesia also showcase his awareness of traditional religion's importance. In his imagined first address to the colonists who will comprise the first generation of Magnesians, the Athenian stresses the inseparability of piety and righteousness, enjoining his addressees to honor not only the Olympians, but also the gods of the underworld, spirits, heroes and their living parents (IV.717a3-b6). As for the Magnesians' rituals, temples, and to what gods these will be dedicated, the Athenian affirms that the ultimate authority will be the hallowed oracles of Delphi, Dodona, and Ammon (V.738b5-c7, VI.759c6-d1, VIII.828a1-5). In addition to temples and cults

established after the founding, any local cults that survive from ancient times should be integrated into the city's religious life (VIII.848d2-5). And, besides the temples to Olympians like Zeus, Hestia, and Athena to be built throughout Magnesia, the city itself will be divided into twelve parts, each of them dedicated to an Olympian god (V.745b3-e2). On the whole, then, the Athenian appears far more appreciative of traditional views of the divine than Timaeus, notwithstanding their agreement on the basics of cosmology.

Indeed, although the Athenian gives voice to an undeniably philosophical perspective throughout most of the *Laws*, he is also at pains to cast himself as an enemy of change and innovation. His deference to tradition on religious matters is only part of the generally conservative approach he adopts throughout the conversation. This approach is most evident whenever the Athenian refers to Egypt's supremely rigid culture as a model to follow. He first praises the Egyptians in book II, commending them for their millenary, unchanging standards of artistic composition, which have prevented the corruption that comes from a pleasure-driven pursuit of musical innovation (656d5-657b8). (By contrast, the state of the arts throughout most of Greece is lamentable: there, people do not resist the urge to chase after exciting new musical forms [658e6-660c1]). In book III, the Athenian presents ceaseless innovation in the arts as the main cause of his own city's moral decline: as he sees it, contempt for established musical norms in the theater led to disregard of all other standards and authorities (700a7-701c4). In his treatment of children's play in book VII, he claims "there is no greater ruin for a city (πόλει λώβην οὐκ εἶναι μείζω)" than a successful innovator in this area (797b8-c4). Immediately afterward, he makes a general case against change, describing it as "an extremely risky thing (πολὺ σφαλερώτατον)" in virtually every realm (797d9-e2). As a consequence, fixity and stability should be among the good legislator's primary objectives:

> οἷς γὰρ ἂν ἐντραφῶσιν νόμοις καὶ κατά τινα θείαν εὐτυχίαν ἀκίνητοι γένωνται μακρῶν καὶ πολλῶν χρόνων, ὡς μηδένα ἔχειν μνείαν μηδὲ ἀκοὴν τοῦ ποτε ἄλλως αὐτὰ σχεῖν ἢ καθάπερ νῦν ἔχει, σέβεται καὶ φοβεῖται πᾶσα ἡ ψυχὴ τό τι κινεῖν τῶν τότε καθεστώτων. μηχανὴν δὴ δεῖ τὸν νομοθέτην ἐννοεῖν ἀμόθεν γέ ποθεν ὄντινα τρόπον τοῦτ᾽ ἔσται τῇ πόλει.
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> Whenever the laws in which people have been brought up go unchanged over a long span of time on account of some divine good fortune, so that there is no memory or rumor of things ever having been different from the way they are now, then the whole soul feels reverence and is afraid of altering any of the things established in the past. Indeed, a lawgiver ought to conceive of some means, however he can, that somehow his city will obtain this. (798a8-b6)

The means, according to the Athenian, is one used by the Egyptians: making musical and choral forms sacred to the gods (798e4-799b8). The Athenian consistently decries cultural change as a corrupting force and urges his audience to follow the Egyptians in legislating against innovation and bolstering people's pious aversion to novelty. For him, cultural rigidity and piety are bound together in a feedback loop: on the one hand, making norms and institutions sacred to the gods leads people to accept their authority and validity, guaranteeing their staying power; on the other hand, when these norms and institutions are

recognized as stable and enduring, it makes people more reverential and pious and more convinced of their elders' and the gods' authority.

The Athenian's cosmology in *Laws* X must be interpreted in light of his deep appreciation of cultural fixity and piety as sources of moral order. It is, after all, precisely because believing in the gods as prescribed by the laws is indispensable for righteous citizens that the Athenian fights various types of impiety. As Kleinias puts it, a persuasive case for the gods' existence and goodness would constitute "the finest and best prelude to all the laws (ἁπάντων τῶν νόμων κάλλιστόν τε καὶ ἄριστον προοίμιον)" (X.887b8-c2). What the Athenian says throughout book X is supposed to bolster and support his prescriptions from the preceding (and the following) books, including his prescriptions for Magnesia's religious practices. Thus, even though the Athenian is in broad agreement with Timaeus on matters of cosmology, his entry on the subject aims at the opposite of theological innovation.

Indeed, the Athenian's odd choice of a fairly sophisticated philosophical cosmology to defend traditional religious forms is more a reflection of the types of attacks on religion he seeks to counter than a testament to his own desire to turn ordinary Magnesians toward a philosophical understanding of divinity. As he sees it, what he and his interlocutors should worry about is not just a casual disbelief in the gods' existence, but the rejection that results from exposure to modern doctrines (886a6-e2). These doctrines identify natural processes as the product of chance, rather than divine guidance, and see the gods and moral values as nothing more than a man-made fiction (889b1-890a9). If he is to refute the atheists, the Athenian must offer an alternative to their natural philosophy; defending traditional religion on its own terms is not an option for him. That the Athenian has to resort to philosophical cosmology to defend established religion reveals how vulnerable to critical engagement the conventions he seeks to protect ultimately are. His (and Plato's) choice, however, is to emphasize the importance of defending these conventions, avoiding an explicit acknowledgment of their weakness in the face of aggressive scrutiny.

We can grasp more clearly now why the Athenian is essentially silent on the traditional gods when he presents his cosmology: an explicit attempt to explain what the relation between traditional gods and his celestial mover(s) might call attention to the paradox of his defending the old religion by means of a newfangled theology.

This sense of paradox is not, of course, universal among readers of the *Laws*. According to Glenn Morrow, one of the dialogue's most influential interpreters, the Athenian's cosmic theology is perfectly compatible with the fundamentally traditional religion he prescribes for Magnesia. For Morrow, Plato is transparently reforming and revitalizing the established forms of Greek civic religion, and his aim is to "enlarge or enrich current religion by directing attention to other manifestations of the divine than those usually recognized in worship."[78] Under this reading, the book X cosmology and the Athenian's prescriptions for Magnesia's religion are not in tension, and the former straightforwardly supports the latter. In defense of Morrow's portrayal of the Athenian as a religious reformer, one may point to various aspects of Magnesia's religion that are genuinely innovative, especially the Athenian's stress on the celestial bodies' divinity and

[78] Morrow (1960) 447.

his suggestion that a public cult be established for them (VII.821a2-d4) and his call for a joint cult of the Sun and Apollo (XII.945e4-946d6).[79]

Yet in spite of these moments that suggest a harmonious fusion between the old and the new, between traditionalism and the philosopher's natural religion,[80] Morrow's reading has its shortcomings. First, we should note that Morrow's casting the Athenian as a religious innovator does not sufficiently acknowledge the Athenian's consistent self-presentation throughout the dialogue as an enemy of change. In other words, Morrow fails to ask the following questions: If some key aspects of the Athenian's vision for Magnesian civic religion are undeniably novel, why is he so invested in projecting an image of himself as a traditionalist rather than a reformer? Why is the Athenian not more transparent about his desire to reshape civic religious practices and beliefs? Perhaps one could answer such a line of objection by pointing out that: a) there is no need for the Athenian to highlight what is innovative about his approach when it would be fairly obvious to anyone familiar with Greek religious practices; and b) the Athenian is not dissembling in any way when he casts himself as a traditionalist because, when it comes to the *formal* aspects of civic cult, he very much is one—as Morrow puts it, what the Athenian seeks to transform is the *spirit* of civic religion, pouring "new wine into old bottles."[81]

Such responses, however, fall short as a defense of Morrow's interpretation. First, while it is true that the novelty of the Athenian's proposals would be self-evident to anyone familiar with traditional religion, the discrepancy between his innovative efforts and his professed traditionalism is still jarring. After all, the Athenian never offers a clear explanation of why reform is necessary for certain aspects of civic religion but ruinous for others. Furthermore, Morrow's distinction between the external, formal side of Magnesian religion and its internal, conceptual side may be unsustainable and overstate how well integrated the Athenian's innovations are with the traditions he adopts and defends. To what extent, we may wonder, do ordinary Magnesians, who worship the same way most of their fellow Greeks do and know little of astronomy and theology, have a particularly philosophical conception of the divine? To be sure, they will adhere to the Athenian's moralizing vision of the traditional pantheon, but it is unlikely that they will be generally more astute on theological matters and more attuned to the philosopher's focus on the gods as celestial movers. Indeed, outside of book X, the Athenian emphasizes not the gods' role and place in nature, but their supervision of human affairs and punishment of various types of wrongdoing (e.g. IV.716a4-b5, IV.717c6-d6, V.729e2-730a9, VIII.842e7-843a8, IX.871b1-6, XI.930e3-931e6). He never explains how the gods' role as celestial movers and their role as moral guardians are related. Whether and how ordinary Magnesians' grasp of divinity can be reconciled with his philosophical perspective is not self-evident. The introduction of the joint cult of Apollo and the Sun toward the end of the dialogue intensifies rather than resolves our doubts about the unity of Magnesian religion: though

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[79] Consider also his criticisms of old poets' tales portraying the gods as immoral (e.g. I.636c7-d7, II.672b3-c6, XII.941b2-c4), which recall Socrates' suggestions for reforming storytelling about the gods in *Republic* II.

[80] For Dodds (1951) 220-221, whom Morrow and others follow, the joint cult of Apollo and the Sun is the *Laws*' clearest attempt to bridge these disparate perspectives.

[81] Morrow (1960) 399-401.

the cult indicates a nominal unification of astral and traditional worship, it leaves the relation between the celestial and the Olympian pantheons ambiguous and obscure. Though the Athenian tries to harmonize and integrate novel and traditional elements within Magnesian religion, he is not as clearly successful as Morrow's interpretation suggests.

More recent discussions of theology and religion in Magnesia are far more sensitive to how the Athenian's spirited defense of traditional religion throughout most of the *Laws* is at cross-purposes with his theological musings in book X. What these interpretations have to say about religion in Magnesia is also more useful for understanding why the Athenian keeps traditional deities out of his cosmology. Jacob Abolafia, for example, follows Dodds and Morrow in recognizing the cult of Apollo and the Sun as an attempt to fuse traditional and novel strands in Magnesia's religion, but he acknowledges the tensions that make this fusion fraught and difficult: "The traditionalist will never be able to truly see past the 'mere reflection' of reason in the public cult, and must be prevented from backsliding into private religious superstition with threats and coercion, while the scientifically minded man will tend to look past the false pretences of the Olympian elements in the state."[82] There will be two different religious perspectives within Magnesia, and even though they will come together in public rituals these celebrations will not represent the same things to everyone. The solar cult is a genuine attempt to join the traditional and the philosophical viewpoints, but the unification is only partial as long as the differences between those perspectives exist and the cult merely accommodates both of them with a mixture of traditionalism and symbolism. Ultimately, the sun simply "points at a way of unifying, if never completely, these disparate threads into the rope that might bind together a city."[83]

The difficulty of convincingly unifying the disparate threads of traditional religion and cosmological theology is key for understanding why the Athenian avoids discussing them together throughout the *Laws*. Though the Athenian presents his cosmological arguments as a defense of the gods recognized by the laws, the theology he introduces in those arguments may not be as compatible with the traditions he is defending as he suggests. As Robert Mayhew points out:

> As most people absorb the stories about the gods that they are raised on, and are unlikely to challenge such beliefs (implied at 887c-e), to expose citizens generally to deep and difficult issues and questions on the cutting edge of Platonic philosophical theology would not reinforce or solidify proper civic-religious beliefs, but would in fact undercut them by casting doubt upon them or shrouding them in obscurity.[84]

If the Athenian is unclear and leaves many questions unresolved in his theology, then, it is likely because more clarity and precision would do more harm than good. Leaving the identity of the celestial movers and their relation to traditional gods obscure allows the Athenian to maintain the appearance that his theology and traditional religion are

[82] Abolafia (2015) 391.
[83] Abolafia (2015) 392.
[84] Mayhew (2010) 215.

ultimately compatible. Since there is no genuinely rational, theological account of how traditional deities are related to the celestial bodies and their souls, an attempt to clarify this matter would come off as artificial and contrived. Calling attention to the gap between the philosophical perspective and the popular one would not close that gap but widen it.

In the *Laws*, cosmology is deployed as a supplement to traditional religion, albeit an awkward one, rather than as a subtle challenge—as it is in the *Timaeus*. Whereas Timaeus is fairly clear about how innovative his cosmology is and what sets it apart from traditional accounts of the gods, what the Athenian does is more complicated. On the one hand, the Athenian offers an equally innovative cosmology and articulates a distinctly philosophical perspective on divinity that is in many key aspects similar. On the other hand, the Athenian offers this cosmology to protect Magnesia's mostly traditional civic religion, and his success depends on his audience not asking difficult questions about the relation between the celestial movers in his theology and the Olympians and other traditional deities worshipped in the city. Compared to Timaeus, the Athenian seems at once more invested in the compatibility between the philosophical cosmology and ordinary conceptions of the gods and more aware of what pulls these two perspectives apart.

The reason for their different approaches lies not only in their being two different characters with different backgrounds and concerns, but also in the different rhetorical contexts they confront. Timaeus speaks before an audience that, though not entirely philosophical, is open to philosophy and its strange notions. The Athenian, by contrast, addresses two old Dorians with little interest or background in philosophy, and his cosmology is meant to be more or less intelligible to them and an entire city of people with a similar background. It is not surprising, then, that the Athenian seems to recognize a much wider gulf between his own perspective and ordinary Magnesians' than Timaeus sees between himself and people like Critias. More importantly, the Athenian presents his cosmology for the benefit of all of Magnesia, while Timaeus offers his partly as a philosophical protreptic targeting individuals like Critias. The Athenian, as we have seen, is acutely aware of the importance of civic religion in keeping the citizenry virtuous and law-abiding, and his primary goal in the dialogue is to devise the institutions that are conducive to such a community. In light of this, it is fitting that he should cast his cosmology as supportive of Magnesia's civic religion even if the philosophical perspective that informs it could challenge most Magnesians' beliefs about the gods. Timaeus, by contrast, is under no such constraints, and he uses his cosmology in part to challenge some of the aspects of Athenian civic religion that have a grip on Critias. He is not entirely indifferent to the considerations that guide the Athenian's presentation, but he faces an audience that should be more receptive to an innovative, philosophical perspective.

Having examined how their stance toward traditional deities sets Timaeus and the Athenian apart, we can now turn to detailed analysis of their theologies. I start with Timaeus, addressing the Demiurge, the cosmos, and the astral gods in sequence. This will show what makes Timaeus' theology challenging and how it might help someone like Critias develop a better understanding of the gods.

iia. Timaeus' Gods—The Demiurge

In Timaeus' cosmology, no god is more prominent than the Demiurge. Any discussion of Timaeus' understanding of divinity should therefore start with him and pay special attention to his portrayal. Even though most scholarly discussions of the Demiurge are centrally concerned with his ontological status and whether he can be identified with other gods or principles in Timaeus' cosmological scheme, I have no intention to address these issues here.[85] My interest, rather, is in how the Demiurge appears on the surface of Timaeus' mythic cosmology and his function as a distinctive and central character within it. It is as a mythic character, after all, that the Demiurge will have the most impact on Critias and others with a similar perspective. In what follows, I discuss what Timaeus tells us about the Demiurge's character, his actions and his relationship with humans.

(α) The Demiurge's Nature

To begin, let us consider what Timaeus tells us about the kind of god the Demiurge is. His two salient traits are goodness and his rationality. To be sure, Timaeus tells us in his proem: "to find the maker and father of this All is quite a task (ἔργον) and to announce him to everyone after having found him is impossible (εὑρόντα εἰς πάντας ἀδύνατον λέγειν)" (28c3-5). But even if it is beyond our ken to understand what or who the Demiurge really is, Timaeus' detailed descriptions of his character and works certainly encourage us to think of him as outstandingly good and rational. As I hope to show, Timaeus' characterization of the Demiurge reflects a distinctive philosophical conception of divinity. Indeed, when we turn to the cosmos and the lesser gods, we will see that they exhibit the same key characteristics as the Demiurge, though not always in the same way.

Timaeus offers more direct commentary on the Demiurge's goodness than he does on his rationality. The body of his cosmology begins with the following suggestive description of the Demiurge's nature:

> Λέγωμεν δὴ δι' ἥντινα αἰτίαν γένεσιν καὶ τὸ πᾶν τόδε ὁ συνιστὰς συνέστησεν. ἀγαθὸς ἦν, ἀγαθῷ δὲ οὐδεὶς περὶ οὐδενὸς οὐδέποτε ἐγγίγνεται φθόνος· τούτου δ' ἐκτὸς ὢν πάντα ὅτι μάλιστα ἐβουλήθη γενέσθαι παραπλήσια ἑαυτῷ.
>
> Let us now state the reason why the framer of Becoming and this All framed them. He was good, and in one who is good no grudgingness about anything ever arises. Since he was devoid of this, he wanted all things to become as similar to himself as possible. (29d7-e3)

The Demiurge's defining characteristic is his goodness; it explains his every action and decision throughout Timaeus' cosmology. Specifically, the Demiurge's goodness

[85] An especially influential discussion of the Demiurge's identity, complete with critical assessment of earlier perspectives, can be found in Menn (1995) 6-13.

manifests itself as a complete freedom from grudgingness or ill will (φθόνος) and a desire to make everything else as good as it can be. Timaeus goes beyond presenting his auditors with the rudiments of a novel conception of divinity. He also encourages them to think of goodness in a definite, somewhat unusual way. He does not, however, explain why we should think of goodness as an absolute lack of grudgingness or what the implications of such a view are; that is something we have to uncover ourselves.

The first thing we must bear in mind if we are to understand the precise character of the Demiurge's goodness is the broad semantic range of φθόνος, translated as 'grudgingness' above. Though it is very common—and often appropriate—to translate φθόνος as 'envy' or 'jealousy', the term can refer to a wider variety of states and dispositions than this suggests.[86] Aside from those who envy others' luck or goods, anyone who refuses to share their advantages with their peers or inferiors can be said to exhibit φθόνος. Plato's Socrates even describes the refusal to indulge someone else or do them a favor with the verb φθονέω throughout various dialogues.[87] This is why 'grudgingness' is a preferable translation for what the Demiurge lacks: the point is not so much that he feels no jealousy or envy of others' benefits, but rather that he has no inclination to keep his goodness all to himself. According to Timaeus, being good entails actively giving of oneself to others. Generosity is the defining mark of the good, and the Demiurge realizes his goodness by giving of himself unstintingly.

Timaeus' introduction of his god as completely ungrudging also invites contrast between the ideal of divinity he is advancing and conventional views about the gods as prone to φθόνος.[88] The idea of a φθόνος θεῶν, commonly translated as 'jealousy of the gods', is widely attested in fifth-century Greek literature.[89] This customary translation, however, is somewhat misleading. Though it is not always presented in the same way, this notion never implies that humans can attain any sort of success or happiness that eludes the god and thus stirs his envy. Rather, the point is that gods often refuse to let lesser beings have a share of the loftiness and grandeur that belong to them—they are stingy rather than generous. Gods, then, constantly strike down mortals who are too grand or prosperous. The motive is not pure malice, however, but to remind lesser creatures of their vulnerability. Divine φθόνος is not just a destructive phenomenon, but it helps preserve balance and proper limits in the natural order.

A key problem with portraying the gods as grudging is that it depends on what is essentially a tragic, pessimistic vision. In this picture, the main difference between the gods and us is that, while we are fundamentally vulnerable and limited beings, they are not. We lack the power and stability that are proper to the gods, so that whatever happiness we experience must be ephemeral. When the gods intervene in human affairs, most often they make our weaknesses and limitations manifest instead of helping us overcome them.

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[86] For detailed discussion of the significance of φθόνος, see Dickie (1993) and Hermann (2003).

[87] E.g. *Apology* 33a8; *Gorgias* 489a4; *Hippias Minor* 363c4, 372e7; *Protagoras* 320c1; and *Republic* I.338a3.

[88] Hermann (2003) 69 notes this as well.

[89] See Roig Lanzillotta (2010) for a discussion of the concept and its historical development.

If we are not mindful of our limitations, the penalty could be ruin. Dialogues earlier than the *Timaeus* indicate that such a view of the human condition is inimical to Plato.[90] (Timaeus also, we will see, advances a more optimistic and grander conception of human existence.)

If gods can become irritated at any apparent attempts to rival their grandeur and are liable to begrudge mortal creatures their success it is because somehow this threatens to obscure, perhaps even eliminate, the vast difference between mortals and immortals. This is problematic insofar as makes the gods' position appear somewhat vulnerable and unstable: in spite of our relative lowliness, we can perturb the gods, who in turn appear unduly insecure regardless of their tremendous power. This is an inconsistent and potentially confusing image of the gods' superiority over humans, one that projects all-too-human characteristics onto them.

By presenting the Demiurge as completely free from φθόνος, Timaeus is able to articulate a more coherent notion of divine power. Able to give of himself freely without suffering any diminution, the Demiurge seems more impressive and less human than his grudging predecessors. Compared with Timaeus' god, deities who find human success irksome appear rather petty and harsh, traits that are unbecoming of a being supposed to be vastly better than us. The Demiurge, then, exemplifies a more coherent ideal of divinity. Through him Timaeus shows his audience that it makes the most sense to think of the gods as our disinterested benefactors. We should reject the notion that the gods would have any interest in disrupting our happiness.

Timaeus' remarks on the Demiurge's goodness go beyond explaining the origins of the cosmos. In particular, his claim that the Demiurge is completely without φθόνος has manifold resonances and implications. First, it orients us toward a specific conception of goodness—being good entails giving of oneself freely. Second, it brings into sharp relief the contrast between philosophical and popular understandings of what the gods are like. Being completely ungrudging, the Demiurge appears more impressive and less anthropomorphic than his resentment-prone forerunners. He embodies an ideal of divinity that has been purged of inappropriate features and exhibits greater internal consistency than traditional ones.

*

What about the Demiurge's rationality? Timaeus does not address this feature of the Demiurge's character as directly, but we have good reasons to think that it is crucial. To begin with, we should bear in mind that, as several scholars have pointed out, Timaeus seems to suggest that the Demiurge is reason or intelligence (νοῦς) in a few passages (39e7-6, 47e4, 48a2).[91] Since the Demiurge's precise identity is not my concern here, I do

[90] This is a key theme in Socrates' discussions of poetry in the *Republic* (II.376e9-III.398b8, X.595a1-608b8) and his concluding myth of the afterlife (X.614b2-621d3). For analysis of Plato's repudiation of the pessimistic worldview he associated with Homer and tragedy, see Halliwell (2002) 98-118.

[91] On the Demiurge as νοῦς, see Hackforth (1936) and Menn (1995).

not delve too deeply into these passages' significance; what matters within the present context is their signaling that the Demiurge is supremely rational.

Timaeus' focus on the Demiurge's craftsmanship, evidenced in the many names he uses to refer to him and his work, can be especially helpful for understanding what makes the god rational. The best known of Timaeus' names for the Demiurge is, of course, δημιουργός, a fairly generic term for 'craftsman' (29a3, 41a7, 42e8). More frequently, however, he uses the label ὁ συνιστὰς (29e1, 30b5, c3, 32c7, 36d8), a term we can translate as 'framer' or 'joiner'. Similarly, the name ὁ τεκταινόμενος, used once (28c6), refers to someone who works at carpentry or construction. These names alone encourage us to think of the Demiurge as operating in a manner analogous, if not identical, to various forms of human craftsmanship, especially those whose concern is to produce orderly structures. Timaeus' descriptions of the Demiurge's work only reinforce this impression. As Luc Brisson has shown, the god's various creative acts are depicted in that plainly recalls different types of handiwork: for example, the Demiurge works as a carpenter or stonemason when he builds the cosmic body (31b4-32c4), and as a metallurgist as he constructs the cosmic soul (34b10-36d7) and the immortal part of the human soul (41d4-42e4).[92] Timaeus' point is that his god does not produce anything spontaneously or at random, but operates consistently as an expert craftsman.

How is the Demiurge's craftsmanship evidence for his rationality? From the Platonic perspective, craftsmanship is fundamentally rational. To begin with, it involves being able to give an account of one's goal and the means for attaining it.[93] A true craftsman is in principle capable of teaching or explaining his goals and methods to anyone who wishes to understand them. The rules he follows do not reflect his personal inclinations or idiosyncrasies; they are based on universal principles, the forms. As Timaeus points out, craftsmen create fine products by attending to the forms as they work (28a6-b2).[94] Without knowledge of the forms, a craftsman will not be able to proceed with an adequate conception of his goal. Furthermore, as Timaeus reminds us, the forms are accessible to reason alone (28a1-2, 29a6-7), so craftsmanship depends on reason.

Timaeus states in the proem that, being the best possible craftsman, the Demiurge used the forms as his paradigm when creating the cosmos (28c5-29b1). He remarks on the Demiurge's intention to imitate the intelligible paradigm at several other points throughout the cosmology (e.g. 30d1-31a1, 38b6-c3, 39d7-e9). At the very least, then, the Demiurge is just as capable of reasoning about the forms as the most expert human craftsmen. But his attention to the forms is not the only evidence of the Demiurge's rationality. We also see him engaging in practical deliberation as he confronts the particular circumstances of each task that he must complete to achieve his ends (e.g. 30b1-6, 32c6-33b1, 33b4-7, 33d1-34a1). Practical reasoning is just as significant an element of the Demiurge's rationality as his cognition of the forms.[95]

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[92] Brisson (1974) 36-50 offers a detailed discussion of these and other episodes, including the operations of the lesser gods who imitate the Demiurge.

[93] This is Socrates' claim at *Gorgias* 465a2-6.

[94] Cf. *Cratylus* 389a6-b6 and *Republic* X.596a10-b11.

[95] On the Demiurge's practical reasoning, see Burnyeat (2005) 156-164. Cf. Johansen (2004) 69-86 and Powers (2013) 717-720.

While being good moves the Demiurge to generate the cosmos, reason allows him to discover the steps he needs to take in order to succeed in the task. Take, for example, how the Demiurge determines that the cosmos as a whole should be a rational living being:

> λογισάμενος οὖν ηὗρισκεν ἐκ τῶν κατὰ φύσιν ὁρατῶν οὐδὲν ἀνόητον τοῦ νοῦν ἔχοντος ὅλον ὅλου κάλλιον ἔσεσθαί ποτε ἔργον, νοῦν δ' αὖ χωρὶς ψυχῆς ἀδύνατον παραγενέσθαι τῳ. διὰ δὴ τὸν λογισμὸν τόνδε νοῦν μὲν ἐν ψυχῇ, ψυχὴν δ' ἐν σώματι συνιστὰς τὸ πᾶν συνετεκταίνετο, ὅπως ὅτι κάλλιστον εἴη κατὰ φύσιν ἄριστόν τε ἔργον ἀπειργασμένος. οὕτως οὖν δὴ κατὰ λόγον τὸν εἰκότα δεῖ λέγειν τόνδε τὸν κόσμον ζῷον ἔμψυχον ἔννουν τε τῇ ἀληθείᾳ διὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ γενέσθαι πρόνοιαν.
>
> As he reasoned, then, he found that among naturally visible beings no work that is without reason as a whole will ever be finer than one possessing reason as a whole, and also that it is impossible for anything to acquire reason without a soul. So on account of this reasoning he constructed the All by building reason in soul and soul in body, in order that the work he was producing would be as fine and good as possible by nature. This is the way, then, that, in accordance with our likely account, we ought to say this cosmos came into being as an ensouled and truly rational living being because of the god's providence. (30b1-c1)

Starting from his desire to bestow as much goodness as possible on sensible reality, the Demiurge reasons and comes to conclusions about how he might best accomplish this task. The Demiurge's rationality and goodness are not identical, but they complement one another.[96] On the one hand, if he did not wish to make perceptible reality good, the Demiurge's reasoning would have no motive or overarching goal. On the other hand, without the ability to make rational determinations about how to reach his desired end, the Demiurge would be unable to act on his wish in a structured, reliable manner, if at all. By making the Demiurge a rational craftsman, Timaeus shows that the god's generosity, i.e. the manner in which he expresses his goodness, is not indeterminate and mysterious, but unfolds in a structured and orderly fashion that is intelligible to other rational beings. This can only strengthen conviction in the Demiurge's goodness: if we can reconstruct in a plausible manner how he acted on his desire to make all things good, then his benevolence is all the more compelling.

Portraying the Demiurge as a craftsman, however, does have a potential setback: the undeniably anthropomorphic bent of Timaeus' descriptions of the Demiurge at work seems to encourage us to imagine a god whose form and nature is much like our own. Why does Timaeus describe the Demiurge in a way that might invite misunderstanding? There are a few good reasons. First, by portraying the Demiurge at work as if he were just like human craftsmen, Timaeus offers his audience an especially vivid account of how the world has come into existence as a product of craft. Were Timaeus to proceed in a more abstract, less anthropomorphic fashion, the rhetorical force of his cosmology would be

[96] For discussion of various interpretations of this complementarity among ancient philosophers, see Powers (2013).

diminished. Second, as a mythic cosmogony Timaeus' story belongs to a genre in which anthropomorphic representations of the gods are perfectly appropriate. For how could an engaging story about the birth of the universe and the gods do away with presenting the divine in at least a partially human guise? If Timaeus' account is to somehow compete with or challenge traditional myths about the gods, anthropomorphism is a form of inaccuracy he may not be able to avoid. Even if it can be misleading, then, Timaeus' anthropomorphic portrayal of the Demiurge is productive from a rhetorical point of view, and it is adequate for the kind of story he is telling.

It is ultimately more important to provide a compelling portrait of the Demiurge as a good and rational god than it is to represent him with the utmost precision. Although the Demiurge certainly exemplifies a philosophical conception of divinity, we must recognize that Timaeus' portrayal of the god is sensitive to rhetorical expediency and adapted to the type of myth he is telling. This portrayal mediates, as it were, between the psychological and rhetorical needs of a wide audience and philosophical insight on the nature of the gods. It conveys what is most important about the god in a manner that should be intelligible and compelling to most people. As we examine how Timaeus depicts other gods, especially the cosmos, it will become even clearer that whereas goodness and rationality are central to his conception of divinity, anthropomorphism is not.

(β) The Demiurge's Work

Having concluded our analysis of the Demiurge's nature, let us turn now to his actions. First, consider the Demiurge's imposition of order on sensible reality. According to Timaeus, this is the Demiurge's primary task, even while the god is creating several divine beings, such as the body of the cosmos and its soul, the celestial bodies, and our own immortal souls. He states it clearly after commenting on the Demiurge's goodness:

> βουληθεὶς γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἀγαθὰ μὲν πάντα, φλαῦρον δὲ μηδὲν εἶναι κατὰ δύναμιν, οὕτω δὴ πᾶν ὅσον ἦν ὁρατὸν παραλαβὼν οὐχ ἡσυχίαν ἄγον ἀλλὰ κινούμενον πλημμελῶς καὶ ἀτάκτως, εἰς τάξιν αὐτὸ ἤγαγεν ἐκ τῆς ἀταξίας, ἡγησάμενος ἐκεῖνο τούτου πάντως ἄμεινον.
>
> For the god wished that everything be good and nothing be bad to the extent that it is possible, so he took over everything that was visible, which was not at rest but moving in a discordant and disorderly manner, and brought it into order out of disorder, thinking that the former is altogether better than the latter. (30a2-6, cf. 53a7-b5, 69b2-c3)

Before anything else, the Demiurge concludes that perceptible being must be brought into order. Everything Timaeus describes him doing afterward is part of this project. The Demiurge does not create other gods simply because he wishes to, but because this is something he needs to do if he is to produce the most beautifully ordered universe. Perhaps this is why it is more appropriate to speak of the Demiurge as the other gods' maker rather than as their father: he seems to regard them not as his children, but rather as his products

and his helpers for completing his project of a beautifully ordered whole. By portraying the Demiurge as an expert craftsman, Timaeus is able to illuminate not just the god's rationality, but also that his main purpose is to establish order.

Furthermore, using intelligible forms as his model enables the Demiurge to fashion an orderly cosmos (28a6-b2, 29a2-b1, 30c2-31a1). Perceptible being ceases to move in a disorderly manner because the Demiurge has it share in the stability of the eternal forms. Whatever order and stability we find in perceptible reality is ontologically dependent on the order and stability of the intelligible forms. This is, of course, a foundational claim of Plato's metaphysics. Timaeus' presentation of the Demiurge's work draws on and advances a philosophical understanding of order and reality. His goodness and rationality aside, the Demiurge is the ideal craftsman because, like a Platonic philosopher, he understands both the difference between perceptible beings and the transcendent, intelligible forms and perceptible beings' dependence on the forms.

The details of how the Demiurge brings structure and stability into sensible reality provide further evidence of the kinship between Timaeus' god and Plato's philosophers. One of the most striking aspects of the Demiurge's work is how much of it consists of endowing perceptible reality with mathematical structure. When Timaeus describes him creating the body of the cosmos, i.e. fire, air, water, and earth (31b4-32c4, 53a2-61c2), and its soul (35a1-36d7), as well as arranging the planets to measure time (38c3-39e2), he invokes complex geometry and ratio theory. The Demiurge is an expert mathematician in addition to being an expert craftsman. Here too he resembles a consummate Platonic philosopher: as readers of the *Republic* remember, there Socrates recommends an extensive mathematical curriculum for would-be philosophers as preparation to the study of the forms (VII.522b6-531e1).[97]

Undoubtedly, there are some differences between Socrates' discussion of the philosopher's mathematical education and the Demiurge's use of mathematical structures for imposing order on sensible reality. In *Republic* VII, the purpose of the would-be philosophers' study of mathematics is to help the soul transcend sensible reality and grasp true being (525b5-c6). Furthermore, in that dialogue philosophical education culminates with the dialectical investigation of the forms (531d7-532b2, cf. 540a4-8). In the *Timaeus*, on the other hand, the Demiurge's work consists of introducing being and intelligibility into sensible reality, which leads him from cognition of the forms to mathematical constructions. Socrates' philosophers and Timaeus' Demiurge proceed in opposite directions: philosophers study mathematics to leave sensible reality behind, while the Demiurge uses his mathematical knowledge to make that reality better.

Nonetheless, both Socrates and Timaeus clearly put great stock in mathematical knowledge and emphasize its close association with knowledge of the forms. More importantly, they both agree that nothing can be beautiful and good without being proportionate, i.e. without exhibiting harmonious mathematical structure. Consider first what Socrates says about harmonic theory, the final of the mathematical studies he

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[97] *Philebus* 55c4-59d5 is also instructive on this matter: there, Socrates affirms the importance of measurement and mathematics for the arts and ranks various forms of knowledge according to their precision and reliance on mathematics. For analysis of Socrates' ranking, see Miller (2010), esp. 84-90.

recommends: it is "useful … for the investigation of what is beautiful and good (χρήσιμον … πρὸς τὴν τοῦ καλοῦ τε καὶ ἀγαθοῦ ζήτησιν), but useless if otherwise pursued (ἄλλως δὲ μεταδιωκόμενον ἄχρηστον)" (VII.531c6-7). Studying pure ratios should enhance one's understanding of beauty and goodness.

Myles Burnyeat has argued persuasively that this is partly because fundamental ethical and aesthetic concepts like unity and concord are also fundamental mathematical concepts, so that "to study mathematics is simultaneously to study, at a very abstract level, the principles of value."[98] But it is also crucial that mathematical objects possess to the highest degree possible the order and proportion that account for the beauty of sensible particulars. Socrates' remarks on astronomy are instructive here: though the celestial bodies studied by current forms of astronomy are "the most beautiful and precise (κάλλιστα καὶ ἀκριβέστατα)" among perceptible beings, they nevertheless "fall far short of what is true (τῶν δὲ ἀληθινῶν πολὺ ἐνδεῖν)," since "possessing bodies and being visible (σῶμά τε ἔχοντα καὶ ὁρώμενα)" they must "deviate (παραλλάττειν)" from the proportion and regularity of what is intelligible (VII.529c7-530b4). As the would-be philosopher's understanding of proportion develops, he does not simply leave empirical reality behind, but actually comes to know the most exact standards by which to make sense of and judge the beauty of perceptible beings.

Timaeus fully agrees with Socrates that proportion is the cause of beauty and goodness in perceptible beings. This is clearest when, prefacing his discussion of human wellbeing, Timaeus makes the following axiomatic claim: "all that is good is in fact beautiful, and what is beautiful is not without proportion (πᾶν δὴ τὸ ἀγαθὸν καλόν, τὸ δὲ καλὸν οὐκ ἄμετρον)" (87c4-5). This principle underlies Timaeus' elaborate descriptions of the Demiurge imposing mathematical structure on sensible reality in order to make it as beautiful and good as possible. Admittedly, Timaeus never says outright that the Demiurge made sensible reality beautiful and good by imposing precise mathematical structures on it, but he does come close at several points. For example, when he first describes the Demiurge's creation of fire, air, water, and earth, Timaeus explains the relation between them thus: "the most beautiful bond is whichever makes itself and what it binds together as much a unity as possible, and proportion naturally accomplishes this best (δεσμῶν δὲ κάλλιστος ὃς ἂν αὑτὸν καὶ τὰ συνδούμενα ὅτι μάλιστα ἓν ποιῇ, τοῦτο δὲ πέφυκεν ἀναλογία κάλλιστα ἀποτελεῖν)" (31c2-4). Without proportion, the body of the cosmos would lack the unity we assume it needs in order to be as beautiful as possible. The Demiurge gives the soul of the cosmos an even more complex mathematical structure (35b1-36b6), and its motions, which the celestial bodies trace, are characterized by proportionality and regularity (36b7-d6, 38c5-39d7). Timaeus describes the cosmic soul, with its mathematical structure and regular motions, as "the best (ἀρίστη)" of the Demiurge's creations (37a1-2). Timaeus has the Demiurge order perceptible reality using mathematical structures because these constitute the best and finest kind of order. Timaeus' god understands order, beauty and goodness in much the same way as Socrates' philosophers must learn to see them.

If the Demiurge made the universe by imitating intelligible forms and imposing mathematical structures on it, no one understands its underlying principles better than

[98] Burnyeat (2000) 76.

those who study mathematics and the forms, i.e. philosophers. Because of their experience with mathematics and dialectic, philosophers like Timaeus grasp more fully than anyone else the most basic principles of order and beauty, coming as close to a divine perspective on reality as a human being can. Thus, through his portrayal of the Demiurge Timaeus encourages his audience to recognize philosophy and astronomy as divine pursuits.

The Demiurge is also a model to the gods he creates. He is the oldest and most powerful god, responsible for the others' creation and capable—though he would never do so—of destroying them (41a7-b6). His superiority over the other gods is especially clear in his role as their instructor: after creating them the Demiurge has the other gods fashion mortal creatures, explaining to them why this is their task and how they should complete it (41b7-d3). He specifically directs them to imitate his work while they go about theirs (41c5-6). When we study mathematics and the forms, it is not a second-tier god whose viewpoint we approximate, but the god who, being responsible for existence of the cosmos, outranks all other gods and is a venerable model even to them.

The Demiurge's work is superior to and more fundamental than the other gods'. Furthermore, the other gods rely on the Demiurge as their model, revealing his work as exemplary. He embodies most perfectly and clearly what Timaeus thinks are the characteristics and activities proper to a god. By having the other gods work specifically as the Demiurge's helpers and imitators, Timaeus encourages us to see him as a paradigmatic god, the one that best illustrates what the gods must be like and what they should do. The Demiurge's auxiliaries are genuine gods, but since they produce works that are inferior to the Demiurge's and rely on his example and instructions, their goodness, rationality, and contribution to the beauty of the sensible realm pale in comparison.

Timaeus' casting the Demiurge as the other gods' superior tells us something important about the relation between his theology and conventional ideas about the gods. The Demiurge clearly towers above the Olympians and other traditional gods, just as he does over those gods he has created. When measured against the Demiurge, even Zeus may seem small.[99] Traditional stories may indeed tell of real gods, but they omit the most powerful god, the one on whom the other gods depend both for their existence and for their ability to act in a manner appropriate for them. Timaeus, by contrast, makes this god the protagonist of his cosmology, offering a more accurate and authoritative account of the nature and activities of the gods than any conventional myth could. Though Timaeus' aim is certainly not to outright replace traditional myths, by showing that the gods they depict are secondary he presents an evident challenge to their authority. What the Demiurge does, then, not only shows him to be a distinctly philosophical god, but also one that is above all other gods, both the ones for whose existence he is directly responsible and the others who appear in traditional myths.

What the Demiurge does *not* do is also significant. As mentioned above, the Demiurge is not involved in the creation of mortal creatures, assigning it instead to his

[99] See O'Meara (2017) 27-39 for a discussion of the Demiurge as a philosophical Zeus. Though O'Meara notes interesting Zeusian features in Timaeus' characterization of the Demiurge, I find his claim that the Demiurge is to be identified with Zeus unconvincing. Timaeus resists this identification throughout the cosmology and leaves traditional accounts of Zeus' origins untouched.

subordinates: after creating the other gods and instructing them on how to complete his work, "he went on to abide in his own habitual nature (ἔμενεν ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ κατὰ τρόπον ἤθει)" (42e5-6).[100] At one point, then, the Demiurge stops working and somehow withdraws. If taken at face value, this is, as Sarah Broadie points out, a "very obvious deistic touch."[101] As Timaeus presents him, the Demiurge is not constantly at work on the universe and does not play any ongoing role managing it or preserving its order, but simply creates it once and for all. The Demiurge's work is providential only in the sense that he puts great forethought into creation; what happens afterward is not his responsibility.

In spite of the Demiurge's great generosity, forethought, and power, his influence is limited. Though the Demiurge has made the cosmos what it is, he is not on the hook for everything that happens in it. He directed the lesser gods to create fallible and mortal beings, but that was a choice imposed on him by his paradigm, which demands the existence of such creatures. The Demiurge does not create the whole of us or the other sublunary animals because this is work that he is, paradoxically, both incapable of doing and too good for. Although in theory he could have used his power to make us better and immortal, his overall project would have been the less beautiful for it; we are not what the Demiurge simply wished we would be, but rather what we had to be in order for his work to fully embody the intelligible paradigm it is based on. Our own defects and the evils that arise from them do not detract from the Demiurge's power or benevolence, which are in full display on the heavens. The cosmos and the celestial bodies are the only work that is fitting for a god of the Demiurge's magnitude. Rather than lament our own flaws and wonder whether things would be better for us if the Demiurge were somehow more involved in our creation and our affairs, we should be grateful for what he did create and marvel at his creation's superlative beauty.

(γ) The Demiurge's Relation to Humans

On the whole, humans are a relatively small part of the Demiurge's project and it is not within his purview to supervise our affairs. The Demiurge's work is obviously of great benefit to us, since without an orderly universe it would be impossible for us to exist or lead good, rational lives (47a1-c4). But neither the cosmos nor the celestial gods were generated for our sake. When it comes to the Demiurge's main creative task, he is our

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[100] Divine withdrawal also occurs at *Statesman* 272e3-5. Dillon (1995) shows that ancient Platonists who resisted literal readings of the cosmologies found these passages similarly problematic and subjected the god's withdrawal in the *Statesman* to metaphorical interpretations comparable to those they applied to the Timaean Demiurge's act of creation.

[101] Broadie (2012) 262. A multitude of interpreters deny that the Demiurge's work has a definite beginning or end, of course, from Xenocrates and Speusippus in the Old Academy to modern scholars like Cornford (1935) 37-39, 203-210; Cherniss (1944) 421-431; Baltes (1996); and Carone (2004). This alternative reading does not vitiate my discussion, however, given that my focus is on the surface meaning of Timaeus' cosmology and its function as a myth.

benefactor only indirectly—accidentally even. As Timaeus shows us his most important god as primarily, if not exclusively, concerned with other gods, it becomes clear that our role in the cosmos is ultimately minor. Our species' importance should not be overestimated.

A major qualification to Timaeus' challenge to anthropocentrism should be added, however, since he claims that part of us is in fact divine and created by the Demiurge himself. He describes the Demiurge's construction of our immortal, rational souls immediately after reporting his instructions to the other gods:

> Ταῦτ' εἶπε, καὶ πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸν πρότερον κρατῆρα, ἐν ᾧ τὴν τοῦ παντὸς ψυχὴν κεραννὺς ἔμισγεν, τὰ τῶν πρόσθεν ὑπόλοιπα κατεχεῖτο μίσγων τρόπον μέν τινα τὸν αὐτόν, ἀκήρατα δὲ οὐκέτι κατὰ ταὐτὰ ὡσαύτως, ἀλλὰ δεύτερα καὶ τρίτα. συστήσας δὲ τὸ πᾶν διεῖλεν ψυχὰς ἰσαρίθμους τοῖς ἄστροις, ἔνειμέν θ' ἑκάστην πρὸς ἕκαστον, καὶ ἐμβιβάσας ὡς ἐς ὄχημα τὴν τοῦ παντὸς φύσιν ἔδειξεν, νόμους τε τοὺς εἱμαρμένους εἶπεν αὐταῖς, ὅτι γένεσις πρώτη μὲν ἔσοιτο τεταγμένη μία πᾶσιν, ἵνα μήτις ἐλαττοῖτο ὑπ' αὐτοῦ, δέοι δὲ σπαρείσας αὐτὰς εἰς τὰ προσήκοντα ἑκάσταις ἕκαστα ὄργανα χρόνων φῦναι ζῴων τὸ θεοσεβέστατον …
>
> He said these things, and once more into the bowl where he had mixed and combined the soul of the All he poured the remainder of the previous ingredients. He mixed them in in much the same way, though these were no longer pure in absolutely the same way, but of second and third rank. And once he had put it all together, he divided into as many souls as there are stars and assigned each soul to one star. Having placed them on a carriage of sorts he showed them the nature of the All and declared to them the foreordained laws: the same original birth would be assigned to all of them, that none may be put at a disadvantage by him. Then, after he had sown each of them into the appropriate instrument of time, they should naturally become the most god-revering of animals … (41d3-42a)

The Demiurge only makes one part of us, our rational souls, while leaving our bodies and mortal soul-parts to his auxiliaries (41c6-d3). Insofar as *the Demiurge* has made a part of us, we are akin to the gods, but insofar as it is *only a part of us* that he has made, we are clearly inferior to them. We are neither completely divine nor completely mortal, but a combination of both. Though we are animals, as "the most god-revering of animals" we share a bond with the gods unparalleled among mortal creatures.

The Demiurge, we should note, makes part of us akin to the gods not only by beings its creator, but also by his manner of creating it: when the Demiurge makes our rational souls, Timaeus has him use the same mixing bowl and the same ingredients (though of lesser purity) as he did for fashioning the soul of the cosmos. The Demiurge has made our souls with the same care as his greatest work. Our inferiority to the Demiurge's other creations is in no way due to any neglect on his part. In fact, the Demiurge was so generous that he made our souls akin to the perfect and supremely rational soul that governs the cosmos. Thanks to the Demiurge, we have a divine origin and a special kinship with the greatest of the gods whose motions we can observe.

The Demiurge's generosity toward us is also evident in how he prepares our souls for embodied life. To be sure, the implications of some of the details of this preparation are not entirely clear. It is hardly self-evident, for example, why the Demiurge must assign each rational soul to a star and somehow plant the former into the latter in order to make humans outstandingly pious. Instead of focusing on such strange details, however, it is best to reflect on the Demiurge's purpose in our passage and how his general treatment of our disembodied rational souls is supposed to benefit us.[102] First, we may liken the Demiurge's work throughout this process as akin to an educator's. Both when he shows our souls the nature of the universe and when he proclaims to them the laws that will shape their incarnate existence, the Demiurge furnishes our souls with vital information. On the whole, he takes care that we will be born with an innate familiarity with the heavens. Even his sowing our souls in the stars conveys on a figurative level his commitment to making us at home, as it were, in the celestial realm.

Timaeus does not clarify how the Demiurge's lessons are supposed to have a beneficial impact on our embodied lives, claiming simply that the god imparted them "in order that he be without responsibility for any future wrongdoing on their part (ἵνα τῆς ἔπειτα εἴη κακίας ἑκάστων ἀναίτιος)" (42d3-4). But it is unlikely that everything the Demiurge does for our souls is only to preserve his guiltlessness. What Timaeus is telling us, rather, is that the Demiurge has done everything in his power to enable us to lead good lives as humans. This does not help us clarify how the Demiurge's having taken our disembodied souls on a tour of the heavens can possibly help us live well now; the connection between the two is left for us to draw. Though Timaeus does not say so explicitly, he suggests that our prenatal familiarity with the heavens enables—or even predisposes—us to gaze at them and study their motions while living on earth. Given that for Timaeus astronomy is supremely noble and conducive to happiness, if the Demiurge is responsible for our ability to pursue this activity he truly has done everything in his power to make life good for us. As he portrays the Demiurge's treatment of our rational souls, then, Timaeus reveals the god's generosity toward us and grounds his claims about the astronomy's value in an account of our divine origin.

One last feature of this passage worth remarking on is that it portrays the Demiurge as readying every soul for its future lives in exactly the same way, favoring none over the others. According to Timaeus, the Demiurge has taken care that every human being should benefit from his generosity in equal measure, having made no distinctions between their souls as he prepared them. Thanks to the Demiurge, the possibility of cultivating wisdom and leading truly happy lives is, at least in principle, available to all human beings alike. We should therefore regard ourselves as fortunate for the treatment our souls received from the Demiurge prior to embodiment, but not as any more fortunate than anyone else. To adopt the Demiurge's perspective means not only seeing all human beings as sharing a

[102] My discussion here overlaps in significant ways with the analysis of this passage in Broadie (2012) 38, 101-104, though Broadie emphasizes questions of agency and individual responsibility.

single purpose in life, but also recognizing that we all are just as suitably equipped to fulfill it. It means, among other things, appreciating the unity of our species.[103]

On the whole, Timaeus' portrayal of the Demiurge's creation of our souls suggests that the god is anything but indifferent toward human beings. But for all our appreciation of the Demiurge's generosity, we should also recognize how limited that generosity is. To begin with, the Demiurge's gift to human beings does not guarantee wisdom and happiness, only the capacity to attain these. Unlike the astral gods and the cosmos, whom the Demiurge crafted in a manner that ensures their eternal wisdom and happiness, humans need to work toward such a state, our divine origin notwithstanding. Whether we benefit or not from the Demiurge's generosity is ultimately up to us, and our failures do not diminish the value of his work. He is satisfied with having merely granted us the possibility of a life that will honor our divine origin, and there is nothing at stake for him in whether we succeed or not. Whereas it would compromise the beauty of the Demiurge's whole project if the other gods were somehow defective or unable to fulfill their purpose, our lesser significance and inferior nature allow him to be content with making us perfectible rather than perfect. Even if we should see the Demiurge as our benefactor, then, it remains difficult not to regard him as unconcerned with our individual actions and fates.

Another factor that may limit our appreciation of the Demiurge's generosity toward us is that only a part of us, our rational soul, has any relationship with him. Timaeus encourages us to identify with this part of ourselves only, but this is something that many people will find neither easy nor true to their experiences. Furthermore, anyone who does not feel the pull of astronomy as strongly as Timaeus does might scoff at the notion that we are somehow naturally suited to pursue that kind of knowledge. Taking the Demiurge seriously as one's benefactor, then, requires both thinking of oneself in an unusual light and being receptive to Timaeus' idea that astronomy is necessary for human flourishing. Although the Demiurge's gift extends to all of mankind, it may be a gift that only philosophers in Timaeus' mold can take full advantage of. Many people would have trouble seeing it as a gift at all. The image of divine care that Timaeus offers here could be effective on an audience with at least some openness toward philosophy, but it would hardly comfort those who are strangers to it.

We cannot doubt that, all things considered, Timaeus wants us to think of the Demiurge as a good and therefore beneficent god, from whose work we benefit in several ways. At the same time, Timaeus' description of his work suggests that his primary concern is creating the cosmos and the astral gods. His generosity extends to the human realm, but only insofar as he is responsible for the conditions that enable us to develop our rationality and lead good lives. The Demiurge takes great care in constructing our rational souls and preparing them for incarnate lives, but Timaeus makes it clear that this happened long before our individual births and before the Demiurge withdrew into inactivity. For all that we owe the Demiurge, he is at this point a distant god, whose actions we can grasp

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[103] Zuckert (2011) 350 makes a similar point, highlighting the difference in perspective from Socrates' in the *Republic*: "[Timaeus'] argument may be good for establishing the dignity, if not partial divinity of human beings in general; but if there are no natural differences in intellectual talents, proclivities or potentials, there is no just basis for the division of labor."

only through a reconstruction like Timaeus'. The god who is most active and prominent in Timaeus' account is least present in the universe we live in.

Of course, even without the Demiurge's active involvement, the gods he has created remain in the world and preserve its order. He is able to step back because the cosmos and the other gods can continue his work variously and jointly. The gods the Demiurge has created are no doubt his inferiors, but they are also able to care for themselves and mortals without any ongoing help from him. Awesome as the Demiurge is, he does not eclipse the other gods Timaeus discusses entirely. These other gods are impressive in their own right, but they are also, unlike the Demiurge, gods whose natures and activities we can—and, according to Timaeus, should—observe. Thus, even though Timaeus' focus throughout much of his cosmology seems to be on the Demiurge, we also need to consider what he has to say about the other gods.

iib. Timaeus' Gods—The Cosmos

Aside from the Demiurge, none of Timaeus' gods is as important as the cosmos itself: it comes into being first of all and it encompasses all other living beings, mortal and immortal alike. The cosmos, furthermore, is the god Timaeus discusses in greatest detail, even if the Demiurge plays the leading role in his cosmology. No discussion of Timaeus' gods, then, can be complete without some detailed reflections on this deity, to which I now turn. Once again, I divide my discussion into three main parts, focusing first on the cosmos' main characteristics, then on its activities and last on its relation to humans.

(α) The Cosmos' Nature

Timaeus stresses that the Demiurge constructed the cosmos as a rational living being, building both a body and a soul for it (30b1-c1). Since Timaeus discusses the body of the cosmos before its soul, my own reflections on this god's nature begin there as well. First, consider Timaeus' claim that when building the body of the cosmos the Demiurge left no fire, air, water or earth outside of it for the three following reasons:

> πρῶτον μὲν ἵνα ὅλον ὅτι μάλιστα ζῷον τέλεον ἐκ τελέων τῶν μερῶν εἴη, πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ἕν, ἄτε οὐχ ὑπολελειμμένων ἐξ ὧν ἄλλο τοιοῦτον γένοιτ' ἄν, ἔτι δὲ ἵν' ἀγήρων καὶ ἄνοσον ᾖ, κατανοῶν ὡς συστάτῳ σώματι θερμὰ καὶ ψυχρὰ καὶ πάνθ' ὅσα δυνάμεις ἰσχυρὰς ἔχει περιιστάμενα ἔξωθεν καὶ προσπίπτοντα ἀκαίρως λύει καὶ νόσους γῆράς τε ἐπάγοντα φθίνειν ποιεῖ.
>
> First, that it may be as far as possible a whole living being, complete and made of complete parts; second, that it may be one, since nothing was left out of which another of its sort might come into being; third, that it may be ageless and free of disease, since he realized that when hot or cold things or anything else that has violent powers envelop a composite body from outside and collide against it they

> destroy it before its time and make it waste away by bringing diseases and old age upon it. (32d1-33a6)

For Timaeus, the first thing the Demiurge did for the cosmos' body was to ensure that it would display three closely related features: completeness, uniqueness, and incorruptibility. The combination of these features establishes the cosmos' physical perfection: there is nothing outside of it that can make it any more complete than it already is, nor anything that can in any way threaten its integrity. Having nothing outside of itself, the cosmos enjoys both absolute material completeness and invulnerability. It has the best conceivable body.

Timaeus elaborates on the cosmos' physical perfection when he describes the shape the Demiurge gave it:

> σχῆμα δὲ ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ τὸ πρέπον καὶ τὸ συγγενές. τῷ δὲ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὑτῷ ζῷα περιέχειν μέλλοντι ζῴῳ πρέπον ἂν εἴη σχῆμα τὸ περιειληφὸς ἐν αὑτῷ πάντα ὁπόσα σχήματα· διὸ καὶ σφαιροειδές, ἐκ μέσου πάντῃ πρὸς τὰς τελευτὰς ἴσον ἀπέχον, κυκλοτερὲς αὐτὸ ἐτορνεύσατο, πάντων τελεώτατον ὁμοιότατόν τε αὑτὸ ἑαυτῷ σχημάτων, νομίσας μυρίῳ κάλλιον ὅμοιον ἀνομοίου.
>
> He also gave it the shape that was appropriate and akin to it. The shape appropriate for the living being that would contain all living beings would be the one that encompasses all shapes: thus, he made it round and spherical, with all its extremes equally distant from its center, the most complete of all shapes and most like itself, thinking that what is similar is infinitely more beautiful than what is dissimilar. (33b1-7)

Discussing cosmos' spherical shape, Timaeus goes beyond his negative articulation of the cosmos' material completeness as having nothing outside of it and emphasizes that it actually encompasses all other living beings within itself. Furthermore, the matchless uniformity of the sphere gives Timaeus grounds to add superlative beauty to the attributes that define the body of the cosmos. Last, by making the cosmos a sphere, the Demiurge can have it constantly rotating in place, the form of motion "which is most closely associated with reason and understanding (τὴν περὶ νοῦν καὶ φρόνησιν μάλιστα οὖσαν)" (31a1-4). The constancy and uniformity of the cosmos's spherical body match its rationality, of which rotation in place is only a partial expression.[104] Even if Timaeus' procedure here is a bit opaque, his purpose throughout is undoubtedly to build his case for the cosmos' having a truly perfect body.

The last stage of Timaeus' argument for the bodily perfection of the cosmos turns on explaining why it has no use for the body parts that other animals, including ourselves, commonly feature. Since it has no external environment, the cosmos has no need of eyes, ears, a mouth, excretory organs, hands, or feet (33c1-d5). Here Timaeus does more than

[104] Cf. *Laws* X.897d3-898b8. Lee (1976) offers a comprehensive explanation of why rotation is the most rational type of motion.

simply list which body parts the cosmos lacks; he is also pointing to the radical differences between its body and our own. This contrast opens up an unusual viewpoint from which to examine what we think of our bodily form. From this perspective, the complexity of the human body is not so much constitutive of its beauty as it is an index of our incomplete, needy nature. Timaeus has, of course, already mentioned that the Demiurge gave the cosmos a spherical body and described it as singularly beautiful. We might think his enthusiastic listing of the various body parts the cosmos does not share with us simply follows from that. Yet the cosmos' lack of such parts is significant in its own right. The cosmos is without limbs and organs like ours because there is nothing outside of it. The Demiurge exhausted all available material in building its body and decided that "being self-sufficient it would be better than if it needed other things (αὔταρκες ὂν ἄμεινον ἔσεσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ προσδεὲς ἄλλων)" (33d1-3). A few lines later, Timaeus adds that the cosmos is "able to keep itself company and lacking nothing else on account of its virtue, a sufficient acquaintance and friend to itself (δι' ἀρετὴν δὲ αὐτὸν αὑτῷ δυνάμενον συγγίγνεσθαι καὶ οὐδενὸς ἑτέρου προσδεόμενον, γνώριμον δὲ καὶ φίλον ἱκανῶς αὐτὸν αὑτῷ)" (34b5-8). Unlike the cosmos, we need both other things and other people. By closely linking the cosmos' lack of distinct body parts such as eyes and hands with its perfect self-sufficiency, Timaeus invites us to see these parts as reminders of our own neediness and our distance from a fully divine life.

Without explicitly foregrounding it, Timaeus' description of the universe's body implies a sharp criticism of anthropomorphic conceptions of the gods. For Timaeus, those who describe the gods as similar to us in shape could be taken to obscure the gods' perfection and self-sufficiency, since such a physique would only befit them if they were somehow as needy as we are. Although his own portrayal of the Demiurge and his helpers is anthropomorphic in some regards, in his case this is clearly a poetic device that is balanced by his markedly non-anthropomorphic presentation of the cosmos and the planets. What Timaeus says about the world's body, then, complements his portrayal of the Demiurge by making it clear why we should not we should not imagine the gods—at least the most powerful ones—as being similar to us in shape. If the cosmos is so perfect that it has no use for body parts like our own, why should the Demiurge, a god of even greater stature?

The cosmos' body is second in importance to its soul, which allows it to live as a perfectly rational god. Timaeus' account of how the Demiurge built the cosmos' soul is a notoriously difficult stretch of text, so my discussion will pass over some of its more difficult details. First of all, we should note that as an intricately proportioned mixture (35a1-36b6), the soul of the cosmos has a rational, orderly structure. Second, because its different circles move in accordance with a fixed set of ratios and it rotates unceasingly (36b6-37e5), its motions are paradigmatically rational and consistent. Last, its rational structure and motions enable the world's soul to identify whatever it comes into contact with without error. In a rather obscure passage, Timaeus suggests that about whatever it chances upon, whether an intelligible or a perceptible entity, the world's soul can articulate what it is the same as and what it is different from and qualify its judgments about each thing precisely and in relation to everything else (37a5-b3). From each encounter with a perceptible being, a "true account (λόγος … ἀληθὴς)" emerges, while "understanding and knowledge (νοῦς ἐπιστήμη τε)" result from judgments about intelligible objects (37b3-

c3). The soul of the cosmos is an ideal knower, forming rational, correct judgments about all beings.

Both the Demiurge and the cosmos, then, are paradigmatically rational, though in different ways: whereas the Demiurge reasons about how to craft the finest possible products, the cosmos moves in the way that is most appropriate for a rational being and forms accurate judgments that have no apparent practical import. They present two different faces of reason at work, complementing one another.

(β) The Cosmos' Activity

What Timaeus says about the cosmos' activity also complements his descriptions of the Demiurge at work. To begin with, whereas the Demiurge imposes order on sensible being, it is the cosmic soul's responsibility to maintain that order for all time. Unlike the Demiurge, the cosmos does not deliberate about how to make the world as beautiful as possible. It simply moves as its structure and reason dictate. Yet these motions preserve the constancy and regularity of the whole of physical reality. They do so, first of all, by perpetually guiding the motions of the planets and stars, which the Demiurge has created to mark time and make the cosmos "a moving image of eternity (εἰκὼ … κινητόν τινα αἰῶνος)" (37d5). Without the regular, proportionate motions of the world's soul, there would be no measure of time and the Demiurge's creation would not reflect the intelligible model's eternity. The soul of the cosmos thus cooperates with the Demiurge by enabling him to introduce measures of time in the universe and preserving those measures evermore. Because of the cosmos' constant activity, the beauty and harmony of the Demiurge's work persist through all time without degrading.

The cosmos' soul has a crucial cognitive function in addition to its role as an orderly mover—though the relation between the two is unclear. Its unerring judgments do not constitute the same type of knowledge as Timaeus ascribes to the Demiurge, but that does not make them any less impressive. Though not in the same way, both gods can access intelligible forms effortlessly and possess a comprehensive grasp of reality. Timaeus' description of what the cosmos does is therefore no less illuminating about what a truly divine perspective on reality must be like than his portrayal of the Demiurge. In both Timaeus develops powerful images of divine knowledge, sketching for aspiring philosophers the type of understanding that they ought to imitate.

One major difference between the Demiurge's and the cosmos' activities is that the former acts once and for all while the latter is unceasingly active. But even if it is constantly active, the cosmos' influence is in some respects quite limited, like the Demiurge's. First of all, the cosmos' soul rules the whole universe in a circumscribed manner: though its motions guide the celestial bodies and allow for order among mortal creatures, it does not have a choice whether and how to perform this function. The cosmos' soul does what the Demiurge has programmed it to do. It cannot modify its movements in response to any particular events or out of concern for any of the cosmos' occupants. It cares for and benefits everything that exists within it, but it does so impersonally, without attention to the wellbeing of anything or anyone in particular.

(γ) The Cosmos' Relation to Humans

There is no indication that the cosmos' care includes overseeing human affairs. In the end, from the human perspective the cosmos is almost as distant a god as the Demiurge. Like the Demiurge, the cosmos appears as a god who can neither make human beings its primary concern nor intervene directly in their lives. Both of them benefit us greatly by creating or preserving the conditions in which we can live and thrive, but neither of them seems to do anything specifically for our sake. For Timaeus, it seems, being a god of the highest order entails different forms of indifference to the vagaries of the human realm. As we will see, this is a major point of divergence between Timaeus' theology and the Athenian's, which emphasizes that the gods attend to human affairs.

To say that the cosmos is distant from us is not to say, of course, that it has no significant relation with humans at all. In fact, there is more than one way in which each of us either has or can cultivate a connection with the cosmos. First of all, the Demiurge fashioned our rational souls out of the same materials and in virtually the same manner as he did the soul of the cosmos. Qua rational and immortal beings, we share the same origin with the soul of the cosmos. We are undoubtedly inferior to the cosmos, but we are nevertheless its relatives, so to speak. Furthermore, we are the beneficiaries of the cosmos' motions: without these we would not be able to live or have any order in our lives. Even if the cosmos has no intention to benefit us, it is still appropriate that we should feel some gratitude toward it. We are the cosmos' kin and its beneficiaries simply by virtue of being human.

Ultimately, Timaeus is most interested in the relation each of us can develop with the cosmos by studying its motions. Even though our rational souls are made from the same elements as the cosmos', their resemblance to their divine sibling is (temporarily) vitiated when they are first bound to a mortal body. Timaeus stresses how disruptive an effect incarnation has on our souls (42a3-b2, 43a6-44b7). Studying the celestial motions is the only way we can restore them to their pristine state (47b5-c4, 90c6-d7), so that it is ultimately up to each of us to determine how much like the greatest of the visible gods we are. When Timaeus speaks of the kinship between our souls and the cosmos', he is not simply making a point about our divine origin, but also—and more importantly—arguing that each of us has the potential to become godlike in this life. He claims that if we take the cosmos as our paradigm and assimilate ourselves to it as far as possible, we will attain the best life available to us. The cosmos' unvarying motions, then, can transform each of us for the better, but only if we take the initiative and work at understanding them. By helping us cultivate our rationality, the cosmos extends an invaluable benefit to us, but this gift is ineffectual if we fail to take advantage of it. Though Timaeus does not ascribe any intentions or wishes to it, he does give us reason to see the cosmos as our generous benefactor, much like the Demiurge.

Timaeus encourages us to think of both of his leading gods as clearly on our side when it comes to living in accordance with reason. Of course, neither the cosmos nor the Demiurge feel affection or anything of the sort toward us, and their favor has a detached, impersonal character. In spite of our connection with these gods, our individual fate is not something they can worry about. From the cosmos' perspective no less than the Demiurge's, human beings appear quite small. On the one hand, we should be grateful that

we enjoy such gods' favor; on the other hand, we cannot forget that in their majesty they remain aloof from our world and our choices. Regardless of the contrast between the Demiurge's idleness and the cosmos' constant activity, then, their influence on human affairs is comparably restricted.

iic. Timaeus' Gods—Astral Gods and Auxiliaries

Timaeus also devotes a significant portion of his account to gods who, while not as powerful as the Demiurge and the cosmos, are nevertheless more directly involved in our lives. Timaeus may consider complete, embodied humans as the objects of the gods' concern after all. Before we address these lesser gods' relation with humans, however, we need to specify who they are, what they are like, and their role in the universe.

(α) The Identity of the Auxiliaries

On the surface at least, Timaeus discusses two groups of gods who are somehow subordinate to the Demiurge and the cosmos: the astral gods, i.e. the planets and the stars, and the gods who continue the Demiurge's work by creating mortal creatures. The identity of the latter group, however, is not entirely clear. On the one hand, they seem to be anthropomorphic gods, given how they fashion our mortal souls and bodies. Because of this, it is possible that we are meant to identify the Demiurge's followers with traditional anthropomorphic deities like Athena, Hephaestus, and their ilk.[105] On the other hand, Timaeus does not name any of them and, uncharacteristically for such gods, has them working as a unified collective where none plays a distinctive role. Furthermore, the Demiurge addresses these gods as "works whose craftsman and father I am (ὧν ἐγὼ δημιουργὸς πατήρ τε ἔργων)" (41a7), an appellation that does not fit the gods whose origins Timaeus explicitly refuses to discuss a few lines above at 40d6-7. Thus, we should probably identify the Demiurge's auxiliaries with the planets and the stars instead of with traditional anthropomorphic gods.

Taking the astral gods as the creators of mortal creatures, though preferable, is obviously not without its problems. It is difficult to see how the planets and the stars could actually construct our mortal souls and bodies. To begin with, the celestial bodies, being neither anthropomorphic nor craftsmen in any obvious sense, lack the organs and tools they would need to fashion our bodies as Timaeus seems to claim they did. Furthermore, the activities Timaeus assigns to the astral gods appear to be very different from, if not incompatible with, fashioning mortal creatures as if they were craftsmen: they all move along their orbit and revolve constantly, each "always thinking the same thoughts about the same things (περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν ἀεὶ τὰ αὐτὰ ἑαυτῷ διανοουμένῳ)" (40a7-b4). The work of the planets and the stars is constant rather than a distinct event. Furthermore, their thinking focuses on eternal being instead of a creative act. Timaeus makes it difficult for us to envision the astral gods as our creators.

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[105] Lefka (2013) 129-138 suggests this as a possible reading.

It is possible, as some interpreters have suggested, that Timaeus' portrayal of the creation of mortal beings, especially its anthropomorphism, is not to be taken literally, but rather as a mythic representation of the essential role the celestial gods play in the genesis, growth and nurture of earthly life.[106] This applies above all to the Earth, which Timaeus calls "our nurse (τροφὸν … ἡμετέραν)" and "the guardian and maker of day and night (φύλακα καὶ δημιουργὸν νυκτός τε καὶ ἡμέρας)" (40b8-c2), as well as the Sun, without whose light and warmth no earthly being would be able to live. Under this reading, Timaeus is not ultimately interested in whether and how humans were created or not, but rather in how the gods make it possible for us to live and fulfill our natural purpose.

Yet Timaeus describes the creation of our mortal parts at such length and in such detail that it seems quite unlikely that he expects his audience to look past creation as though it were no more than a metaphorical veil. By having the gods design our bodies such that we are best equipped to lead rational lives, Timaeus offers a far more compelling illustration of their care than he otherwise could. Furthermore, that these gods care for us is not just an artifact of myth for Timaeus. It is an idea he advances earnestly. Thus, even those of us who suspect that Timaeus is not committed to a literal act of creation for our species must acknowledge the didactic purpose of his narrating such an act. What this portion of Timaeus' account lacks in accuracy, it makes up for in how vividly it shows that we have the gods to thank for our ability to live well. Although Timaeus himself may believe that the Earth and the celestial gods care for and benefit us simply by enabling us to feed ourselves and develop our rationality, such care would likely strike most people as too impersonal and free from the concern befitting truly benevolent gods. By contrast, Timaeus' description of these gods as anthropomorphic craftsmen is likelier to inspire gratitude among a wide range of listeners. To the extent that Timaeus' identification of the gods who fashion our bodies with the celestial gods would facilitate a more skeptical reading of this part of his account, it would be self-undermining from a protreptic perspective. By leaving the identity of the Demiurge's imitators unspecified, Timaeus can at once avoid undercutting the credibility of this section of his account and allow part of his audience to recognize these divine craftsmen as the celestial gods' mythic doubles.

(β) The Auxiliaries' Nature and Activities

Thanks to their dual appearance, these gods resemble both the Demiurge and the cosmos. First, as creators they clearly share the Demiurge's generosity in their desire to fashion the human body in a way that makes it possible for us to lead rational lives—Timaeus even refers to sight and hearing as things that "have been gifted (δεδωρῆσθαι)" to us by our creators (47a1-d1). Like the Demiurge, they endeavor to make the whole cosmos and its parts as beautiful and good as possible without standing to gain anything from their work. Furthermore, as they go about their task Timaeus presents them operating in essentially the same way as the Demiurge: the kinds of mortal creatures they create are those contained in the intelligible model (39e6-a2, 41b7-c2), and they deliberate and make choices to ensure that their product is the best possible (e.g. 74e10-75c7). Although

[106] E.g. Cornford (1937) 141; Carone (2005) 56; and Burnyeat (2006) 7.

Timaeus does not have the lesser gods use mathematical structures, they imitate the Demiurge's craftsmanship faithfully and continue his project of bringing as much order as possible into perceptible reality.

As celestial bodies, on the other hand, they resemble the cosmos' more austere perfection: Timaeus explicitly claims that "in imitation of the universe (τῷ … παντὶ προσεικάζων)" the Demiurge gave them spherical bodies (40a4). They too lack nothing outside themselves and are completely invulnerable to external threats. Fittingly, they also imitate the cosmos' rationality in how they move and think, since they rotate in place and are always thinking about the same things (40a8-b1). Furthermore, these gods' movement along their orbits not only displays their rationality, but it also makes visible the motions of the cosmos itself and allows them to serve as the markers of time. They collaborate with the cosmos in preserving its internal order and its resemblance to its eternal model.

(γ) The Auxiliaries' Relation to Humans

Though the celestial gods are like the Demiurge and the cosmos in key respects, they do appear more attentive of human beings than either of their superiors. Consider, for example, the contrast between how these gods design our bodies and Demiurge's treatment of our disembodied rational souls. Although both the Demiurge and his imitators are impelled by the desire to equip us as well as possible to lead rational lives, they proceed rather differently. The Demiurge, on the one hand, gives little thought to the challenges of embodied life and cares for us only as discarnate intellects. His auxiliaries, on the other hand, are aware of what life as a mortal being entails and endeavor to make our bodies a suitable vessel for our minds (esp. 44d3-45a2, 69c5-70a2). Whereas the Demiurge cares only for one part of us—admittedly, the most important part—his imitators care for the whole of us.

These gods also have a more direct impact on our lives than the cosmos as celestial bodies. To begin with, the brilliance of the planets and the stars makes it possible for us to track not only their individual movements but also those of the cosmos as a whole. Thus, they aid our endeavors to learn and imitate the revolutions of the whole universe and restore rational order in our souls. For Timaeus, we can even think of the Sun as having been brought into existence for this purpose:

> ἵνα δ' εἴη μέτρον ἐναργές τι πρὸς ἄλληλα βραδυτῆτι καὶ τάχει καὶ τὰ περὶ τὰς ὀκτὼ φορὰς πορεύοιτο, φῶς ὁ θεὸς ἀνῆψεν ἐν τῇ πρὸς γῆν δευτέρᾳ τῶν περιόδων, ὃ δὴ νῦν κεκλήκαμεν ἥλιον, ἵνα ὅτι μάλιστα εἰς ἅπαντα φαίνοι τὸν οὐρανὸν μετάσχοι τε ἀριθμοῦ τὰ ζῷα ὅσοις ἦν προσῆκον, μαθόντα παρὰ τῆς ταὐτοῦ καὶ ὁμοίου περιφορᾶς.
>
> And in order that there be a clear measure of the relative slowness and quickness with which they (i.e. the celestial bodies) traverse their eight orbits, the god kindled a light on the second circle from the Earth, which we now call the Sun, above all so that it might illuminate the whole sky and all the animals for which it is appropriate

> have a share in number by learning it from the revolution of the Same and the similar. (39b2-c1)

Furthermore, as mentioned above, Timaeus refers to the Earth's unique role in providing us with a home and nourishment by referring to it as "our nurse" (40b8). Again, although it is difficult to see the celestial bodies as specifically and purposely benefitting us, Timaeus makes it clear that they play an active, indispensable part enabling us to live well (or at all). Both as creators and celestial bodies, then, these gods benefit and care for human beings more directly than either the Demiurge or the cosmos.

Aside from how the lesser gods continue and complement the work of the Demiurge and the cosmos, they have a function unparalleled in what either of their superiors does: they make sure that humans who have led unbecoming lives receive their due after death by being reincarnated as different animals. The punitive dimension of these gods' work as creators is especially clear in Timaeus' explanation of how aquatic animals came into existence:

> τὸ δὲ τέταρτον γένος ἔνυδρον γέγονεν ἐκ τῶν μάλιστα ἀνοητοτάτων καὶ ἀμαθεστάτων, οὓς οὐδ᾽ ἀναπνοῆς καθαρᾶς ἔτι ἠξίωσαν οἱ μεταπλάττοντες, ὡς τὴν ψυχὴν ὑπὸ πλημμελείας πάσης ἀκαθάρτως ἐχόντων, ἀλλ᾽ ἀντὶ λεπτῆς καὶ καθαρᾶς ἀναπνοῆς ἀέρος εἰς ὕδατος θολερὰν καὶ βαθεῖαν ἔωσαν ἀνάπνευσιν· ὅθεν ἰχθύων ἔθνος καὶ τὸ τῶν ὀστρέων συναπάντων τε ὅσα ἔνυδρα γέγονεν, δίκην ἀμαθίας ἐσχάτης ἐσχάτας οἰκήσεις εἰληχότων.
>
> And the fourth kind, which lives in the water, has come to be from the most completely mindless and foolish men, whom those who were refashioning them thought no longer deserved to breathe pure air because their souls had been corrupted by every sort of wrongdoing. Instead of breathing fine and pure air, they pushed them into the water to breathe in its depth and murkiness. From here all fish, bivalves and other water-dwelling animals have come into being, acquiring their extremely remote dwellings as punishment for their extreme stupidity. (92a7-c1)

These gods' care for human beings, it seems, is of a significantly wider scope than that exercised by the Demiurge or the cosmos. Aside from creating and maintaining the conditions that enable us to lead rational lives, they also judge our behavior. Human affairs are undoubtedly of greater concern to the lesser gods than they are to their superiors.

At the same time, we should recognize that the gods' aim in having defective souls be reborn as lower animals goes beyond punishment. According to Timaeus, the gods create the lower animals not just to penalize vicious human beings after death, but because these animals' existence is equally necessary as ours if the cosmos is to be as complete and beautiful as possible. In the Demiurge's instructions to his imitators, we find the directive to bring into existence *all* mortal creatures (40b7-c2), but no mention of post-mortem retribution. Exactly how these creatures are created is not of primary importance to him or his helpers. Although the lesser gods are not indifferent to human affairs, their punishments for us are a means of making the cosmos more beautiful, not a sign that they

are somehow offended by human wrongdoing. We are the first and the finest of the creatures these gods fashion, but we are also only part of their work and our failure is something they count on in order to complete it. On the whole, then, Timaeus' presentation of the gods' reincarnation scheme can both heighten and deflate our sense of their care: on the one hand, they pay more attention to how each of us behaves than their superiors; on the other hand, this attention does not register our success or failure as intrinsically important.

Although according to Timaeus the Demiurge tasked his subordinates with "ruling over mortal creatures and guiding them in the best and finest way possible (ἄρχειν, καὶ κατὰ δύναμιν ὅτι κάλλιστα καὶ ἄριστα τὸ θνητὸν διακυβερνᾶν ζῷον)" (42e2-3), their influence on our realm is quite limited after all. We benefit greatly from their fashioning of our bodies and their motions in the celestial circuits, but their primary concern is not to provide for us but rather to establish or maintain the beauty of the whole cosmos. Their care does, of course, make all the difference for us, since without it we would not be able to choose and successfully pursue our own good. But the choice ultimately lies with each of us, and none of the gods is responsible for what we do or what happens to us throughout our lives. Though they are somehow vigilant of how each of us behaves in life, they do not act on their knowledge by intervening in our lives. Instead, they pass judgment on each of us once our lives have ended, a judgment that can only be fair if we are truly responsible for our conduct. This is precisely what Timaeus emphasizes by not giving his gods an active role in steering our lives, even if he encourages us to see them as our benefactors and judges. They do just enough for us to admire, fear and feel gratitude toward them, but not enough to compromise our self-determination.

On the whole, then, Timaeus is remarkably consistent in his presentation of the various gods. All of his gods are paradigmatically good and rational, and they all play key roles in making and keeping the physical world orderly and beautiful. We have all of them to thank for our ability to live rationally, but none of them is close enough to us to intervene in our affairs or play an active role in our search for wisdom. No matter how generous Timaeus' gods are, he is very clear that taking advantage of their gifts is something that we are responsible for and ultimately does not affect the gods' conduct or outlook.[107] Timaeus' theology highlights not only the superlative nobility of philosophy and natural inquiry as activities, but also humans' responsibility for their fate in spite of all the gods do. Next, I discuss why this should matter for someone like Critias.

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[107] The Eleatic Visitor's cosmic myth in the *Statesman* offers a comparable vision of human self-reliance in the contrast it establishes between our condition in the age of Cronus and our current predicament (see esp. 2421d3-272a7, 273e6-274d8). See Miller (2004) 49-53 on the political significance of the god's absence, and Ferrari (1995) 396-397, who draws a useful contrast between the view of divinity and history embodied in the Visitor's myth and the one Critias illustrates in his story.

iii. Timaeus' Gods and Critias

As we approach the possible effect of Timaeus' portrayal of the Demiurge and the other gods on Critias and others who share his perspective, it is worth emphasizing first of all that Timaeus presents his theology in the form of a myth rich in vivid descriptions and poetic charm. As I argued in the previous chapter, Critias is someone who, even if he claims to value factual or historical accuracy, is ultimately childlike in his susceptibility to the pleasures of storytelling. By presenting a distinctly philosophical and unconventional view of the gods and the cosmos within an epic of sorts that, though sometimes difficult, rivals Critias' in its poetry and grandeur, Timaeus makes such a view as appealing as it could be to anyone who loves a good story. Ideally, then, Timaeus' account should entice someone in Critias' position into at least taking an innovative theology seriously and reexamining his views about the gods.

As for how the substance of Timaeus' theology would challenge Critias and people like him, that is not immediately evident and requires some interpretive work. Plato's text, of course, offers no clear evidence of Critias being provoked or jarred by what Timaeus says. This could be taken to imply that there is no substantive disagreement between the two characters and their visions are in perfect harmony with one another. Furthermore, there seems to be some continuity between Critias' understanding of the gods and Timaeus'. First, in Critias' account of ancient Athens' origins in the *Timaeus* Athena plays the role of a generous, rational creator comparable to the Demiurge himself, her product being Athens' "orderly arrangement and structure (διακόσμησιν καὶ σύνταξιν)" (24c4).[108] Critias also seems to echo Timaeus' denial of divine φθόνος in the *Critias*, where he emphasizes that each Olympian received their earthly lot "without strife (οὐ κατ' ἔριν)" (109b1-5).[109] Judging from the surface of the text, at least, Critias should be receptive to Timaeus' theology and regard it as compatible with his own religious outlook.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that Timaeus' portrayal of the gods cannot reorient the perspective on the divine that Critias articulates simply because the tension between them is not openly acknowledged. After all, Timaeus' aim is not to attack conventional piety and replace it altogether, and Critias is not being called to abandon any of his beliefs about the gods or choose between Athena and the Demiurge. Rather, Timaeus challenges Critias—and those of Plato's readers who find their own perspective reflected in Critias—to regard the gods that are most important to them in a new light.

(α) Timaeus' Gods as a Challenge to Parochialism

Both Critias' and Timaeus' gods are dedicated to establishing order in the world. Yet they operate on vastly different scales: Timaeus' divine hierarchy assigns Athena, Poseidon, and company a fairly low rank and makes their work appear comparatively small. Consider that whereas Athena's structuring of the Athenian polity is confined to a

[108] Cf. Druart (1999) 164-168.

[109] Brisson (2000) 229 treats this passage as a typical Platonic rejection of divine jealousy or ill will.

particular locale and historical epoch, the Demiurge's ordering is on the largest possible scale, a work superlatively beautiful and everlasting. As we saw in the preceding chapter, when Critias first introduces his story Athena appears as the original the Athenians imitate and represent in the human realm. Yet in the context that Timaeus' cosmology provides we can see Athena herself as an imitator (of the Demiurge) and her work as comparatively limited in scope. Though she remains a goddess worthy of our reverence, in the Demiurge's shadow Athena loses much of her power as a paradigm.

In light of Timaeus' cosmic theology, Critias' focus on Athena is revealed as somewhat parochial and partisan. He represents the gods' role in our world in a manner that, while suitable for a patriotic encomium, is clearly incomplete and shallow when considered from the broader, cosmic perspective appropriate for a philosopher. Timaeus' cosmology, then, is more than the prelude to his account that Critias expected: instead of simply setting the stage for the confrontation between Athens and Atlantis, it provides a background wherein this conflict appears less monumental and the work of Athena and her ilk can be assessed more impartially. Instead of undermining Critias' beliefs, Timaeus discloses through his account a perspective from which Critias may be able to see what is familiar to him in a new light and grasp its true measure. This is a challenge, but a subtle one. It would not be appropriate for Critias to respond as if he were being refuted.

Showing Critias that the gods who are especially important to him are not as significant from a cosmic perspective is not the only way Timaeus challenges the parochialism of his worldview. Timaeus also introduces Critias to an understanding of the relations between gods and humans that is very different from the one he articulates through his story. As we saw in the previous chapter, in addition to seeing the Athenians as Athena's human representatives, Critias also thinks of them as her kin. In Critias' story, the original Athenians, from whom current Athenians are descended, were the children of Hephaestus and Earth and Athena's foster-children. Critias' Athenians' relation with the gods is one of familial kinship, which explains the special care for Athens that the gods, and especially Athena, have shown. The relation with the divine that Critias' Athenians enjoy is unique, a privilege they seem to share only with the Egyptians at Saïs. By contrast, Timaeus presents an image of our kinship with the gods that is far more abstract and universal. To begin with, since the Demiurge and his helpers create human beings, they are parents of sorts to each and every one of us. Furthermore, every rational soul has the cosmos' soul as its relative, both having been created by the Demiurge in the same manner. Timaeus even claims that the motions that constitute our rationality are "akin (συγγενεῖς)" to the thoughts and revolutions of the cosmos' mind (47b7-c1, 90a5-7, 90c7-d1). For Timaeus the most important aspect of our kinship with the gods is that we are, or at least have the potential to be, rational, and the relation itself is hardly a familial or personal bond. From his perspective, what matters most is not whether the Athenians or any other group of humans have a special connection with Athena or another god. What matters, rather, is that the Demiurge and his assistants have equipped *all* humans with the capacity to cultivate their rationality and become truly akin to the divine that way.

The care and generosity that Timaeus' gods display toward humans far exceed Athena's in scope and importance. Unlike Athena, the Demiurge and company have no favorites among us and have provided every one of us with what is required to lead a genuinely virtuous and happy life. When we bear this in mind, whatever favor particular

individuals or groups of people enjoy with other gods is ultimately secondary; after all, what the gods Timaeus speaks of have done and can do for us is already enough for each of us to be able to flourish as humans. Although Athena's tutelage enabled Critias' ancient Athenians to achieve an extraordinary feat of courage, the rest of us have no good reason to envy them: the best human life is available to us even without the help of a god like Athena, thanks to the Demiurge, the cosmos, and the celestial gods. Once we come to see ourselves as the kin of gods more important and powerful than Athena and understand the implications of that, what is supposed to make the Athenians seem extraordinary appears much less important. Whether Critias is right or not about the Athenians' close bond with Athena, for Timaeus the deeper truth is not that some of us are more god-beloved than others, but rather that all humans are equally fortunate in our kinship to the cosmic gods and the goods we receive from them.

(β) Timaeus' Gods as Paradigms for Philosophers

Our relations to the Demiurge and the cosmos also matter more than anything else for understanding how we ought to live. Becoming like them is more than the best we can do: it is what the Demiurge and his assistants have designed us for, the end around which we ought to structure our lives (90a2-d7). Timaeus even claims that those of us who fail to cultivate our rationality as he recommends are punished after death by being reincarnated into lesser, less rational creatures (42b3-d2, 90e6-92c3). A life without philosophy and natural inquiry is not just a wasted opportunity; it is actually the wrong life for a human.

Though Critias' Athenians achieved a brilliant martial feat as Athena's nurslings and imitators, the divine paradigms Timaeus reveals in his account beckon us to lead lives even better than these heroes'. Following Athena's model, the ancient Athenians were presumably philosophical, but they were also warlike, i.e. devoted to the pursuit of martial prowess and glory (24c7-d3). Indeed, their magnificent defeat of Atlantis displayed—and the telling of it celebrates—their warlike nature more than their philosophical side. Although there is no self-evident incompatibility or tension between being warlike and being philosophical, we should note that Timaeus' gods, whose work embodies the perfect rationality philosophers pursue, are not warlike in any way. The cosmos and the celestial bodies in particular are models of peacefulness. It is difficult to see how warfare could be on the agenda for anyone who wishes to imitate these gods. While the pure rationality Timaean philosophers pursue consists of "thinking divine and immortal thoughts (φρονεῖν … ἀθάνατα καὶ θεῖα)" by training one's mind on the everlasting order of the cosmos' soul (90b6-c6), even in the best conditions politics and warfare are variable and messy affairs that make our mortal imperfection especially evident. Someone whose goal is to think divine thoughts may not be altogether averse to war or shrink from it in a cowardly manner. But they should see war as a distraction from their true calling and should not actively pursue it—or even relish it as an opportunity to distinguish themselves. Perhaps the ancient Athenians were fortunate to have to battle Atlantis, as this allowed them to make manifest their kinship with Athena by emulating her martial prowess. Nonetheless, according to Timaeus' conception of godlikeness, those who do not busy themselves with

conflict lead more enviable—if not happier—lives. Admirable though Athena and the Athenians may be, they do not represent accurately the best possible life for us.

It would be a mistake to envy the Athenians' bond with Athena. Furthermore, their feats do not represent the peak of human achievement and happiness. In our admiration for the Athenians' courage, we may come to overestimate war and mistake it for the noblest human activity. Timaeus' introduction of divine models that point us to a life of reason can be considered, among other things, part of his attempt to correct such a misunderstanding. True wisdom cannot focus on human affairs, but on divine beings. By the standard Timaeus sets, Athena's combination of intelligence and pugnaciousness comes to appear like a lesser form of wisdom, one that is somewhat unbecoming of a deity and determined by distinctly human problems. For him, wisdom entails assimilating ourselves to gods who are actually quite different from us, with whom we have nothing in common besides our rationality. As we train our thoughts on these gods and become like them, we do not embrace our mortal imperfection, but rather flee it and, to a degree, overcome it. Even though this is not achievement that would elicit praise from future generations or be memorialized in a narrative like Critias', according to Timaeus we should pursue it above all else.

Timaeus' illustration of the best life allows the tension between philosophy and politics that the dialogue's opening papers over to reemerge, albeit subtly and indirectly. Although Timaeus, being both a natural philosopher and a statesman, seems to confute the notion that someone dedicated to the pursuit of wisdom would slight political engagement, his ideal of godlikeness suggests that he regards his astronomical inquiries as far nobler than his work as a politician. He and Critias ostensibly lead very similar lives, but they have a completely different perspective on their activities and their relative worth. In Critias' mind, on the one hand, the political has primacy: what matters most to him is his identity as an Athenian and his native city's accomplishments. His views on the gods are informed by and reinforce his infatuation with Athens. Timaeus' self-understanding, on the other hand, transcends his civic identity, as it is grounded in his study of the cosmos and in how he thinks of the gods responsible for its order. The true measure, the standard from which we ought to get our bearings, is not the city, but the gods and nature.

Putting the city and politics first is Critias' fundamental mistake, the root of his parochialism. Timaeus does not say as much directly, but he points Critias and us in that direction by presenting divine paradigms and an ideal of wisdom that are remarkably apolitical. A key lesson Timaeus can teach Critias and anyone in a similar position is that authentic self-knowledge demands that we go beyond the city's confines and paradigms and reflect on our position within a greater whole. Understanding our relation to the Demiurge, the cosmos, and the lesser gods is crucial to that project, as is working to become as much like them as possible. Such an orientation toward the world, rather than clinging to what is familiar and conventional, becomes the true philosopher.

Timaeus' theology is not just a philosophically grounded challenge to conventional views of the gods: more importantly, it helps to advance a distinct vision of human nature and purpose. For Timaeus, understanding what the gods are like and how they relate to us is essential for grasping how we ought to live. His thoughts on this matter are ultimately quite surprising given that the value of political engagement and action seems to be taken for granted as the dialogue opens. Himself a participant in his native city's political scene,

Timaeus nevertheless suggests that civic engagement is neither the standard by which to measure what life is best nor an essential part of it. I examine in greater detail Timaeus' vision of our ultimate end and the extent to which he plays down the importance of social relations and political institutions in our life in the next chapter. To conclude this chapter, however, I address the Athenian's theology, in particular his thinking about gods' relation to humans and why it differs in some key respects from Timaeus'.

iv. The Athenian's Gods vs. Timaeus'

As we turn to the substance of the Athenian's theology in *Laws* X, we should note first of all that he is in fundamental agreement with Timaeus when it comes to the gods' nature and their principal activities. Like Timaeus, the Athenian sees goodness and rationality as essential and closely related aspects of divinity, and both of them see the imposition of order at the cosmic level as the highest expression of the gods' character. This view is perfectly encapsulated at X.897c4-9, where the Athenian claims that the motions and circuits of the celestial bodies are rational and bear witness to the care a divine 'best soul' bestows upon the universe. Nonetheless, significant differences emerge when we compare how Timaeus and the Athenian discuss the gods' relation with humans and the extent to which the gods are concerned with or intervene in human affairs. The points of divergence between the Athenian and Timaeus on our relation to the gods are worth examining, as they can help us better understand the different rhetorical strategies and goals of their cosmologies.

The Athenian's position on the gods' relations with humans is rather complex and ambiguous: though the Athenian makes a spirited case for the notion that the gods care for human affairs in book X (899d5-905c4), he also makes contradictory and unclear comments on the matter throughout the whole of the *Laws*. Since it is reasonable to see the Athenian's comments throughout the conversation as a background for his more sophisticated arguments, I discuss them and their implications first.[110]

(α) The Athenian's Non-Cosmological Pronouncements on the Gods

The first direct comment on the god-human relation in the *Laws* occurs in the first book, when the Athenian makes the following proposal: "Let us consider each of us living beings a divine puppet, built either for their amusement or for some serious aim—which of these, we do not know (θαῦμα μὲν ἕκαστον ἡμῶν ἡγησώμεθα τῶν ζῴων θεῖον, εἴτε ὡς παίγνιον ἐκείνων εἴτε ὡς σπουδῇ τινι συνεστηκός· οὐ γὰρ δὴ τοῦτό γε γιγνώσκομεν)" (I.644d7-e1). Here the Athenian suggests our relation with the gods is

[110] I do not address in this discussion the Athenian's myth about the rule of Cronus (IV.713a6-714a2). The myth clearly differentiates between life under Cronus and our current state, and it is what the Athenian claims his interlocutors and future colonists should expect from the gods that is relevant to my discussion.

inscrutable and mysterious. Whatever use the gods have for us is something we may be unable to comprehend.

Granted, the Athenian's puppet analogy introduces a discussion of the different psychological drives that shape our conduct, not a detailed theology. Yet at a later point in the conversation the Athenian reprises the idea and elaborates on it.[111] While discussing musical education in Magnesia, the Athenian unexpectedly asserts "the affairs of humans are not worthy of seriousness, yet it is necessary to take them seriously: this is unfortunate (τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων πράγματα μεγάλης μὲν σπουδῆς οὐκ ἄξια, ἀναγκαῖόν γε μὴν σπουδάζειν· τοῦτο δὲ οὐκ εὐτυχές)" (VII.803b3-5). Without any prompting from his interlocutors, the Athenian explains his assertion with the following contrast between divine seriousness and human play:

> Φημὶ χρῆναι τὸ μὲν σπουδαῖον σπουδάζειν, τὸ δὲ μὴ σπουδαῖον μή, φύσει δὲ εἶναι θεὸν μὲν πάσης μακαρίου σπουδῆς ἄξιον, ἄνθρωπον δέ, ὅπερ εἴπομεν ἔμπροσθεν, θεοῦ τι παίγνιον εἶναι μεμηχανημένον, καὶ ὄντως τοῦτο αὐτοῦ τὸ βέλτιστον γεγονέναι· τούτῳ δὴ δεῖν τῷ τρόπῳ συνεπόμενον καὶ παίζοντα ὅτι καλλίστας παιδιὰς πάντ᾽ ἄνδρα καὶ γυναῖκα οὕτω διαβιῶναι, τοὐναντίον ἢ νῦν διανοηθέντας.
>
> I say that one must take what is serious seriously, not what is unserious. And the god is deserving of all blessed seriousness, but humans—as we said earlier—are devised as a sort of plaything of the god, which is really the best thing about us. Thus, I think every man and woman should spend their lives in accordance with this character, playing at the finest pastimes and thinking differently from how they do now. (VII.803c2-8)

The reason why dance and music are so crucial a part of a good human life must be our status as divine puppets: when we dance and sing, we embody in performance our recognition of that status, which should make the gods propitious to us. Whereas the Athenian hedged on the worth and seriousness of human life in his earlier description of us as the gods' playthings, here he states clearly that our life is trifling when we consider it in light of the god's magnitude. There is a wide, perhaps insurmountable gap between the divine perspective on reality and our own. Although the Athenian offers no direct comment on what that implies for whether and how the gods care for humans, it would be natural to infer from these passages that the gods do not care much, if at all, about our affairs. We are simply too small from their perspective.[112]

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[111] It is also worth noting that there is ancient precedent for taking the comparison of humans to puppets or playthings seriously: clearly echoing the *Laws*, Plotinus refers to humans as living playthings and expands the analogy by likening embodied life to a spectacle in his discussion of divine providence (*Enneads* III.2.15).

[112] According to Laks (2000) 268, this passage betrays "a degree of existential despair" on Plato's part. Cf. the heterodox and far more optimistic reading of the puppet analogy as a figure meant to illustrate the importance of *choreia* and civic education offered by Kurke (2013).

Although the Athenian's interlocutors seem unoffended when the Athenian first likens us to divine puppets, this second, bleaker presentation of the idea draws a negative reaction from Megillus. Before the Athenian can move on with his discussion of music, the Spartan remarks: "You are thoroughly belittling our human race, Visitor! (παντάπασι τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος ἡμῖν, ὦ ξένε, διαφαυλίζεις)" (VII.804b5-6). Megillus' response flags the Athenian's musings on our insignificance as likely disturbing to pious, traditional types, who prefer a more exalted view of humanity and favor gods who are not as distant and indifferent as the Athenian seems to suggest. What the Athenian says next is instructive: asking Megillus to forgive him, he explains he made his statements "while looking away toward the god (πρὸς … τὸν θεὸν ἀπιδὼν)," and offers Megillus to treat humans "not as something trivial but, if it pleases you, as worthy of some seriousness (μὴ φαῦλον, εἴ σοι φίλον, σπουδῆς δέ τινος ἄξιον)" (VII.804b7-c1). Though he acknowledges Megillus' consternation, the Athenian reiterates that those who focus their thoughts on the divine will have trouble resisting the view that our race occupies a relatively small position in the cosmic hierarchy. Rather than correct himself, the Athenian simply offers to continue the conversation as though humans are important after all in order to remain in his interlocutors' good graces. Though the Athenian is unwilling to defend his notion that attending to the god makes humanity seem paltry, he nevertheless does not disavow it. As he grants Megillus that humans deserve some serious consideration, the Athenian's considered view remains opaque.

The Athenian's treatment of human affairs as important and worthy of the gods' attention is more than a concession to his interlocutors. In fact, he makes numerous references to the gods' justice and awareness of human wrongdoing throughout the dialogue. Notable examples of this include: his assertion in his first speech to the colonists that Justice metes out punishments for wrongdoers and often ruins entire cities and households (IV.716b3-5), which is reminiscent of the description of divine punishment in Hesiod's *Works and Days* 238-241; his claim that Nemesis pays attention to how children speak to their parents and punishes the insolent (IV.717c6-d5); his reference to Zeus Xenios' watching over the treatment of strangers (V.729e2-730a2); his mention of the gods' anger at those who move boundary stones (VIII.842e7-843a8); and his spirited defense of stories that show the gods heeding and responding to the curses wronged parents utter against their bad children (XI.931b5-d3). In spite of his apparent suspicion that human affairs are not very important, the Athenian is comfortable with the idea that the gods take an interest in human behavior and actively punish wrongdoers.

Perhaps the Athenian is confused and clinging to irreconcilable views about the gods, but there are good reasons to resist this conclusion. To begin with, the Athenian's various references to divine retribution closely reflect conventional beliefs and myths about the gods' justice, so they hardly qualify as clear statements of personal faith. Furthermore, virtually all of his comments in this vein occur within preludes to Magnesia's laws or the laws themselves.[113] Their aim is not to make plain the Athenian's theological commitments, but to encourage traditional piety and fear of the gods among the Magnesians. This is especially clear in light of the Athenian's claim about the power of the

[113] Of the example passages cited in the preceding paragraph, only XI.931b5-d3 is not embedded in either a prelude or a law.

label "hateful to the gods" (θεομισής) when he discusses how best to prevent incest in Magnesia: this word is capable of extinguishing the frenzied desires that lead to such acts, and it will guarantee unanimous public abhorrence of whatever conduct it is attached to (VIII.838b7-e1). Whether the gods actually hate incest or not is irrelevant in this context. What matters is that convincing people that engaging in certain acts will incur the gods' wrath is the most effective means of keeping them in line. Given the Athenian's conviction that fear can be a powerful deterrent, it makes the most sense to see his numerous references to the gods' attention to various specific transgressions as part of his strategy to ensure Magnesians are as obedient and virtuous as possible.

Overall, then, the Athenian's comments on the god-human relation outside of his cosmology do not yield a clear and consistent picture. On the one hand, the Athenian seems to suspect that a wide gulf separates gods and men, that attention to the divine can render human concerns trivial. On the other hand, he seems eager to convince the people of Magnesia that the gods do pay attention to their actions and will punish any wrongs done. There is a hint of a rift between how a philosopher sees the gods and our relation to them and how he thinks most people ought to think of the gods, but no more than a hint. Even though we should notice that the Athenian's ideas about divinity do not match what he envisions for the Magnesians, we are denied an explanation for why that must be so.

(β) The Athenian's Cosmological Theology

The Athenian's discussion of our relation to the gods within his cosmology can help us understand why philosophers may be inclined to see this relation differently from most people and whether it is possible to somehow bridge the philosophical and the popular standpoints. In particular, the portion of the Athenian's cosmology that makes a philosophical case that the gods care about humans (X.899d5-905c4) can illuminate how the philosophical perspective can be compatible with traditional piety as well as what sets this perspective apart.

First, let us consider why the Athenian argues that the gods give thought to human affairs. There is a type of impiety, he claims, which acknowledges the gods' existence but cannot accept that human actions are of concern to them. As the Athenian imagines it, this kind of impiety emerges from seeing the fortunes of wicked and unjust people "being praised as happy in public opinion excessively and improperly (δόξαις δὲ εὐδαιμονιζόμεναι σφόδρα ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ ἐμμελῶς)," or from witnessing bad people amass worldly success not in spite but because of their crimes (X.899d8-900a5). He foresees that some people in Magnesia may become skeptical of conventional notions of divine retribution and come to the conclusion that the gods' justice is not reliable after all. The arguments and mythic incantations he presents thereafter, then, should be seen as primarily aimed at restoring people's conviction that we live in a moral cosmos that does not let wrongdoers go scot free. Here again, it seems, the task of philosophical cosmology is to serve as a defense of traditional ideas about the gods.

What positive case for how and why the gods care for human affairs does the Athenian make, then, and to what extent is it successful in putting the skeptics' doubts to rest? First, the Athenian explains why the gods *cannot* be neglectful of our affairs: they

are, as established in the preceding arguments for their existence, fully just and virtuous and in control of the cosmos, so that not even the smallest part of the whole is exempt from their attention and care (X.900c8-903a8). In the course of this argument, the Athenian presents his audience with reasons for thinking that the gods care for us, but, aside from suggesting that they are able to do this easily (X.902e7-903a3), he does not provide any details about the form their care takes. To complete his vision of divine care, the Athenian switches from argument to incantation, presenting his audience with a bewildering eschatological theodicy: in short, the gods who rule the world have ensured that the justice and excellence of the universe are preserved by devising a system of karmic promotions and demotions that directs transmigrating souls to better or worse places in accordance with their deeds (X.903b4-905c4).[114] Although this scheme is a philosophical novelty, the Athenian casts it as perfectly in line with traditional ideas of divine punishment: he identifies the horrible paces to which unjust souls are sent with Hades (X.904d1-4, 905a6-b2) and claims that this very system is what Homer refers to as "the justice of the gods who hold Olympus (δίκη … θεῶν οἳ Ὄλυμπον ἔχουσιν)" (X.904e3-4).

The Athenian's ideas about divine vigilance and retribution are nevertheless not as continuous or compatible with traditional views as he suggests. To begin with, in spite of his allusions to Hades, the punishments the Athenian envisions here are rather different from the ones he hints at in the preludes. For example, when the Athenian approvingly cites the curses of Oedipus and other wronged parents and their fulfillment by the gods at XI.931b5-d3, his aim is for the people of Magnesia to see the gods as prone to punish at least some wrongdoers by leading them to personal misfortune or a violent death. Under the scheme he presents in his argument against divine neglect, Oedipus' sons would have been punished for their misbehavior by being moved to a worse existence after death, not by killing each other. These two types of punishment are not mutually exclusive, of course, but the Athenian never explains how they complement one another. Throughout the preludes and laws the Athenian presents the gods as keeping track of particular transgressions and meting out punishments for individual acts such as the moving of boundary stones or disrespecting one's parents. Yet his eschatological vision has the gods simply set up a somewhat mechanical system whereby people are punished after death based on the quality of their entire life instead of specific acts.[115] In the system the Athenian details the gods are not particularly attentive to human behavior and do not intervene directly in our affairs. It is a system where, in contrast to the retribution the Athenian alludes to in the preludes, divine justice is purged of the idea that our transgressions anger or offend the gods directly. The Athenian's gods ultimately care about the good of the whole cosmos, not what humans do.

Indeed, at points the Athenian's theodicy seems to encourage the notion that human affairs are not that serious or worthy of the gods' attention after all. First, the Athenian opens his incantation on the gods' justice by reproaching the impious for thinking that the gods owe humans some type of special care:

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[114] The details of the Athenian's reincarnation scheme are notoriously obscure. For more detailed discussion, see Saunders (1973) and Mayhew (2008) 173-184.

[115] On this aspect of the Athenian's eschatology, see Saunders (1973) and Nightingale (1999) 322-323.

καίπερ πάνσμικρον ὄν, σὲ δὲ λέληθεν περὶ τοῦτο αὐτὸ ὡς γένεσις ἕνεκα ἐκείνου γίγνεται πᾶσα, ὅπως ᾖ τῷ τοῦ παντὸς βίῳ ὑπάρχουσα εὐδαίμων οὐσία, οὐχ ἕνεκα σοῦ γιγνομένη, σὺ δ' ἕνεκα ἐκείνου.

> Even though you are an exceedingly small part, it has escaped your notice on this very matter that all generation comes to be for the sake of this: that the universe have a blessed existence; for it does not come into being for your sake, but you for its sake. (X.903c2-5)

Though the Athenian later claims that the good of the cosmos and the good of each person should somehow coincide (X.903d1-3), he never explains why. In the end, this part of his case against skeptics of divine care is more about attacking these critics' notions of what good gods owe humans than offering a robust account of their care. In spite of his previous suggestion that humans matter because we are "the most god-revering of all animals (θεοσεβέστατον … πάντων ζῴων)" and the gods' possession (X.902b4-c2), the Athenian now emphasizes how trivial and small we must appear from the gods' perspective. He also speaks of the good of the whole cosmos in such a way that suggests it is possible that what we regard as bad or evil serves the gods' larger purpose and therefore is good: toward the end of the incantation he chides his imaginary interlocutor for not realizing that even wrongdoers make "a contribution to the whole (συντέλειαν … τῷ παντὶ)" (X.905b2-c1). Even in the incantation aimed at reassuring his audience that the gods attend to human affairs the Athenian assumes that human and divine perspectives are radically different. His gods, it seems, are somehow able both to become angry at our misdeeds and to take advantage of them to maintain the excellence of the whole. The Athenian offers no genuine explanation for why this is so.

The Athenian's cosmology fails to resolve the tensions evident in his other comments on the god-human relation; rather, it reproduces them. Although his theodicy appears to create a bridge between a philosophical grasp of the gods' activities and traditional views of their role in dispensing justice, in the end his gods remain detached from human affairs. Their almost mechanic system of punishments is hard to reconcile with the furious interventions commonly attributed to them in myth. The Athenian invites his audience to identify his novel scheme with traditional Olympian justice, but the differences between the two cannot be denied. In his theodicy, the gods still have more important matters than humans to focus on. That makes the Athenian's vision all the more difficult to reconcile with the common notion that our actions can elicit their anger. On the whole, the Athenian strikes an awkward balance between defending traditional notions of divine justice for the Magnesians and articulating a more philosophical understanding of humans' relation to the gods. What the Athenian thinks about the god-human bond or what exactly he wants the people of Magnesia to think is ultimately not clear.

(γ) Contrasting the Athenian and Timaeus on the God-Human Relation

Timaeus' portrayal of the Demiurge and other gods highlights their generosity and how attentively they prepare humans for a rational life. Timaeus also casts his gods as models to which humans ought to assimilate themselves. To a degree, elements of this vision of the gods and their relation to us are also present in the Athenian's account: his gods are also generous insofar as they maintain the rational order of the cosmos and enable us to live well, and they are also paradigmatic insofar as they embody rationality and measure. But the Athenian clearly does not emphasize the gods' care in constructing our souls and bodies or their status as models of rationality the way Timaeus does. Indeed, whereas Timaeus offers a vivid account of the care the gods put into creating our various parts and thereby illustrates a vision of our ultimate purpose, the Athenian is noncommittal and ambiguous about the aim the gods have envisioned for us. This is not to say that the Athenian suggests our lives are meaningless, of course, but that Timaeus' confidence in the gods' generosity toward us, as well as the clarity that lends to his vision of our ultimate end, are lacking in the Athenian's account. In this regard, at least, the Athenian presents the gods as more detached from and indifferent to human wellbeing than Timaeus does. The best most of us can hope for, according to the Athenian, is a life of obedience to the law. There is no suggestion that the gods intend anything beyond that for us.[116]

Aside from the issue of the gods' purpose for us, however, Timaeus seems more committed than the Athenian to viewing the gods as removed from our affairs. Recall that Timaeus' Demiurge withdraws once he has finished creating the other gods and the immortal soul and cedes the supervision of the cosmos to his subordinates. The Demiurge's auxiliaries, in turn, do not have much of a role to play in our affairs beyond their initial fashioning of our bodies and mortal souls and their administration of post-mortem punishments. Timaeus' main focus is on the gods' generosity toward humans when they first put together the world and our souls and bodies, much less so on whether they mind human affairs or somehow intervene in them. The Athenian, on the other hand, both embeds traditional notions of divine vigilance and retribution into Magnesia's law code and devotes a significant portion of his cosmology to defending the idea that the gods attend to human affairs. On the whole, the Athenian encourages his audience to see the gods as playing a more active role in the world than Timaeus does, even if he is not entirely clear about the ways in which their activity affects humans. Granted, the centerpiece of the Athenian's case that the gods care about human affairs is a quasi-scientific eschatology with notable similarities to the punishment system Timaeus details at the end of his cosmology.[117] Nonetheless, divine punishment has a more dynamic function in the Athenian's presentation than it does in Timaeus': whereas for the latter the gods punish humans who fail to pursue wisdom in order to populate the cosmos with the other

[116] I agree with Klosko (2006) 222 that the Athenian's description of humans as divine playthings is of a piece with the psychological and ethical pessimism he exhibits throughout the dialogue.

[117] Saunders (1973) 238-239 stresses similarities between the eschatologies and proposes that the *Timaeus* eschatology is the basis for the one we find in the *Laws*. For a somewhat more skeptical comparison, see Mayhew (2008) 178-182.

sublunary animals—presumably a goal that can be eventually attained—the former sees continuous karmic transformation as the gods' means of maintaining the excellence of the cosmos—a process that is constant and ongoing (see esp. X.903d3-e1, 906a2-c6). Although Timaeus' gods do far more to establish the conditions that make it possible for humans to lead rational lives, the Athenian's gods seem somewhat closer to humans in their sustained attention to how each of us lives.

To sum up: in some respects, for example in their care in fashioning our souls and bodies, Timaeus' gods appear closer to humans, while in other respects it is the Athenian who envisions a closer god-human relationship, for example when he makes the case that the gods pay attention to our actions. It is possible that these differences reflect philosophical development on Plato's part, but they may also reflect the differences in the rhetorical settings that the cosmologies are embedded in and their function within those settings. The cosmologies are aimed at two different audiences with different sets of needs, and the god-human relation presented in each is meant to foster two different visions of our purpose and potential.

As I have argued, one of the aims of Timaeus' cosmology is to challenge someone like Critias to adopt a more philosophical perspective on the gods and their relation to us. While Critias takes Athena's role as Athens' patron goddess very seriously and sees his city's superiority as dependent on her generosity, Timaeus' introduction of the Demiurge and other gods and his emphasis on how they enable all humans alike to lead rational lives offers Critias a less Athenocentric perspective. Furthermore, Timaeus' portrayal of the Demiurge and his assistants as somewhat detached after the act of creation allows him to emphasize human responsibility, countering Critias' focus on divine agency. It is our responsibility, not the gods', to cultivate our rationality and achieve happiness through contemplating the heavens. Not only is this the highest human endeavor and our ultimate end, but pursuing it also brings us closer to the gods and reveals our kinship with them. For Timaeus, our relation to the gods enables us to transcend political boundaries and appreciate the whole cosmos as our home.

By contrast, the Athenian's primary aim is not to turn the people of Magnesia toward a more philosophical understanding of divinity, but to allay the doubts of those losing their trust in the city's essentially traditional religion. Philosophical theology is certainly a tool he avails himself of to achieve that end, but he keeps matters vague enough to avoid directly calling attention to the gap between philosophical and traditional theology. Though his views on divine punishment do not seem radically different from Timaeus', he stresses the gods' attention to human affairs because he recognizes that fear of the gods' wrath and punishments plays a major role in maintaining obedience to the laws. This is why, instead of focusing on what the gods have done to enable humans to live well, he emphasizes their punishing anyone who behaves viciously and disobeys the laws. In contrast to Timaeus' gods, the Athenian's care about whether we obey the laws or not rather than whether we live an appropriately rational and contemplative life as humans. For the Athenian, the city and our social environment are of much greater significance both for the individual striving for excellence and happiness and for the entire cosmos. Whereas Timaeus' theology invites his audience to transcend the political in this life, the Athenian's makes the political an integral step on our soul's cosmic path.

Indeed, one of the more striking differences between Timaeus' cosmology and the Athenian's lies in how they think of the contribution our political community and social environment make not only to each person's happiness but also to the good of the cosmos as a whole. Their contrasting visions of our ultimate end and assessments of the city's ethical and cosmic significance, as well as how these fit together as parts of a unified philosophical project, are my focus in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Soul, Cosmos, Polis—Two Perspectives in the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*

In this chapter, I address the different perspectives on the polis and human society that Timaeus and the Athenian represent in their cosmologies and how they illuminate the relationship between philosophy, cosmology and politics. I start with the contrasting viewpoints on human happiness and our ultimate end that Timaeus and the Athenian support in their cosmologies, focusing on how they conceive of the contribution our social environment makes to our achieving happiness. On the one hand, Timaeus encourages us to think of our ultimate end as being completely independent of our political and social identity and affiliations. The conception of human happiness he advances within his cosmology is surprisingly apolitical. On the other hand, the Athenian endorses a view of human happiness and fulfillment in which the polis plays an indispensable role. It is fitting that while the city is mostly absent from Timaeus' cosmology, the Athenian's invests justice in the polis with cosmic significance. In each case, I argue, the speaker presents a perspective on human happiness and the polis' contribution to it that is adapted to the dramatic and rhetorical context he confronts. Whereas Timaeus' avoidance of the political is part of his strategy to turn people like Critias toward a less parochial, more cosmopolitan perspective, the Athenian's attention to the polis' significance for both the individual and the cosmos is in keeping with his use of cosmology as a supplement to civic religion. I end with a reflection on how the two cosmologies complement one another as parts of a single philosophical project.

ia. Timaeus on Happiness

Though there is no detailed discussion of what human happiness consists of in Timaeus' cosmology, a clear and consistent conception of happiness emerges at two distinct points of his presentation. The first is Timaeus' claim that we must investigate divine causes of order in nature "for the sake of acquiring a happy life, to the extent that our nature allows it (κτήσεως ἕνεκα εὐδαίμονος βίου, καθ' ὅσον ἡμῶν ἡ φύσις ἐνδέχεται)" (68e8-69a2). Studying nature on the model of Timaeus' cosmology is a requirement for those who wish for a genuinely happy life—and even that life is deficient when compared to the gods'. Timaeus also touches on human happiness toward the end of his discourse, in a passage I discussed in the first chapter: after describing our rational soul as a guardian spirit within each of us, he affirms that pursuing wisdom allows us to share in immortality and that the wise person, "since he is constantly tending to his divine part and keeping well ordered the spirit that lives with him, will be exceptionally happy (ἅτε δὲ ἀεὶ θεραπεύοντα τὸ θεῖον ἔχοντά τε αὐτὸν εὖ κεκοσμημένον τὸν δαίμονα σύνοικον ἑαυτῷ, διαφερόντως εὐδαίμονα εἶναι)" (90b6-c6). Once again, the study of rational order in the cosmos is at the very least a necessary condition for human happiness. Timaeus does not say what contribution to our happiness political engagement and the exercise of moral virtues like courage or justice make—what we ought to focus on above all is becoming as rational as possible.

Timaeus' brief comments on happiness do not fully reveal how apolitical his conception of human fulfillment is or the extent to which, at least at the surface level, he

encourages his audience to think of themselves as essentially asocial creatures. Indeed, this is most evident not when Timaeus exalts the power and value of astronomical studies, but at various points of his discussion of the teleology of our bodily and psychic parts. As he presents the gods' reasoning when they designed our bodies and souls, their singular aim was that each of us should be able to restore our rationality through study. Our need to live with other humans and form political associations played no role in their deliberations. As we examine Timaeus' discussions of our physiology and psychology in detail, it will become clearer how consistently he downplays the social and political dimension of human life. This elision of the political leads to a surprisingly lopsided, somewhat unPlatonic perspective on human nature, but it is not without rhetorical upside: Timaeus' account of human nature encourages his audience to think of themselves in abstraction from their particular earthly environment and focus on their natural capacity for godlike rationality. While not entirely accurate, such a perspective would be well adapted to Timaeus' aim of correcting the naïve parochialism Critias exemplifies.

To make the case that Timaeus' account of our nature and creation elides politics, I examine three different aspects of his account: the intellectualist bent of his discussion of the gods' construction of our body and mortal soul; the narrow role he assigns the spirited part of our soul in our lives, which is especially evident in his discussion of psychic maladies; and the peculiar and idiosyncratic perspective on natural history and the significance of civilized life his discussion of our fingernails reveals.

ib. Timaeus on the Human Body and Mortal Soul

For Timaeus, no fact about human nature seems more important than that each of us most truly is a rational soul of mind. As he puts it at 90d5, our disembodied rational soul is "our ancient nature (τὴν ἀρχαίαν φύσιν)" (cf. 42d2). During our embodied existence, we should identify ourselves with this nature and do everything in our power to exercise it appropriately. We have already discussed in the previous chapter the relation between this notion and Timaeus' thinking about the gods' paradigmatic nature and activities. Now we turn to consider how his idea that we are essentially fallen intellects who have to cope with embodiment shapes his discussion of the gods' reasoning when they designed our body and mortal soul. As Timaeus presents it, the gods' main concern in their creative endeavor was to provide us with the equipment to engage in this rational activity. Even if embodiment significantly encumbers our rational soul's proper activity, Timaeus insists that every part of our mortal self has been designed for our mind's benefit as it copes with incarnation.

(α) Embodying the Rational Soul

Consider, first of all, Timaeus' description of how the gods began to construct our bodies:

> τὰς μὲν δὴ θείας περιόδους δύο οὔσας, τὸ τοῦ παντὸς σχῆμα ἀπομιμησάμενοι περιφερὲς ὄν, εἰς σφαιροειδὲς σῶμα ἐνέδησαν, τοῦτο ὃ νῦν κεφαλὴν ἐπονομάζομεν, ὃ θειότατόν τέ ἐστιν καὶ τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν πάντων δεσποτοῦν· ᾧ καὶ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα παρέδοσαν ὑπηρεσίαν αὐτῷ συναθροίσαντες θεοί, κατανοήσαντες ὅτι πασῶν ὅσαι κινήσεις ἔσοιντο μετέχοι.
>
> The divine orbits, which are two, they bound into a spherical body in imitation of the shape of the All, and this is what we now call our head. It is our most divine aspect, ruling over every other part of ours. To it the gods then handed over as its servant the entire body they had assembled, having decided that it would have a share in all the motions that would be. (44d3-8)

Although Timaeus describes incarnation as leading to all sorts of disturbances and disorder for our rational souls shortly before (42e8-44b1), here he emphasizes that our bodies actually facilitate rather than fight against reason's rule. Embodiment remains something our mind has to cope with, being forced to take care of the body it inhabits instead of focusing on its proper function exclusively. We are fortunate, however, that the gods endowed us with bodies that, far from being mere obstacles to reason's being in charge, are suited for it. The gods decided to house our mind in a body that resembles the cosmos in its sphericity, our head, so that its motions would be able to return to order.[118] Further, they gave us the rest of the body to assist and serve the head, not get in its way. According to Timaeus, one who understands nature and the gods' designs sees their body as an instrument, rather than a prison, for their mind.[119]

Timaeus' description of our body as reason's vessel or vehicle (ὄχημα), first offered at 44d8-45a3 and repeated at 69c5-7, underscores its role as an instrument for our immortal part as it copes with earthly life. As our mind's vehicle, the body allows us to move around our environment, something that is absolutely essential if we are to survive and even flourish in our embodied state. Although sharing in kinds of motion other than revolution in place sets us apart from the purely rational gods, we should nevertheless appreciate the various kinds of motion available to us as enabling us to achieve a measure of rationality within this life. If our bodies did not make it possible for us to engage in activities other than studying the heavens and developing our rationality, we would not be able to keep ourselves alive long enough to do even that. Somewhat paradoxically, being able to move in a variety of ways and direct our attention to things other than the sky makes it so that our lives can be more rational, not less. Understanding that study is our natural end does not mean that we should regard what we do to stay alive as unfortunate distractions; it is what we need to do in order to reach that end. Even those parts of our bodies that are not directly involved in the exercise of reason are there to facilitate it.

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[118] Contrast the elongated shape of wild animals' heads at 91e6-92a2, which reflects their atrophied internal motions.

[119] For a discussion of Timaeus' thoughts on the body that includes comparison with other Platonic dialogues, see Johansen (2004) 137-159.

(β) The Mortal Soul's Purpose

The gods also designed the mortal parts of our soul for the benefit of our rational soul. According to Timaeus, the mortal kind of soul has "irresistible and terrible passions within itself (δεινὰ καὶ ἀναγκαῖα ἐν ἑαυτῷ παθήματα)" (69c7-d1). Aware of this, the gods structured this part of our soul so that it would not impede the exercise of our rationality:

> καὶ διὰ ταῦτα δὴ σεβόμενοι μιαίνειν τὸ θεῖον, ὅτι μὴ πᾶσα ἦν ἀνάγκη, χωρὶς ἐκείνου κατοικίζουσιν εἰς ἄλλην τοῦ σώματος οἴκησιν τὸ θνητόν, ἰσθμὸν καὶ ὅρον διοικοδομήσαντες τῆς τε κεφαλῆς καὶ τοῦ στήθους, αὐχένα μεταξὺ τιθέντες, ἵν᾽ εἴη χωρίς.
>
> On account of these [passions], because they were wary of polluting the divine unless it were completely necessary, they housed the mortal part in a different location in the body, separate from the other part—they constructed an isthmus and boundary for the head and the chest, placing the neck in between, so that they would be apart. (69d6-e3)

At first, the genesis of the mortal soul seems like merely an inevitable byproduct of embodiment: this is the part of our soul that is subject to all the dreadful affections that result from having a body. It would be a mistake, however, to infer from this that the mortal soul has no positive role to play in our lives. Even if it is not part of the gods' purpose that we have a mortal soul, they were nevertheless able to structure it in such a way that it should support rather than hinder our pursuing a rational life. As Timaeus emphasizes in this passage, the gods recognized that the mortal soul would impede reason's activity the least if it were to remain separate from it, and they designed our body to ensure this. By placing our mortal soul away from our head, in our chest and abdomen, the gods made it more difficult for its non-rational motions to disturb reason. It is a good thing, then, that our soul is divided into rational and mortal parts. If the soul were completely unified, reason's capacity to rule the whole would be compromised by its sharing in the mortal parts' affections and motions.

Keeping reason separate from the mortal soul is not the only measure the gods took to ensure that it is capable of ruling: they also divided the mortal soul into two parts, the spirited and the appetitive (69e3-71e2). To understand how this arrangement facilitates reason's rule over the whole, it is best to start from what Timaeus tells us about the appetitive part, even if he describes its construction last. What is distinctive about this part is its irrationality and unruliness: Timaeus likens it to a "wild beast (θρέμμα ἄγριον)," adding that it can disturb the other parts with its "noise and turmoil (θόρυβον καὶ βοὴν)" and is naturally unsuited to heed reason. The gods, of course, do not endow us with an appetitive soul out of malice, but because being a mortal animal and needing food, drink, and the like to survive entails being subject to the appetites. The lower part of our mortal soul is neither good nor rational, but it is necessary (70d7-71a5). Spirit, by contrast, is the better part of the mortal soul, capable of heeding reason and enforcing its commands

against the mass of appetites. Timaeus even compares this part of the soul to a garrison whose task is to protect the citadel of reason (69e5-70b3).

Though neither of the mortal soul's parts is rational in a strict sense, the spirited part is more rational than the appetitive: while the former can obey reason's orders and assist in their implementation, the latter's natural tendency is to resist rational control. A key function of the spirited part, then, is to mediate between reason and the appetites, ensuring that the latter do not disturb or overthrow the former.[120] The spirited part's location in the body reflects this unambiguously: residing in the chest, it remains close to the head even if it is separate from it, but it is also directly above the abdomen, where the appetitive part is located. The mortal soul's internal division and its parts' locations within the body show that it is not enough for reason to be separate from the mortal soul if we are to live rationally. It is also necessary that the better part of the mortal soul be closer to reason than the worse part and help reason exert control over non-rational desires. Reason has to be able to communicate somehow with the parts of the mortal soul, and it needs at least one of them to be naturally receptive to its orders and able to bring the other in line when necessary. For the person who is to live rationally, cooperation between the parts of the soul is just as important as their remaining separate and not interfering with one another's work.

(γ) Embodiment's Peril and Ambiguity

In spite of Timaeus' attention to how well designed our body and mortal soul are for serving reason, he never abandons the notion that embodiment constitutes a fall from a better state. Our mortal self remains distinct from and inferior to what each of us truly is, and its potential as reason's servant still falls short of the ideal condition in which our minds found themselves prior to incarnation. While we inhabit our mortal bodies, we have to live as mortal animals and attend to our bodily wellbeing, which makes a life of pure, uninterrupted rationality impossible. Caring for our mortal parts is not something we can flee, for we share with every mortal creature an innate desire to keep ourselves alive and healthy. Timaeus even recommends that we care for our bodies appropriately and not let them become warped by excessive study (87e5-88a7, 88c1-d1). Equipping us with the desire for nourishment and health and the ability to satisfy it was therefore just as important for the gods as making sure that our rational part would be able to operate with minimal disturbance from the body.

From the point of view of a pure intellect, the problem with having a body is not so much that this disturbs its natural order, but rather that a rational soul that finds itself in such a body has no option but to value the things and activities that keep the body healthy and alive. We cannot be indifferent to our mortal parts while we are alive, even if we recognize that our true identity is different and independent from them. Still, we ought to value our body's integrity and wellbeing for the sake of living rationally, not because life

[120] Cf. Brennan (2012) on how the spirited part should be understood as a response to the introduction of the appetitive soul, a necessary bond between reason and the appetites that makes their interaction possible.

and health are independently good. Being in a mortal body forces reason to care about that body's wellbeing, but it should still regard the body as its instrument. The relative value of bodily health and reason's ability to operate is especially evident when Timaeus explains why our heads are fragile instead of well protected:

> ἡ γὰρ ἐξ ἀνάγκης γιγνομένη καὶ συντρεφομένη φύσις οὐδαμῇ προσδέχεται πυκνὸν ὀστοῦν καὶ σάρκα πολλὴν ἅμα τε αὐτοῖς ὀξυήκοον αἴσθησιν. μάλιστα γὰρ ἂν αὐτὰ πάντων ἔσχεν ἡ περὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν σύστασις, εἴπερ ἅμα συμπίπτειν ἠθελησάτην, καὶ τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος σαρκώδη ἔχον ἐφ᾽ ἑαυτῷ καὶ νευρώδη κρατεράν τε κεφαλὴν βίον ἂν διπλοῦν καὶ πολλαπλοῦν καὶ ὑγιεινότερον καὶ ἀλυπότερον τοῦ νῦν κατεκτήσατο. νῦν δὲ τοῖς περὶ τὴν ἡμετέραν γένεσιν δημιουργοῖς, ἀναλογιζομένοις πότερον πολυχρονιώτερον χεῖρον ἢ βραχυχρονιώτερον βέλτιον ἀπεργάσαιντο γένος, συνέδοξεν τοῦ πλείονος βίου, φαυλοτέρου δέ, τὸν ἐλάττονα ἀμείνονα ὄντα παντὶ πάντως αἱρετέον· ὅθεν δὴ μανῷ μὲν ὀστῷ, σαρξὶν δὲ καὶ νεύροις κεφαλήν, ἅτε οὐδὲ καμπὰς ἔχουσαν, οὐ συνεστέγασαν. κατὰ πάντα οὖν ταῦτα εὐαισθητοτέρα μὲν καὶ φρονιμωτέρα, πολὺ δὲ ἀσθενεστέρα παντὸς ἀνδρὸς προσετέθη κεφαλὴ σώματι.
>
> The nature which comes into being and is composed out of necessity does not in any way allow for thick bone and abundant flesh to coexist with sensitive perception—if these two characteristics were willing to come together, then the structure of the head would have featured them most of all, and humankind would have had a fleshy, sinewy and strong head and gained a life twice or many more times as long and healthier and freer from pain than our current one. At this time, however, when the craftsmen who were concerned with our generation were deliberating whether they should make our race longer-lived and worse or shorter-lived and better, they decided that the shorter life should be chosen, since it was preferable to the longer but worse one for everyone and in every way. Thus, they covered the head with thin bone and not, since it is without joints, with flesh and sinews. So for all these reasons the head was attached to every man's body being more sensitive and intelligent but far weaker. (75a7-c7)

Unlike in any of the passages discussed so far, the gods face a dilemma here: should humans lead longer and healthier lives or more rational ones? That they deliberate about this at all suggests that a longer and healthier life is undoubtedly valuable for a mortal creature, but their choice indicates that living rationally is preferable to merely living. For all of the gods' care in equipping us with what we need to nourish our bodies and keep them healthy, they have designed us to be the most rational mortal being rather than the healthiest and most resilient. Being alive and fit is good because it allows us to care for our rational soul. Without being subordinated to that goal, it is essentially worthless. A life that balances study and care for the body is preferable to one that is entirely dedicated to study not because our mind and our body are equally important, but because neglecting our physical welfare for the sake of study ultimately compromises reason's long-term ability to rule and make full use of its abode and instrument.

Throughout his account, Timaeus offers a consistent, if fairly complex, perspective on the human body and mortal soul. On the one hand, he presents embodiment as perilous, a state in which our rational soul is forced not only to cope with a multitude of influences that can throw it into disarray but also to care both for itself and the body to which it is attached. On the other hand, Timaeus emphasizes that humans have the best possible mortal body and soul, which will help reason regain its pristine order so long as they are properly cared for. Even if attachment to a mortal body is not an ideal state, we are fortunate that we can recover our rationality and let it guide our lives.

(δ) Our Body and Our Celestial Origins

This ambivalent view of embodiment emerges again—albeit with an interesting twist—in a striking image Timaeus introduces toward the end of his account:

> τὸ δὲ δὴ περὶ τοῦ κυριωτάτου παρ᾽ ἡμῖν ψυχῆς εἴδους διανοεῖσθαι δεῖ τῇδε, ὡς ἄρα αὐτὸ δαίμονα θεὸς ἑκάστῳ δέδωκεν, τοῦτο ὃ δή φαμεν οἰκεῖν μὲν ἡμῶν ἐπ᾽ ἄκρῳ τῷ σώματι, πρὸς δὲ τὴν ἐν οὐρανῷ συγγένειαν ἀπὸ γῆς ἡμᾶς αἴρειν ὡς ὄντας φυτὸν οὐκ ἔγγειον ἀλλὰ οὐράνιον, ὀρθότατα λέγοντες· ἐκεῖθεν γάρ, ὅθεν ἡ πρώτη τῆς ψυχῆς γένεσις ἔφυ, τὸ θεῖον τὴν κεφαλὴν καὶ ῥίζαν ἡμῶν ἀνακρεμαννὺν ὀρθοῖ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα.
>
> And we should think about the most powerful part of our soul in the following way: the god has given it to each of us as a guardian spirit, which we say resides in the top of our body and lifts us toward what is akin to us in the sky and away from the earth—for we are not earthly plants, but heavenly ones. Yes, we are absolutely correct in saying this, since the divine suspends our head and root from where our soul's nature first emerged and keeps our whole body upright. (90a2-b1)

Reason should rule our lives; its origin is celestial; and our body is designed to help reason approximate its original state—these familiar elements are all conveyed by Timaeus' heavenly plant image. Our body's upright posture is adduced as further evidence supporting Timaeus' claims about our origin and purpose, another sign that we enjoy a special proximity with the gods and ought to live accordingly.

Yet this passage goes beyond the notion that our body is supposed to serve reason: being upright is important not just because it facilitates our study of the heavens, but also because it reminds us that our true and original home is above. Somewhat paradoxically, part of what makes the human body a suitable abode for reason is that it points us back to a former celestial bliss. We are at home in our bodies because they remind us that we are not truly at home down here on earth. By likening our body to an upside-down plant, Timaeus effectively combines the two contrasting strands of his vision of human nature, one emphasizing reason's celestial origin and the other our body's aptitude for rational activity, within a single image.

Even more important than the image's economy are its implications for how we should think about our earthly life. Our heavenly origin, according to Timaeus, pulls us

away from the earth, i.e. away from what is close and familiar to us while we live down here. The point of seeing ourselves as heavenly plants is to recognize that what we are accustomed to recognize as our own is not so. Our concern with earthly matters alienates us from what is genuinely proper to us.[121] Leading a fully rational life, then, demands that we regard our bodies and our earthly environment in an unusual way. Whereas for most people being firmly rooted in a particular land is fundamental to their sense of identity, for Timaeus this is apparently irrelevant, since our metaphorical roots stretch upward rather than downward. Timaeus' thinking here is not simply different from conventional notions; it is their complete opposite. With the heavenly plant metaphor, Timaeus goes beyond commenting on how we relate to our environment and underscores how radical and strange a perspective he offers on our nature. Not unlike Timaeus' presentation of the paradigmatic lives of the gods, this image calls into question the value of political engagement and social ties: for what claims, if any, can our political community or social relations have on us when we think of our terrestrial existence as an exile of sorts? Timaeus seems to counsel detachment from these aspects of our life rather than investing them with new meaning.

Overall, what the gods have designed us for and what Timaeus advises us to do is to take care of our bodies and minds. It does not seem that we need a political community, or any other people at all, in order to be able to do that. Besides the passages we have already discussed, there are aspects of Timaeus' treatment of the nature and purpose of the spirited part of our soul and his discussion of psychic disturbances and illnesses that also suggest a conception of human nature as essentially apolitical, even asocial. I discuss these portions of Timaeus' account in detail next.

ic. Timaeus on the Spirited Part and Psychic Maladies

The preceding section already touched on the basic aspects of Timaeus' psychology: while embodied, our soul is tripartite, consisting of a rational, a spirited and an appetitive part. This tripartition of the embodied soul obviously recalls Socrates' account of the soul's parts and their respective natures in *Republic* IV, VIII and IX. But even though Timaeus and Socrates divide the soul into the same three parts, their analyses are clearly different in focus: whereas in the *Republic* Socrates develops his psychology by reference to ordinary feelings such as hunger, shame, and anger, and to the types of experiences that give rise to them, Timaeus proceeds from the perspective of divine craftsmanship. Furthermore, while Timaeus emphasizes our soul's divine origin and distinguishes between immortal and mortal parts, Socrates for the most part steers clear of such matters.[122] My focus here, however, is on the less obvious points of divergence in

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[121] Cf. Nightingale (2004) 141 on this passage as an example of Plato's 'rhetoric of estrangement,' which "offers readers a radically new perspective on the world."

[122] In the *Republic* Socrates does suggest that the virtue of reasoning belongs to a divine part of us at VII.518e2-3 and IX.590c8-d6 and talks of the soul's kinship with the divine and the accretions it takes on by coming to be in a body at X.611b9-612a6. But even

how these two accounts present the spirited part's purpose and character. The contrasts between Timaeus' treatment of the spirited part and Socrates', we will see, can help us appreciate the extent to which Timaeus presents a vision of human nature that elides social life.

(α) Socrates' and Timaeus' Contrasting Views of the Spirited Part

First, we should consider how Socrates describes the spirited part in the *Republic*, since this is the earlier and fuller account as well as the recognizable background to Timaeus' account. Since Socrates' discussion of this part is wide-ranging and extends over several books, it is not entirely easy to summarize it adequately. (Indeed, a few commentators have even dismissed the notion of the spirited part as not seriously meant by Plato.[123]) Nonetheless, the most succinct and helpful characterization of this part of the soul is probably Socrates' suggestion that it always desires "dominance, victory and good repute (τὸ κρατεῖν … καὶ νικᾶν καὶ εὐδοκιμεῖν)" (IX.581a9-10). Here Socrates covers the main features at the core of the spirited part's identity: it drives us to be assertive, even aggressive, and prove our superiority, but it is also deeply invested in how we are regarded by others. Given its sensitivity to external judgment as well as its tendency to pursue what is honorable and flee what is shameful, a multitude of scholars have claimed that the spirited part is fundamentally motivated by social, other-regarding concerns.[124] It is because we have a spirited part that we are able to form relatively stable communities. It is also because of the spirited part that popular morality and respect for convention have a firm hold on most of us. In the general picture of the spirited part advanced in the *Republic*, its role and nature are intimately connected to the social dimension of our life.

As we have already seen, one of the spirited part's functions according to Timaeus is to mediate between reason and the appetitive part, serving as the reason's ally. The idea that spirit naturally sides with reason against the appetites appears in the *Republic* as well (IV.440a8-441a3), so the two accounts clearly agree on that point. There are other respects, however, in which Timaeus' does not follow its predecessor as closely. It is worth pointing out, first of all, that Timaeus devotes only a short part of his speech to the function of this part of the soul. This is how he describes how and why the spirited part came into being:

> ἐν δὴ τοῖς στήθεσιν καὶ τῷ καλουμένῳ θώρακι τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς θνητὸν γένος ἐνέδουν. καὶ ἐπειδὴ τὸ μὲν ἄμεινον αὐτῆς, τὸ δὲ χεῖρον ἐπεφύκει, διοικοδομοῦσι τοῦ θώρακος αὖ τὸ κύτος, διορίζοντες οἷον γυναικῶν, τὴν δὲ ἀνδρῶν χωρὶς οἴκησιν, τὰς φρένας διάφραγμα εἰς τὸ μέσον αὐτῶν τιθέντες. τὸ μετέχον οὖν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀνδρείας καὶ θυμοῦ, φιλόνικον ὄν, κατῴκισαν ἐγγυτέρω τῆς

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though Socrates anticipates Timaeus' division of the soul into divine and mortal parts in those passages, he never elaborates on reason's divinity in detail.

[123] E.g. Robinson (1970) 44-46, Penner (1971) 111-113.

[124] E.g. Gosling (1973) 41-51; Cairns (1993) 381-392; Kamtekar (1998); Hobbs (2000) 1-49; Burnyeat (2006) 9-13; Lear (2006) 115-121; Wilberding (2009); Brennan (2012); Renaut (2014); Wilburn (2015).

κεφαλῆς μεταξὺ τῶν φρενῶν τε καὶ αὐχένος, ἵνα τοῦ λόγου κατήκοον ὂν κοινῇ μετ᾽ ἐκείνου βίᾳ τὸ τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν κατέχοι γένος, ὁπότ᾽ ἐκ τῆς ἀκροπόλεως τῷ τ᾽ ἐπιτάγματι καὶ λόγῳ μηδαμῇ πείθεσθαι ἑκὸν ἐθέλοι· τὴν δὲ δὴ καρδίαν ἅμμα τῶν φλεβῶν καὶ πηγὴν τοῦ περιφερομένου κατὰ πάντα τὰ μέλη σφοδρῶς αἵματος εἰς τὴν δορυφορικὴν οἴκησιν κατέστησαν, ἵνα, ὅτε ζέσειεν τὸ τοῦ θυμοῦ μένος, τοῦ λόγου παραγγείλαντος ὡς τις ἄδικος περὶ αὐτὰ γίγνεται πρᾶξις ἔξωθεν ἢ καί τις ἀπὸ τῶν ἔνδοθεν ἐπιθυμιῶν, ὀξέως διὰ πάντων τῶν στενωπῶν πᾶν ὅσον αἰσθητικὸν ἐν τῷ σώματι, τῶν τε παρακελεύσεων καὶ ἀπειλῶν αἰσθανόμενον, γίγνοιτο ἐπήκοον καὶ ἕποιτο πάντῃ, καὶ τὸ βέλτιστον οὕτως ἐν αὐτοῖς πᾶσιν ἡγεμονεῖν ἐῷ.

Within the chest and the so-called trunk they bound the mortal kind of soul. And given that one part of it was naturally better and another worse they built the trunk's cavity in sections, dividing it just like women's quarters and men's are separate. Between them they placed the midriff as a partition. Then, that part of the soul that shares in manliness and anger, which loves victory, they placed closer to the head, between the neck and the midriff, in order that it may serve reason and in alliance with it forcibly restrain all appetites whenever they altogether refuse to obey reason and its citadel's commands willingly. And they set the heart, the veins' meeting point and the source of the blood that courses vigorously throughout the whole body, in the guardhouse, so that, when the spirit's force boils over at reason's announcement that some unjust act affecting them is unfolding outside or even from the desires within, every sensitive part within the body may swiftly perceive through every channel both its exhortations and threats, heeding it and following it everywhere, and thus allow the best part among them all to lead. (69e3-70c1)

Most of this passage echoes points that Socrates makes in the *Republic*: that the spirited part is somehow better than the appetitive; that it shares in manly courage, competitiveness and anger; and that it is quick to respond to external threats—none of this should surprise anyone familiar with the earlier account. Timaeus' physiological focus, however, is innovative: the details of the spirited part's location in the body and the specific organs and humors involved in its operations receive no attention in the *Republic*. Of course, this is a departure in approach rather than a substantive disagreement, one that makes perfect sense given that Timaeus, unlike Socrates, is a natural philosopher. Whether one has any idea or not of what bodily processes underlie the spirited part's affections has no obvious consequences for how one thinks of its role and character.

Yet what Timaeus leaves out of his treatment of the spirited part is ultimately more important than what he says. Even if Timaeus' focus is different from Socrates' in the *Republic*, his discussion overlooks a fundamental aspect of the spirited part: its other-regarding nature. Whereas the spirited part's love of honor is central in the *Republic* account, Timaeus makes no reference to honor at all.[125] He does not address the extent to which the spirited part's desires and values are molded by social context, but envisions its

[125] Cf. Zuckert (2011) 350: "Ironically, in light of the root of his name, Timaeus does not appear to recognize a desire for honor."

role in our lives as strictly determined by our nature and design. This is especially clear in how he treats the spirited part's aggressiveness and quickness to anger: these emerge as responses to threats to our bodily or psychic integrity, and their purpose is to help us stay alive and rational rather than drive us to maintain or advance our social standing. Although this naturalistic focus fits Timaeus' overall orientation, compared with Socrates' analysis it presents too restrictive a view of the spirited part's concerns and function.

A different passage outside of Timaeus' discussion of the tripartite soul offers further support for the idea that he significantly limits the spirited part's role in our lives. At 88a8-b2, Timaeus claims that two different types occur naturally among human beings: "the one for nourishment, because of our body, and the other for wisdom, because of that most divine element in us (διὰ σῶμα μὲν τροφῆς, διὰ δὲ τὸ θειότατον τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν φρονήσεως)." It is clear that the body's desires are the kind we ascribe to the appetitive part of the soul, and that the rational part is the one that is divine and pursues wisdom. Timaeus' suggestion that each part of the soul is responsible for a different set of desires is, of course, consistent with Socrates' claims in the *Republic*; his silence on the spirited part's desires, however, is notable and somewhat surprising. This omission suggests either that this part of the soul has no desires of its own or that these desires are somehow not natural and therefore less important than those of the other two parts. Presumably, for Timaeus one could live well without necessarily caring for the spirited part and giving it what it needs, i.e. making sure that others respect us and we are in good social standing. By contrast, in the *Republic* those who dedicate their lives to the pursuit of wisdom are said to regard the desires and pleasures of both the spirited and the appetitive part as necessary (IX.581d10-e4). A complete life is one in which the spirited part's desires given their due, not neglected. Timaeus never directly contradicts Socrates' earlier account or claim that the spirited part needs no caring for at all, but his account clearly does not give its needs serious consideration.

Timaeus' relative neglect of the spirited part and its desires is understandable. Overall, this approach fits nicely with the principal aim of his discussion of human nature: to persuade us that our bodies and mortal souls are designed for us to lead the best lives possible. If the spirited part has no concerns or needs of its own, that makes it easier to present its primary function as making sure that the other parts are able to do their jobs well. On this picture, our having a spirited part is undoubtedly good. Timaeus gives us no reason to think that the spirited part could turn against reason and somehow make itself the soul's ruler. If the spirited part wants nothing other than to keep us alive and rational, its function is to preserve our natural internal order, which only the appetites can subvert. Thus, Timaeus makes psychic harmony appear natural and relatively easy to attain: reason can always count on spirit's help, and the appetitive part is always outnumbered. Our souls have a low potential for conflict by design, a result of the gods' providence when they fashioned us. If psychic harmony should appear fragile and elusive, it could cast doubt on the quality of the gods' craftsmanship. As befits his generally optimistic approach, then, Timaeus presents us with a model of the soul in which little can go wrong. Overlooking certain aspects of the spirited part's character allows him to do that.

(β) Timaeus on the Psychic Maladies

Timaeus' discussion of the soul's diseases, which he accounts for solely by reference to certain bodily conditions and disturbances, makes especially clear how narrow a view of the sources of disorder in our lives he puts forth. At first, Timaeus seems to suggest nothing more than that there is a special class of psychic maladies that result from certain bodily states: he introduces his discussion as being about "diseases affecting the soul on account of a condition of the body (τὰ [sc. νοσήματα] … περὶ ψυχὴν διὰ σώματος ἕξιν)" (86b2), rather than about the soul's diseases generally. Moreover, he never denies that there are psychic disorders whose cause is not physiological. If we look past how Timaeus introduces the discussion and focus on its contents, however, it is striking to how wide a range of psychic disorders he assigns somatic causes. First, there is his explanation of madness: someone who enjoys extreme pleasure or suffers extreme pain and does everything in his power to pursue the one and avoid the other becomes incapable of rational thought, as the 'seed' of his marrow becomes overabundant (86b7-d1). Timaeus could easily claim that such madness is caused not just by a specific bodily condition but also by having the appetitive part of one's soul completely out of control. Yet he chooses to emphasize the bodily cause over the psychic. The soul is not so much at variance with itself as it is brought into disorder by the body.

As Timaeus moves on to offer a similar etiology for various other psychic disturbances, his narrowly physiological approach becomes even more conspicuous:

> καὶ σχεδὸν δὴ πάντα ὁπόσα ἡδονῶν ἀκράτεια καὶ ὄνειδος ὡς ἑκόντων λέγεται τῶν κακῶν, οὐκ ὀρθῶς ὀνειδίζεται· κακὸς μὲν γὰρ ἑκὼν οὐδείς, διὰ δὲ πονηρὰν ἕξιν τινὰ τοῦ σώματος καὶ ἀπαίδευτον τροφὴν ὁ κακὸς γίγνεται κακός, παντὶ δὲ ταῦτα ἐχθρὰ καὶ ἄκοντι προσγίγνεται. καὶ πάλιν δὴ τὸ περὶ τὰς λύπας ἡ ψυχὴ κατὰ ταὐτὰ διὰ σῶμα πολλὴν ἴσχει κακίαν. ὅτου γὰρ ἂν ἢ τῶν ὀξέων καὶ τῶν ἁλυκῶν φλεγμάτων καὶ ὅσοι πικροὶ καὶ χολώδεις χυμοὶ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα πλανηθέντες ἔξω μὲν μὴ λάβωσιν ἀναπνοήν, ἐντὸς δὲ εἰλλόμενοι τὴν ἀφ' αὑτῶν ἀτμίδα τῇ τῆς ψυχῆς φορᾷ συμμείξαντες ἀνακερασθῶσι, παντοδαπὰ νοσήματα ψυχῆς ἐμποιοῦσι μᾶλλον καὶ ἧττον καὶ ἐλάττω καὶ πλείω, πρός τε τοὺς τρεῖς τόπους ἐνεχθέντα τῆς ψυχῆς, πρὸς ὃν ἂν ἕκαστ' αὐτῶν προσπίπτῃ, ποικίλλει μὲν εἴδη δυσκολίας καὶ δυσθυμίας παντοδαπά, ποικίλλει δὲ θρασύτητός τε καὶ δειλίας, ἔτι δὲ λήθης ἅμα καὶ δυσμαθίας.
>
> Indeed, virtually all of the experiences that are spoken of in reproach as 'succumbing to pleasures', as if people were voluntarily bad, are incorrectly reviled. For no one is willingly bad, but a bad man becomes bad on account of some corrupt state of his body and because he has been brought without proper education, and these adversities affect everyone against their will. And again, with pains the soul likewise suffers much trouble; for whenever someone's humors, either those that are acidic or saline phlegms or any that are bitter and bilious, wander along the body and, instead of finding a release to the outside, are pent up within, they mix their vapor with the soul's motion and become blended with it. They produce manifold diseases of the soul, which vary in their intensity and

> frequency and, as they move into the soul's three locations they yield all forms of irritability and depression, of rashness and cowardice, and even of forgetfulness and stupidity, depending on the part they happen to attack. (86d5-87a7)

First, note that although at the beginning of this passage Timaeus echoes Socrates' belief in the involuntariness of vice, his perspective on this notion is quite different: whereas for Socrates what makes wrongdoing involuntary is that it is done in ignorance of what is good,[126] for Timaeus it is the state of our body rather than our beliefs that makes all the difference.[127] They agree that everyone naturally pursues what is good, but they diverge in their diagnosis of what leads to moral failure. Indeed, in this whole passage Timaeus hardly leaves room for any psychic disturbances or vices with causes that are not somatic. His interest lies in the trouble the body causes the soul, not the soul's internal dynamic and its potential for instability. Rather than extensively cataloguing and explaining the soul's disturbances, Timaeus is directing our attention to how many of them result from bodily conditions. Besides reflecting Timaeus' natural scientific bent, this focus helps drive home both the importance of caring for our body's health and that simply being in a body—rather than any feature of the gods' design—threatens our soul's natural order.

Shortly afterward, Timaeus acknowledges that our social environment can have a negative impact on our psychic health, but in fairly restrictive terms. The problem with bad constitutions, he claims, is that in these "no studies at all that could cure these ailments are learnt from youth on (μαθήματα μηδαμῇ τούτων ἰατικὰ ἐκ νέων μανθάνηται)" (87a7-b3). The failure of bad constitutions is a failure to provide their citizens with the kinds of gymnastic and scientific training that helps us preserve our psychosomatic order. This conception overlooks that some regimes are bad not simply because they lack the resources to help citizens care for their souls but because their institutions foster instability and disorder. Timaeus does not acknowledge here the active role constitutions play in their citizens' development by inculcating in them specific beliefs and values and the way cities mold citizens' souls to make them more or less receptive to reason. Even when he examines factors contributing to psychic disorder from outside the body, Timaeus maintains his focus on maladies of somatic origin. Our body's potential to generate disorder in our lives should concern us more than the risk of adopting false and harmful beliefs.

There is no acknowledgement in Timaeus' account of a source of disorder and corruption that receives Socrates' attention in the psychology of the *Republic*: a spirited part that has not been properly educated. Whereas Timaeus presents the spirited part's service to reason as natural, Socrates claims that the soul's middle part is reason's ally "unless it is corrupted by a bad upbringing (ἐὰν μὴ ὑπὸ κακῆς τροφῆς διαφθαρῇ)" (IV.441a2-3). A bad upbringing can consist of inadequate forms of music and poetry or a deficient exercise regime that lead the spirited part to become too aggressive or too soft,

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[126] See esp. *Meno* 77b7-78b2; *Protagoras* 358c3-d4; cf. *Gorgias* 466b9-468e5. I am persuaded by the general interpretation of these passages and Socrates' paradox offered by Segvic (2000).

[127] Zuckert (2011) 349 also sees a significant contrast between how Timaeus and Socrates think of psychic disturbances.

but it can also include the absence of adequate role models, both in poetry and in real life, to shape the spirited part's self-image. The latter in particular is inextricably connected to the political culture in which one grows up: what the people around us pursue as honorable and avoid as shameful and how our city rewards and punishes those pursuits informs our spirited part's desires and aversions.[128] Socrates offers a vivid example of this in his account of the timocratic man, who rejects his philosophical father's example and devotes himself to hunting and warlike activities because of the disrespect his father suffers at home and among his fellow citizens (VIII.548d6-550b7). Similarly, someone who has a natural inclination toward philosophy and learning may have their character catastrophically warped by an inhospitable civic setting, "just like an alien seed sown in a different land is wont to be overtaken by local species and disappear among them (ὥσπερ ξενικὸν σπέρμα ἐν γῇ ἄλλῃ σπειρόμενον ἐξίτηλον εἰς τὸ ἐπιχώριον φιλεῖ κρατούμενον ἰέναι)" (VI.497b3-5). In light of Socrates' attention to how different political cultures can foster grave psychic corruption and disorder by orienting our spirited part toward inappropriate ideals, we can readily recognize how narrow Timaeus' focus on the bodily disturbances is. We can see, that is, that Timaeus mostly avoids considering how our social and political context can shape our psyche's order.

To sum up: Timaeus speaks about the spirited part of the soul in a manner that, while familiar at first sight, suggests strongly that his analysis is guided by a distinctive perspective on human nature. From this perspective, the social dimension of human life is not as significant as our ability to restore our rational soul to its pristine state and keep both our soul and our body healthy and harmonious. This perspective is in evidence not only in Timaeus' discussion of the spirited part, but also when he addresses the obstacles we face in our efforts to live rationally and how to surmount them. Timaeus' discussion of the embodied human soul, from its structure to what makes it healthy or sick, largely takes it in abstraction from its social needs and environment. This is consistent with how he speaks of the gods' priorities and reasoning when they fashioned our mortal souls and bodies, which we discussed in the preceding section.

Before considering the implications of Timaeus' consistent avoidance of the political, I would like to examine one last passage from his account of how the gods designed our body that fits this pattern. In this very strange passage, Timaeus relates the gods' reasons for giving human beings fingernails. It has not received much attention from commentators, possibly because it is prima facie a rather embarrassing explanation of why we have fingernails. The significance of this passage, however, lies not so much in the explanation itself but rather the conception of our origins and relation to the lower animals it encourages us to adopt. Here too, I argue, Timaeus hints that politics and communal living are not fundamental aspects of our nature.

[128] Hobbs (2000) 11-30 offers an especially lucid discussion of what the spirited part's education consists of.

id. Timaeus on the Genesis and Purpose of Human Fingernails

Though Timaeus explains the existence and purpose of virtually every part of our body and mortal soul by reference to how they equip us to live rationally, there is one part of us for which he offers no such explanation: our fingernails. He describes their production thus:

> τὸ δ᾽ ἐν τῇ περὶ τοὺς δακτύλους καταπλοκῇ τοῦ νεύρου καὶ τοῦ δέρματος ὀστοῦ τε, συμμειχθὲν ἐκ τριῶν, ἀποξηρανθὲν ἓν κοινὸν συμπάντων σκληρὸν γέγονεν δέρμα, τοῖς μὲν συναιτίοις τούτοις δημιουργηθέν, τῇ δὲ αἰτιωτάτῃ διανοίᾳ τῶν ἔπειτα ἐσομένων ἕνεκα εἰργασμένον. ὡς γάρ ποτε ἐξ ἀνδρῶν γυναῖκες καὶ τἆλλα θηρία γενήσοιντο, ἠπίσταντο οἱ συνιστάντες ἡμᾶς, καὶ δὴ καὶ τῆς τῶν ὀνύχων χρείας ὅτι πολλὰ τῶν θρεμμάτων καὶ ἐπὶ πολλὰ δεήσοιτο ᾔδεσαν, ὅθεν ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐθὺς γιγνομένοις ὑπετυπώσαντο τὴν τῶν ὀνύχων γένεσιν.
>
> And where sinew, skin and bone are interwoven in the fingers, a combination of these three materials, a single hard skin dried out and composed of all of them, came into being. With these auxiliary causes it was fashioned, but it was wrought by the design that is most responsible for such things for the sake what would happen in the future. For they who created us knew that eventually women and all wild animals would come into being from men. And they understood that many of these animals would need the use of nails for various purposes, which is why they fashioned into human beings the rudiments of the nails right when they were born. (76d3-e4)

Rather than give our nails a role as instruments we can use in our efforts to lead a rational life, Timaeus accounts for their existence by referring to the gods' plan for the creation of all mortal species. We cannot understand their usefulness if we restrict our consideration to human life, for it is only when fingernails belong to wild animals that they are able to serve their genuine, natural purpose. As humans, it seems, we neither need fingernails nor have any natural use for them.

Unfortunately, Timaeus does not tell us explicitly why he thinks nails are useful to animals but not humans. Yet this is fairly easy to see: animals use their sharper, more developed nails to defend themselves or to kill other animals they can eat, among other things. For them, nails are weapons of sorts, without which they may not be able to survive. Humans, on the other hand, can do without nails: we do not need to hunt and kill other animals to survive, and we can fashion weapons, walls, and other artifacts to defend ourselves. For Timaeus, then, humans by nature and design live in a way that makes having such bodily equipment superfluous. Our bodies are adapted to a safe and civilized way of life, and their design presupposes that we will not have to fend for ourselves in the wild.

Why is this important and how does it fit together with Timaeus' unusual perspective on human sociality and community? First of all, Timaeus' approach to zoogony and anthropogony and how he conceives of the relation between the two is the reverse of that commonly taken by natural philosophers of the period. According to

philosophers such as Anaximander and Empedocles, humans were not the first animals to have come into existence, but were preceded by lower species.[129] While Timaeus emphasizes how other mortal animals are degraded, demoted humans, most of his predecessors and contemporaries stress that humans are in fact animals.[130] For some of these thinkers, what sets humans apart from the other animals is that humans came together to build and live in cities. Archelaus, for example, claims that after animals and humans came to be, "human beings were differentiated from the rest and established rulers, laws, crafts, cities and everything else (διεκρίθησαν ἄνθρωποι ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλλων καὶ ἡγεμόνας καὶ νόμους καὶ τέχνας καὶ πόλεις καὶ τὰ ἄλλα συνέστησαν)" (DK 60A4.19-20).[131] For him, humans are different from the other animals because we have fashioned civilized life for ourselves, not because we are more intelligent or closer to the gods. Along similar lines, Protagoras apparently argued that humans at first lived like wild beasts, framing our species' history as a movement from savagery to civilization. In the Platonic dialogue named after him, he claims that the difference between primitive men and their modern, city-dwelling descendants is so vast that comparison with the former would make someone who is exceptionally vicious by current standards seem like a paragon of virtue (*Protagoras* 327c4-d4). Lacking civic education and laws that would compel them to act justly, the earliest men lived like the most savage of animals. On this view, being civilized and tame is something humans achieved at a point in our history by means of specific inventions and institutions, not a feature of our original nature. For us to be able to lead recognizably human lives, our species had to overcome its original state. We have not always been, as Timaeus would have it, the most god-revering and rational animals.

From the perspective of an Archelaus or a Protagoras, it would be possible to agree with Timaeus that we *currently* have no particular need for our fingernails but see them as a reminder of our primitive state prior to the emergence of civilized life. Such a perspective would find Timaeus' stance on our nature patently unhistorical. Assuming that humans have never lived like wild animals and our lives have always been tame and civilized, Timaeus appears unaware of how essential a condition living in a city is for our ability to choose the kind of life he recommends. His assumption that a life dedicated to rational contemplation has always been available to us makes the emergence of civilized life and other technological developments seem trivial. For Timaeus, it appears, humans entered the universe fully formed and ready to achieve their highest potential from the very beginning, needing nothing beyond their natural faculties to develop their rationality.

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[129] For Anaximander, see DK 12A10 and 12A30. For a cogent reconstruction of Empedocles' zoogony and anthropogony that includes relevant texts and translations, see Sedley (2007) 33-52.

[130] Campbell (2000) stresses that Timaeus' anthropocentric zoogony inverts the standard Presocratic scheme.

[131] This is not to say that Archelaus is typical or representative of other natural philosophers. As Betegh (2016) points out, incorporating an account of the origins of society in his cosmology was likely his innovation and it would be mistaken to read this kind of account into earlier thinkers. Nevertheless, Archelaus' innovation is consistent with the general principles espoused by his predecessors and could be regarded as taking these principles to their logical conclusion.

Timaeus' gods not only designed us without explicitly considering our need for living as members of a community, but also in such a way that we would at least in principle be able to attain wisdom even if we did not associate with other humans.

What seems at first a strange and embarrassing passage is ultimately much more than that. Timaeus' thoughts about why we have fingernails are hardly crucial, but the peculiar way he chooses to speak about their purpose reveals how distinctive a perspective he presents. Timaeus could try to explain what use we could have for nails by referring to a primeval past in which we lived like beasts—a past a few intellectuals of his time seem to have considered a reality—but that would raise difficulties for his account. If he admitted that at one point it would have been practically impossible for a human being to pursue the kind of wisdom he celebrates, he would have a harder time arguing that this is in fact what the gods have set as our ultimate goal. Moreover, it would be rather strange if the gods had designed our mind and body so that we could dedicate our lives to studying nature but left it to us to devise the conditions that would make that possible in practice. Most importantly, though, Timaeus' explanation here excludes the possibility that humans were formerly savage creatures, who needed the influence of communal life to mature into our true nature. If it was never necessary that we undergo such a radical transformation, then being part of a structured society is not as constitutive of our nature as we would generally think. This is, of course, of a piece with Timaeus' persistent minimizing of how our social environment shapes our lives.

ii. What Motivates Timaeus' Avoidance of Politics and Sociality?

Our survey of Timaeus' remarks on human happiness and the creation of our bodies and mortal souls shows a lopsided focus on intellectual achievement. Timaeus pays little attention to the social dimension of our lives, which is surprising for a variety of reasons. First of all, Timaeus is by all appearances a Platonic philosopher, agreeing with Plato's several philosophical characters on key issues in psychology, epistemology and metaphysics. But Plato's other philosophers demonstrate a keen interest in how a city's culture and institutions affect its citizens' endeavors to live well in several dialogues, especially the *Republic*, the *Statesman* and the *Laws*. In this context of broad agreement, Timaeus' neglect of that entire aspect of our lives is particularly jarring. These dialogues all suggest that understanding civic education and culture and reforming them on the basis of philosophical insight is not something a complete philosopher should avoid. Though not in the same way, each of these dialogues suggests that an accomplished philosopher goes beyond caring for his or her own body and soul and is in fact best qualified to care for the city as a whole. By comparison, Timaeus' idea of the wise person appears deracinated and egoistic: deracinated, because he sees the heavens as his true home and to that extent is above human affairs; egoistic, because he need not concern himself with anything more than taking appropriate care of his soul and body.

The *Timaeus*' frame, of course, reminds us of Platonic philosophy's concern with politics and civic institutions: the clear allusions to the *Republic* and Socrates' request for a speech showing the ideal city in action suggest that the *Timaeus* is a sort of continuation of rather than a departure from that previous work. Furthermore, the plan of the feast of

speeches makes it so that Timaeus' cosmology is framed by politics, as Critias' fulfillment of Socrates' request will follow Timaeus' account. In the dialogue's setting, politics and social institutions are not regarded as trivial at all. Everyone present is said to have significant experience in politics, with Socrates as the sole exception. Timaeus in particular seems to have taken politics very seriously, to the point of advancing to the highest offices in his native Locri (20a1-5). For someone whose perspective on human nature seems to minimize the importance of politics and political engagement, Timaeus has a striking record of public engagement. The content of Timaeus' cosmology is undoubtedly in tension with his career as Socrates describes it. Even more surprising than a Platonic philosophical character minimizing the importance of politics is one with Timaeus' career doing it before the particular audience he faces.

Yet it is precisely because of the audience he confronts and the way politics dominates their conversation that it is fitting for Timaeus to point to a perspective that transcends politics in his cosmology. As we have argued, the dialogue's opening reveals Critias as embodying a naïve parochialism that calls for philosophical correction. One of the goals of Timaeus' cosmology is to offer a corrective to the perspective on the world Critias represents. In the previous chapter, we saw that Timaeus' theology has the potential to orient someone in Critias' position toward a more philosophical perspective. Timaeus' gods, i.e. the Demiurge, the cosmos, and the celestial bodies, are above traditional, anthropomorphic deities such as Athena, and their favor and providence extend to all humans alike. These gods are responsible for our existence and have provided us with everything we need in order to lead the best life available, making any special favor we may enjoy from traditional deities on account of our lineage or civic identity superfluous.

The way Timaeus' discusses human happiness and the gods' reasoning when they fashioned us, inseparable as it is from his theology, also serves this reorienting function. As the dialogue's frame shows, Critias takes great pride in his identity as an Athenian citizen and cherishes the stories and festivals that celebrate Athens' values and virtues. For him, one's social and political environment is all-important; his sense of self and perspective on the world are entirely dependent on the culture and institutions of his native city. In other words, Critias is all too tied to his earthly environment, living and thinking of himself as the opposite of Timaeus' plant rooted in heaven. By inviting Critias and others like him to think of themselves as having celestial roots, Timaeus challenges them to consider their place in the world from a radically different perspective from the one they are accustomed to. The way Timaeus talks about happiness and the purpose of the human body and soul offers Critias types an opportunity to make sense of who and what they are without reference to the particular social or political setting that is familiar to them. More than that, it suggests to them that the only way they can truly understand their nature and position in the cosmos is if they think of themselves in abstraction from their social environment. Rather than indict Critias' viewpoint or reveal its inadequacies directly, Timaeus advances an alternative vision and makes it clear that those who ignore or resist it end up alienating themselves from their potential as rational, semi-divine creatures. That is, he provides Critias and others like him with reasons to grow dissatisfied with their narrow perspective and strive to transcend it.

This aspect of Timaeus' vision, however, could be problematic. As we have already pointed out, Timaeus' idea of the studious and happy individual comes off as detached and

egoistic. If Timaeus' account successfully stirs others to turn away from their earthly environment to focus on nurturing their rational soul and preserving their psychic and bodily health, it may end up fostering narrow self-concern. Since happiness does not seem to demand that we concern ourselves with anything other than establishing and preserving our own psychic and bodily wellbeing, it is unclear what reason we have to care for other people. Perhaps the kind of forgetfulness of our social environment Timaeus promotes could erode the commitment to the welfare of others that accompanies the type of partisan devotion Critias exhibits. It is natural, after all, that the more we think of our own nature and identity independently of our social setting, the less compelling our community's and our peers' claims on us will appear. Regardless of the bliss that awaits us as we move toward the godlike perspective Timaeus holds before us, we run the risk of losing something crucial in the process.

Other parts of Timaeus' vision, however, may promote active engagement with the world. One of these is Timaeus' portrayal of the Demiurge. Although he does not explicitly present the Demiurge as a paradigm for humans to imitate or assimilate themselves to, we have good reason to see this supreme deity in this way. Aside from how the lesser gods imitate the Demiurge, his order-establishing work suggests that causing things to be arranged in the best way possible is a fundamental aspect of rationality.[132] On this picture, it is not in reason's nature to remain self-contained and jealously guard its purity, as it were. Rather, its character is to apply itself to producing order where it is lacking and improve whatever reality it confronts. For the individual person, this means that if they become as rational as possible they will not be absorbed with keeping order within themselves and nothing more, but also strive to create order in the world, including among the people they encounter. If this is on the mark, then Timaeus' godlike person should be committed to improving his immediate surroundings, not be indifferent to them. Such a person should be able to promote others' good even if he is not particularly attached to his familiar social and political environment.

Additionally, while our sense of kinship with our fellow citizens is diminished as we adopt Timaeus' cosmic viewpoint, a new understanding of our relation to others—rather than simple forgetfulness and withdrawal—may develop. Recall some of the points made in our discussion of how Timaeus' gods relate to humans. First, the Demiurge is a father of sorts to all humans alike: he created each of our rational souls and also provided all of them with equal insight into the nature of the heavens and the laws of fate. Further, we are all, as rational souls created by the Demiurge, related in exactly the same way to the highest of the visible gods: the cosmos, whose soul was fashioned in the same manner as ours. Last, the Demiurge's helpers have endowed every one of us with the same capabilities and tools to restore our rationality to its original state, following the Demiurge's example in extending their generosity toward all humans indiscriminately. For Timaeus, every human being has a divine, celestial origin and is naturally at home in the cosmos. Those who are moved by his account should come to think not only of themselves as plants rooted in the sky, but also recognize that this applies to every person in the same way. Timaeus provides us with a myth about our origins wherein we all share the same divine parentage and original home, which ought to fundamentally alter our understanding

[132] Cf. Mahoney (2005) 87.

of our kinship with other humans. Although adopting the perspective Timaeus puts forth may put distance between ourselves and the people we are used to seeing as our own, it also enables us to see ourselves as sharing a deep bond with them and everyone else.

What Timaeus has to offer to take the place of our sense of belonging to a particular community, then, is the opportunity to see every person as somehow our kin. Perhaps this sounds too cosmopolitan for Plato to ring true, but it is ultimately a very limited cosmopolitanism.[133] Furthermore, a few passages elsewhere in Plato's oeuvre point toward cosmopolitanism, making Timaeus less of an anomaly. First, there is Socrates' argument in the *Republic* that the ideal city's soldiers should not treat other Greeks harshly in war, since "the Greek race is kin and related to itself but foreign and alien to non-Greeks (τὸ μὲν Ἑλληνικὸν γένος αὐτὸ αὑτῷ οἰκεῖον εἶναι καὶ συγγενές, τῷ δὲ βαρβαρικῷ ὀθνεῖόν τε καὶ ἀλλότριον)" (V.470a9-471c1). On the surface, here Socrates appears to advance a Panhellenic rather than a cosmopolitan vision: recognition of other Greeks as kin is accompanied by the decidedly parochial perception of non-Greeks as natural enemies. Yet within the *Republic* itself Socrates gives us the resources to recognize that we are kin to the whole of humanity and his Hellenocentrism is a concession to the prejudices of his time and audience. As Owen Goldin points out, when Socrates discusses philosophy and the apprehension of the forms he never suggests that Greek cultural or ethnic identity is necessary. For Socrates, truth is available to those who have the right education regardless of gender, place, or time.[134] A clearer gesture toward cosmopolitanism appears in *Statesman* 262c10-d, where the Eleatic Visitor asserts that separating Greeks from the rest of the human race and lumping all non-Greeks together as if they were a natural kind would be an improper division. The implication there seems to be that there are no natural differences between Greeks and so-called barbarians. Though we should hesitate to regard Plato as a genuine and full-fledged cosmopolitan thinker, some of his work attests to his attraction to this ideal.

Timaeus in particular encourages us to think of the whole cosmos as our natural home, but he seems to do so in order to advance what is primarily an intellectual rather than an ethical ideal. The cosmos is not a community that encompasses and transcends individual cities, and our earthly setting is too confining and needs to be transcended primarily as an intellectual rather than an ethical horizon. Adopting the perspective Timaeus advances need not engender in us a sense of duty to benefit the whole of humanity, even if it does allow us to see that it is arbitrary to base our concern for others on group affiliation or civic identity, which do not determine who we truly are.

Timaeus' cosmic perspective is not conducive to full-blown cosmopolitanism, but it may inspire a peculiar form of philanthropy. As we come to think and act like a god to the extent that it is possible for a human, our aims should include promoting the good of others not in an ordinary sense, but specifically insofar as they are rational, potentially

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[133] Cf. Howland (2007) on the cosmopolitan aspects of Timaeus' account.

[134] Goldin (2011) 268. Goldin also points out that Socrates' guardians will never engage in wars of aggression and will only encounter non-Greeks while defending their city, in which case their regarding these foreigners as natural enemies will have only a positive effect insofar as it will make them more defensive in the event of a foreign invasion (269-270).

godlike beings like ourselves. This is obviously different from the way most people see themselves and each other, but that should not dissuade the godlike person from engaging with others. Instead, he should recognize others' errors about who they are and what is good for them as a disorderly state he is extraordinarily well poised to restore to order. On the one hand, awareness of his own capacity to benefit others in such a crucial way may engender a sense of responsibility in the godlike person; on the other hand, he will be aware that it is a limited responsibility, since each of us ultimately has to be a self-mover when it comes to looking after our physical and intellectual wellbeing. Such a person will understand, then, that he will have to treat others as self-determining agents rather than passive subjects he can mold if he is to promote genuine order among them, and also that his success in such endeavors is by no means guaranteed and depends on more than his own efforts. In spite of his detachment from the particular social environment he lives in, the person who strives for godlikeness may be better prepared to truly benefit others than anyone else. Perhaps this is why Timaeus has devoted much of his life to political service: he recognizes that, as someone whose own studies have allowed him to approach godlikeness, he is more qualified to serve than most others.

Timaeus' focus on intellectual achievement and avoidance of the political and social aspects of human life may not be as escapist as it appears after all. Even if he emphasizes individual intellectual flourishing, Timaeus' perspective on rationality and its origins has implications for how we regard and treat other people. Adopting that perspective may even be necessary if we wish to truly grasp how to benefit others and what the aims and limits of our engagement with them should be. By urging his audience to focus on their rational soul and its heavenly origin, then, Timaeus gives them the opportunity to develop an ethical outlook that is grounded in nature rather than particular civic traditions and institutions. Partly as a counter to Critias' partisan devotion to Athens, Timaeus encourages us to think of our and others' happiness as something we can and should work toward independently of our native social and political environment. By presenting a cosmology that makes the city inessential from the perspectives of both the individual person and the cosmos, Timaeus can provoke Critias and others like him to reassess their attachment to their community and ground their values in nature instead. Though not explicitly anti-political, Timaeus' cosmology suggests that regarding civic traditions and institutions as the ultimate authorities on how we ought to live is mistaken. This view presents a fitting challenge to someone with as blinkered a perspective as Critias', but it is not necessarily appropriate in every context and may pose problems of its own. The Athenian's approach in the *Laws*, which presents a completely different perspective on our ultimate end and the city's significance, will allow us to see that more clearly.

Before turning to the *Laws*, however, it is necessary to counter some possible objections to my interpretation of Timaeus' rhetorical strategy and aims in eliding our social nature. Though the preceding analysis assumes that Timaeus is for the most part free to make certain choices in how he presents his material, the text may nevertheless be taken to suggest that Timaeus' presentation is to a large degree determined by the plan for the feast of speeches Critias outlines at 27a3-b6: Timaeus will begin with the generation of the cosmos and end with "human nature (ἀνθρώπων φύσιν)," followed by Critias' account of the ancient Athenians. The gap between Timaeus' account of human origins and Critias'

narrative of ancient Athens that naturally accompanies the plan brings out Critias' parochialism, but Timaeus is not responsible for it. The plan is Plato's choice rather than Timaeus', and it is possible that the contrast between Timaeus' perspective and Critias' is entirely of the author's making. Timaeus may be simply presenting a cosmology that is simply suitable for the feast of speeches, which we can only recognize as a challenge to Critias' parochialism because Plato has embedded it within the dialogue's particular context. Perhaps Timaeus avoids politics because the feast's plan demands that he not go further than human origins, not because he wants to counter Critias' political focus.

Against this objection, I point out that even if Timaeus has to speak within a plan where the contrast between his apolitical perspective and Critias' parochialism will emerge regardless of his account's specific content, it can still be the case that he makes choices in his account that are especially well suited to provoke someone like Critias. In particular, nothing in the plan Critias announces demands that Timaeus include a strong protreptic element in his account, describing the bliss we attain as we contemplate the celestial motions. Timaeus does not need to emphasize our heavenly origin and what we should do to restore our rational faculty to its pristine condition, but this is a theme to which he returns repeatedly throughout his account. Though Timaeus would be able to offer a fitting account of our origins without touting the benefits of philosophical astronomy, he chooses to make it clear to his audience what they are missing as long as their attention is away from the heavens. Plato's framing of Timaeus' cosmology is not solely responsible for its appearance as a challenge to Critian parochialism.

Another point against this objection is that the plan for the speeches Critias announces does not necessarily require Timaeus to end his account where he does and leave a gap between it and Critias' account. According to Critias', Timaeus' account is supposed to end with human φύσις, a vague notion most translators render as 'origins' but whose vagueness may be better captured by our choice of 'nature'. The latter, of course, implies far fewer restrictions on what Timaeus may cover in his account. Though it would be unusual for a cosmology to address primitive humanity's history and the emergence of communal living, such an appendix would be warranted if Timaeus wanted to examine sociality as an aspect of our nature and establish greater continuity with Critias' political narrative. It may well be Timaeus' choice to present our nature in abstraction from social and political realities, rather than something forced on him by Plato's design or his account's genre.

Perhaps our argument that the constraints context and genre impose on Timaeus' presentation are not sufficient to account for his apparent challenge to Critias' parochialism lets another line of objection emerge: if Timaeus is free to include in his account material untypical of cosmologies, then why does he not challenge Critias with a broad, detailed discussion of social psychology instead of presenting a cosmology and biology that avoid the topic? A more direct account of what ails Critias and appropriate remedies, we can suppose, would likely be more effective in provoking him to reflect on and transcend his perspective. Yet Timaeus may have a few reasons to avoid such a discussion. First of all, it would be hard to justify including a sophisticated account of how societal values and beliefs are impressed on citizens—for example, of the sort we find in the *Republic* and the *Laws*—in a cosmology. Although Timaeus could reasonably discuss humanity's earliest stages and the origins of political association within his cosmology on the grounds that

they are part of our nature's development, no such justification would apply to how cities currently mold their citizens' psyches. Though cosmology can be a flexible genre, a detailed discussion of social psychology and civic education would be appropriate only in more explicitly political forms of discourse.

This is not to say, however, that Timaeus' relatively indirect approach is the product of cosmology's generic conventions: an advantage his strategy has over a more detailed and direct approach is the way it encourages his audience to think of themselves as celestial beings and consider their nature in abstraction from their social ambit. Rather than directly criticize political structures and institutions, Timaeus simply orients his audience toward what should be more fundamental concerns, revealing the highest human activity and happiness as entirely disconnected from political realities. Even if Critias and others like him will not find in Timaeus' speech a *direct* challenge to their partisan viewpoint, the cosmology's pointed avoidance of politics has the power to provoke them to reflect critically on their place within their city and the world.

Having accounted for Timaeus' avoidance of politics and sociality in his discussion of human nature and its likely motivations and aims, I can now turn to the Athenian's contrasting approach in the *Laws*. After examining and explaining the contrast between the two cosmologies' perspective on politics and community, I will consider whether and how these perspectives form part of a unified philosophical project.

iii. The Athenian on Happiness and the Polis

In the *Laws*, Plato has the Athenian present a conception of happiness and its relation to our social and political environment that is markedly different from Timaeus'. Even though the Athenian's primary discussions of happiness are found outside of his cosmology, we shall see that aspects of his cosmology reflect and reinforce the ideas about happiness he presents elsewhere in the dialogue. First, I discuss the distinctly political and civic understanding of happiness and virtue the Athenian articulates throughout the dialogue. Then, I examine what role and position he gives the city in his cosmology and how that fits the conception of happiness he advances in the dialogue's other sections.

(α) The Athenian on Personal and Civic Happiness

Although the Athenian's remarks on happiness are scattered throughout the dialogue, they point to a unified and consistent vision. Rather than examine each relevant passage at a time, I will focus on the different aspects of the Athenian's notion of happiness that surface frequently throughout the dialogue. For the purposes of our discussion, one particularly striking and important feature of the Athenian's position is that he discusses what happiness is not only for individual people but for cities as well. At several points in the conversation, the Athenian discusses individual and civic happiness together, suggesting that happy cities and happy individuals exhibit at least some of the same characteristics (e.g., I.628c9-e1; I.636d4-e3; V.742d2-743c4; VII.816c1-d2). At other times, he comments on civic happiness specifically, which he identifies as the

legislator's ultimate aim when devising laws (e.g., I.631b3-6; IV.718b2-5; V.743c5-6; VII.806c3-7). The Athenian's concern with civic happiness is hardly surprising given the *Laws*' focus on the nature and aims of legislation, but it does clearly set him apart from Timaeus, whose perspective on happiness is apolitical and strictly focused on the individual. While Timaeus presents a vision of what each of us can do to achieve our own happiness irrespective of our particular circumstances, the Athenian is interested in what makes entire cities and citizen populations happy.

The Athenian's notion of what happiness consists of, for both individuals and cities, appears typically Platonic: being virtuous, understood as possessing all four of the cardinal virtues—courage, justice, wisdom and moderation—is at least necessary, if not sufficient, for happiness (I.631b3-d2; II.660e2-661e5; IV.715e7ff.; VIII.829a1-3; IX.870b6-7).[135] Furthermore, though the good legislator's ultimate aim is to make the city as happy as possible, the Athenian often speaks of the legislator's goal as fostering virtue in the citizens (e.g. I.630c1-6; IV.705d3-706a4; VI.770c1-771a2; XII.962b4-963a9). This suggests that the Athenian thinks that a city's happiness follows naturally from its citizens' being virtuous and happy and requires nothing more.

If we examine how the Athenian speaks of the citizens' virtue more closely, however, we can see, first of all, that his conception of virtue is not entirely typically Platonic but quite distinctive in key respects. By focusing on what is distinctive in how the Athenian speaks of virtue and virtuous people, we will be able to see that he thinks that: a) a city's happiness depends on the citizens' being virtuous in a specific way; and b) citizens depend on their city's laws and institutions to attain the virtue and happiness proper to them. The happiest possible city makes citizens whose virtue and activities conduce to its happiness, while happy citizens achieve their happiness by acting in a way that leads not only to their own but also to their city's happiness. What is good for the city as a whole coincides with what is good for individual citizens, and the former shapes the latter. Though the contrast between the Athenian and Timaeus on the question of happiness was already clear, it is even starker now.

One of the most distinctive aspects of how the Athenian speaks about virtue is that, in spite of his insistence that the legislator ought to foster the whole of virtue and not just a part of it (see esp. I.630d9-631b1), he singles out moderation (σωφροσύνη) as a particularly important virtue.[136] At III.696b1-697b6, for example, the Athenian argues that in a city honor should not be conferred on anyone who lacks moderation, even if that person seems to possess other virtues. Although moderation by itself is not worthy of honor, "but rather some sort of speechless silence (ἀλλά τινος μᾶλλον ἀλόγου σιγῆς)" (696d11-e2), the Athenian claims that virtue needs moderation in order to be of maximal benefit to us, and the soul and its goods should receive the highest honors "provided moderation is present in it (σωφροσύνης ὑπαρχούσης αὐτῇ)" (696e3-697b4). For the Athenian, moderation is the crowning virtue, since without it all the other virtues are

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[135] For a discussion that casts virtue as both necessary and sufficient for happiness in the *Laws*, see Annas (1999) 45-48. For a discussion of virtue as only necessary, see Bobonich (2004) 210-215.

[136] As Barker (1918) puts it, this virtue is "the mainspring of the *Laws*" (343-345). Along similar lines, see North (1966) 186-196 and Stalley (1983) 54-56.

worthless or incomplete, or the most essential virtue, without which the others cannot come into their own and be performed properly.

Part of the reason why moderation is so important for the Athenian must be that it is the virtue that consists of being properly disposed toward desires and pleasures. At I.647d3-7, he suggests that one cannot become fully moderate "unless he has fought and conquered the many pleasures and appetitive desires that spur shamelessness and injustice (μὴ πολλαῖς ἡδοναῖς καὶ ἐπιθυμίαις προτρεπούσαις ἀναισχυντεῖν καὶ ἀδικεῖν διαμεμαχημένος καὶ νενικηκὼς)." Because this kind of mastery is so important, the Athenian vigorously defends drinking parties, which test and help develop citizens' ability to resist pleasures, against his interlocutors' skepticism (see esp. I.649c3-650b4). Indeed, the first and most fundamental step in acquiring virtue for him is developing the right orientation toward different pleasures and pains in childhood (II.653a5-c4). If our pleasures and pains are not aligned with their proper objects in childhood, they will be more liable to conflict with our reasoned judgment of what is right and wrong and undermine our endeavors to live virtuously. Being moderate and in control of our desires and pleasures entails a harmonious relation between our judgment and our non-rational drives, which is essential for being able to consistently act in accordance with virtue. Furthermore, since the moderate citizen for the most part desires and takes pleasure in what he ought to, he does not have to continuously fight against desires that may prompt him to transgress the law or harm others but is mostly free from them. Acting lawfully and virtuously comes naturally to such a person. Hence the Athenian's frequent use of various forms of the doublet "moderate and just" (e.g. I.632c6-7; IV.711d6-7; VII.808c5-6; IX.870b7-c1): someone whom pleasures and desires cannot impel toward wrongdoing can be counted on to respect his fellow citizens and the laws.

To fully understand the importance of moderation for the Athenian, however, we have to look beyond the aspect of this virtue that involves our pleasures and desires and examine its equally important religious dimension. Consider the following passage from his imagined first address to Magnesia's colonists:

> Τίς οὖν δὴ πρᾶξις φίλη καὶ ἀκόλουθος θεῷ; μία, καὶ ἕνα λόγον ἔχουσα ἀρχαῖον, ὅτι τῷ μὲν ὁμοίῳ τὸ ὅμοιον ὄντι μετρίῳ φίλον ἂν εἴη, τὰ δ' ἄμετρα οὔτε ἀλλήλοις οὔτε τοῖς ἐμμέτροις. ὁ δὴ θεὸς ἡμῖν πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἂν εἴη μάλιστα, καὶ πολὺ μᾶλλον ἤ πού τις, ὡς φασιν, ἄνθρωπος· τὸν οὖν τῷ τοιούτῳ προσφιλῆ γενησόμενον, εἰς δύναμιν ὅτι μάλιστα καὶ αὐτὸν τοιοῦτον ἀναγκαῖον γίγνεσθαι, καὶ κατὰ τοῦτον δὴ τὸν λόγον ὁ μὲν σώφρων ἡμῶν θεῷ φίλος, ὅμοιος γάρ, ὁ δὲ μὴ σώφρων ἀνόμοιός τε καὶ διάφορος καὶ ὁ ἄδικος, καὶ τὰ ἄλλ' οὕτως κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον ἔχει.
>
> What kind of behavior, then, is dear to the god and follows him? Only one, in line with the ancient proverb that 'like is dear to like'—provided it is measured, since things that lack measure are dear neither to one another nor to what is measured. Verily, the god above all must be the measure of all things for us, much more so than some man, as they say. So one who will become dear to such a character must himself become such a person to the best of his ability, and based on this principle the man who is moderate is dear to the god, since he is like him, while the

> immoderate and unjust is unlike him and at variance with him. The same applies to other vices as well, based on the same principle. (IV.716c1-d4)

Though the whole of virtue brings us closer to the god and makes us resemble him, in this passage the Athenian singles out moderation as especially godlike. One possible explanation for this is that by maintaining order within ourselves and in our community we imitate god's activity as a cause for order or organizing principle within the cosmos as a whole. Yet the Athenian's proclamation that the god, not man, is the measure of all things suggests that observing due measure and avoiding excess is about more than attaining psychic harmony and vanquishing inappropriate desires and pleasures. Here the Athenian rejects Protagorean humanism and its emphasis on human self-reliance in favor of reverence toward divine authority.[137] Being moderate, then, includes accepting god as the measure of all things, i.e. recognizing his vast superiority and our own need for divine guidance. Moderate citizens behave in a way that expresses their willingness to follow god.[138] They are, that is, profoundly pious.

Part of what makes the Athenian's linking of piety and moderation significant is that it further reveals how distinctly civic or political his conception of moderation—and virtue in general—is. As I discussed in the previous chapter, for the Athenian piety is of tremendous benefit to the city because it cements the citizens' respect for laws and institutions, preserving social cohesion and stability. Thus, the kind of moderation that the Athenian suggests the good legislator should cultivate among citizens is one that is particularly conducive to a stable and cohesive civic environment. Virtuous, moderate citizens make themselves and their city happy not only by avoiding or keeping in check the pleasures and desires that could bring them into conflict with their peers, but also by accepting the divine authority of the laws and institutions to which they owe their virtue. This is a perspective on virtue that looks beyond individual dispositions and actions to dwell on virtue's dependence on specific institutions as well as virtue's role in preserving these. Here the civic context is both necessary for virtue and happiness and something that virtuous and happy people are deeply invested in and care about.

(β) The Athenian's Unique Perspective on Rationality and the Law

For Timaeus, godlikeness involves recognizing the divine nature of our rational faculty and restoring it to its original order by studying the motions of the celestial bodies and the cosmos. His notion of godlikeness emphasizes each person's kinship with the highest gods and our ability to become even more like them by cultivating our rationality through study. The Athenian, by contrast, sees godlikeness as a matter of being moderate and pious, a key part of which is recognizing our inferiority to the god (see esp. VI.715e7-

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[137] Van Riel (2013) 23-24 sees a similar relation between moderation and piety and the rejection of Protagoras' *homo mensura* doctrine.

[138] Cf. Annas (2010) 89-90, who suggests that the Athenian's valorization of humility and meekness brings him surprisingly close to a perspective more typical of Judaeo-Christian traditions than pagan ones.

716a7, cf. X.903c1-5). Of course, the Athenian does seem to agree with Timaeus that our rationality makes us akin to the gods when he refers to it as "the portion of immortality there is in us (ὅσον ἐν ἡμῖν ἀθανασίας ἔνεστι)" (IV.713e6-714a2). Nonetheless, he emphasizes that we follow the god by obeying the laws that embody his rationality rather than undertaking a lofty intellectual ascent, which clearly sets him apart from Timaeus.[139] This obedience makes us godlike because it results in a commitment to maintaining order in our city in a manner that mirrors and contributes to the god's preservation of order in the cosmos.[140]

Indeed, the Athenian seems to think obedience to the law will be the highest form of rationality most citizens are capable of attaining. This, too, is part of the uniqueness of his conception of virtue within the Platonic corpus. The Athenian agrees with other Platonic characters that reason and its characteristic virtue, wisdom, are an essential part of virtue by enabling us to determine and decide on virtuous actions (e.g., *Laws* I.644e4-645a4; cf. *Republic* IV.442c5-8). Nonetheless, while Socrates and Timaeus present reason as a natural faculty each of us has and can nurture into its full potential, i.e. wisdom, through specific studies (see esp. *Rep*. VII.522b3-535a1; *Tim*. 90b6-d7), the Athenian stresses rationality as a feature of the law, which can provide citizens with rational guidance and shape their judgment.

The Athenian's clearest statement of the law's role in providing citizens with rational guidance appears in the puppet analogy he uses to illuminate our psychology: out of the many forces that pull us toward different types of action, he says, there is one that we should always follow, "the golden and sacred pull of reason, also called the common law of the city (τὴν τοῦ λογισμοῦ ἀγωγὴν χρυσῆν καὶ ἱεράν, τῆς πόλεως κοινὸν νόμον ἐπικαλουμένην)" (I.644e4-645a4). At 644d1-3 the Athenian suggests that reason is called law only when it takes the form of a public decree, but as he elaborates his puppet analogy, he seems to treat reason and the law as identical:

> δεῖν δὴ τῇ καλλίστῃ ἀγωγῇ τῇ τοῦ νόμου ἀεὶ συλλαμβάνειν· ἅτε γὰρ τοῦ λογισμοῦ καλοῦ μὲν ὄντος, πρᾴου δὲ καὶ οὐ βιαίου, δεῖσθαι ὑπηρετῶν αὐτοῦ τὴν ἀγωγήν, ὅπως ἂν ἐν ἡμῖν τὸ χρυσοῦν γένος νικᾷ τὰ ἄλλα γένη.
>
> We must always collaborate with the finest guidance of the law, for given that reasoning is fine but also gentle and not forceful its pull needs help, so that the golden string may conquer the others within us. (645a4-7)

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[139] For discussion of the law as reason's substitute, see Renaut (2014) 301-306.

[140] For a fuller discussion of ordinary Magnesians' godlikeness, see Armstrong (2004) 180-182. Note also that the select group of citizens who are in charge of Magnesia's government, whether we call them the Guardians of the Laws or the Nocturnal Council, attain a higher, more theoretical form of godlikeness than the rest of the city. As the Athenian points out near the dialogue's end, these rulers must have mastery of arguments concerning the unity of the virtues, the beautiful and the good, and the gods (esp. XII.964b3-968a4). On this group's role and education, see Morrow (1960) 500-515; Klosko (1988); Lewis (1998); Bobonich (2002) 391-395, 439-446.

Similarly, at V.726a2-6 the Athenian claims that what is better within us, i.e. reason, should rule what is worse and suggests shortly afterward that obedience to the laws is the proper way to attain this (728a4-b2). To be clear, in these passages the Athenian does not simply supplant our natural ability to reason with the law's prescriptions and commands, nor does he deny that we each possess such a faculty. Rather, he is giving the law an indispensable role enabling reason to assert itself against non-rational desires and determine how we act. Law, the Athenian is saying, plays an essential role establishing and reinforcing the psychic order wherein reason is in control and virtue and happiness are attainable. Law is identical with reason only insofar as it provides us with the content and guidance reason needs to assert itself against our desires and choose the right actions. The Athenian can treat the two as more or less identical because those are the aspects of reason he is most concerned with. At III.688a1-b4, he reiterates that a good legislator should aim at the whole of virtue, adding also that one virtue is especially worthy of the legislator's attention: "the first and leader of the whole of virtue, that would be wisdom, reason and opinion (πρώτην τὴν τῆς συμπάσης ἡγεμόνα ἀρετῆς, φρόνησις δ' εἴη τοῦτο καὶ νοῦς καὶ δόξα)." For the Athenian, the citizens' wisdom is not the same as that of philosophers, as it consists mainly of sound moral judgment rather than intellectual achievement (see esp. III.689c6-e2). Even in utopian Magnesia no more than a few citizens will dedicate themselves to study and non-practical wisdom,[141] with most citizens receiving only elementary lessons in mathematics and astronomy (VII.817e5-818b6). The wisdom most citizens are capable of attaining and should aim at, in Magnesia and elsewhere, is the wisdom that allows one to recognize and decide on virtuous courses of action, and this depends on obedience to the law. For the Athenian, the highest form of rationality most people are able to achieve is intimately bound up with their social environment and their self-understanding as citizens.

To understand the Athenian's unusual perspective on the laws as an essential source of rationality, we have to take into account his dour outlook on human nature. At IV.718d7-719a2, for example, he claims that people eager to attain virtue are quite scarce, and that our natural inclination is toward vice. Similarly, at VI.766a1-4 the Athenian asserts that a human being who receives the proper upbringing and education is wont to be pious and gentle, while one who fails to receive such an education will end up "the most savage of the creatures the earth begets (ἀγριώτατον, ὁπόσα φύει γῆ)." Yet human nature is such that even a social context conducive to virtue may fail to tame especially harsh personalities, which makes measures against temple robbery and other crimes necessary even in Magnesia (IX.853c3-854a3). Besides these scattered comments, the Athenian offers his clearest statement on why our weak nature demands that we subordinate ourselves to the laws for rational guidance at IX.874e7-875d5, as part of his discussion of laws concerning wounding and mutilation. There, the Athenian starts with the claim that without laws humans would not be any different from the most savage beasts, given that our nature is incapable of discerning what is best for the community as a whole. The Athenian points out that there is, in theory, a better alternative to the rule of law: government by someone who possesses knowledge of what benefits the city,

[141] These are the members of the Nocturnal Council, whose role the Athenian discusses at XII.651d3ff.

> ἐπιστήμης γὰρ οὔτε νόμος οὔτε τάξις οὐδεμία κρείττων, οὐδὲ θέμις ἐστὶν νοῦν οὐδενὸς ὑπήκοον οὐδὲ δοῦλον ἀλλὰ πάντων ἄρχοντα εἶναι, ἐάνπερ ἀληθινὸς ἐλεύθερός τε ὄντως ᾖ κατὰ φύσιν.
>
> for there is no law or regulation that is superior to knowledge, nor is it appropriate that reason be subordinate or a slave to anything, but instead rule everything, if indeed it is genuine and truly free as befits its nature. (875c6-d2)

However, if a person who possessed such knowledge but lacked a perfectly moderate character were to rule, his nature would impel him toward greed and ruin the whole city. Furthermore, for someone to combine an understanding of what benefits a city with genuine self-restraint is extremely rare; we can do without laws only in a fantasy. The result is that we must rely on the second-best course of laws and regulation, "which observe and discern what applies for the most part but cannot grasp every single case (ἃ δὴ τὸ μὲν ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ ὁρᾷ καὶ βλέπει, τὸ δ' ἐπὶ πᾶν ἀδυνατεῖ)" (875d3-5). Here the Athenian acknowledges that true wisdom and reason are superior to and transcend the laws. Obeying the laws is more of a substitute for genuine moral knowledge than a necessary condition for it. The problem is that such knowledge and the character needed to reliably act on it are out of reach for the vast majority of people, making strict obedience to the laws the best alternative.

The Athenian's thoughts about the level of rationality most people are capable of attaining and the importance of obedience to the laws shed light on his conception of happiness. Further contrast with Timaeus is instructive here. First of all, we should note that for the Athenian happiness depends on a form of wisdom and rationality that is less theoretical, as it were, and does not demand the level and precision of study Timaeus recommends. The Athenian differs from Timaeus in not making complex studies and high intellectual achievement necessary for happiness. Though Timaeus presents the study of nature as something we are all capable of in principle, the wisdom the Athenian claims will allow citizens to attain happiness, which depends less on individual intellectual cultivation and more on abiding by the wisdom embodied in legislation, appears to be a far more attainable goal for the majority of people. At the same time, whereas Timaeus makes attaining the wisdom that will make us happy a matter of exercising our natural capabilities without any essential contribution from our civic context, for the Athenian civic context has a crucial role to play in our becoming rational and happy. The form of rationality that Timaeus encourages us to cultivate demands significant intellectual labor on our part, but he does not make our success dependent on our external environment like the Athenian does. In other words, while for Timaeus it is up to us to develop our rationality into its proper form, for the Athenian most people can succeed only with the appropriate external guidance, which the city and its laws ought to provide. Timaeus does not see the city playing a particular role in our endeavor to reach our ultimate end and restore our rational faculty to its adequate form. He even suggests that we may need to transcend our native civic environment to reach the summit of rationality. The Athenian, on the other hand, suggests that without cities and laws most people will end up savages and lack any measure of moderation or wisdom. The city for him is therefore essential for establishing

and disseminating wisdom and rational behavior among humans, without which happiness would be entirely out of our reach. While Timaeus seems to think that the city is inessential for human happiness, the opposite is true for the Athenian.

(γ) The City in the Athenian's Cosmology

Timaeus' and the Athenian's cosmologies clearly reflect the contrast in their perceptions of the city and its contribution to human order and happiness. Timaeus' cosmology, as we have seen, mostly avoids commentary on the political realm and even suggests that humans do not need civic structures to attain the highest level of rationality and happiness. The Athenian's cosmology, on the other hand, reflects his understanding of the city as an indispensable contributor to our happiness by investing the city and its justice with cosmic significance.

Some readers have reached ostensibly the opposite conclusion about the Athenian's cosmology: according to Christopher Bobonich, for example, the cosmology is supposed to show that we are not political animals by nature but have an ultimate goal that transcends the city and political life. Virtuous souls are on an extended cosmic journey of which life in the city is only a stage, to be superseded by a form of life that takes place outside a city and includes a richer intellectual life than city-dwellers can attain.[142] But while such an interpretation correctly points out that the Athenian's cosmology directs its audience's attention to a reality that transcends and is prior to the polis, his aim is not simply to reveal the polis as merely a part of a greater whole or somehow diminish the importance of our life within it. Although the Athenian does not explicitly discuss the city's status within or relation to the cosmos in his cosmology, the city is nevertheless a major presence in his account of the natural world, which has as one of its principal aims to lend legitimacy to or justify the city's existence and practices.

Among the ways in which the city figures as a significant presence in the Athenian's cosmology are the many parallels and similarities between political and cosmic structure the Athenian suggests. For example, the Athenian's claim at X.903c1-5 that the individual comes into existence in order to contribute to the whole cosmos' happiness (rather than the reverse) recalls, as Friedrich Solmsen points out, Socrates' assertion in *Republic* IV.420b3-421c6 that the happiness of the whole city counts for more than the happiness or individuals or specific groups within it.[143] It appears that the Athenian's formulation of a cosmic teleology builds on a key feature of Plato's political theorizing.

Of course, this parallel is compatible with a perspective that privileges the cosmos rather than the city as our true home. Yet other more specific structural parallels between cosmos and polis that emerge in the cosmology suggest the Athenian's aim is not to diminish the city's significance but to augment it. As Sara Brill points out, the relation between the soul that governs the cosmos and reason (νοῦς, X.897b1-4) closely parallels the relation between individual citizens and the city: just as the cosmic soul needs reason as an ally and guide, so does the individual soul rely on the city's laws, which embody

[142] Bobonich (2002) 474, 478-479.
[143] Solmsen (1942) 155-156.

reason, as a source of order.[144] The Athenian's cosmology thus presents nature itself as the basis for law's supremacy and ordering role in the city. Rather than simply revealing the cosmos as a prior and more fundamental whole than the city, the Athenian allows his audience to recognize how the city mirrors and contributes to the order of the cosmos as a whole.

Such mirroring is also evident in the parallels between certain aspects of civic and cosmic topography the Athenian establishes with his portrayal of post-mortem punishment. The god has devised a system to ensure that the vicious do not go unpunished and virtue conquers vice at the cosmic level. It consists of souls' being transported to better or worse places according to their actions: while someone who is fully virtuous moves to a "holy place (τόπον ἅγιον)," those who are vicious move "the opposite way (ἐπὶ τἀναντία)." This constitutes an adequate system of punishment because "you become worse when you join worse souls and better when you make your way to better ones (κακίω μὲν γιγνόμενον πρὸς τὰς κακίους ψυχάς, ἀμείνω δὲ πρὸς τὰς ἀμείνους πορευόμενον)" (X.904d6-e7). As Trevor Saunders has pointed out, the Athenian's cosmic punishment scheme appears to turn into a quasi-physical process an established "social truism" he alludes to earlier in the *Laws*: among the worst punishments wrongdoers bring upon themselves is that they cut themselves off from good people and end up able to consort only with other bad people (V.728b2-c8).[145] The Athenian, it seems, bases his portrayal of how souls move through the cosmos on how people move and associate with each other within the ordinary context of the city. At the same time, the penal system the Athenian devises for Magnesia, especially the penalties the different types of impious characters must pay, can be seen as adopting or reproducing certain features of the god's cosmic penology.[146] As the Athenian discusses how to address the presence of such disruptive characters in Magnesia, their being transported to a special location that adequately reflects their character is central to their punishment or rehabilitation. On the one hand, those whose impiety is simply an intellectual error and can be cured are to be imprisoned within the city, being forced to converse with members of the so-called Nocturnal Council for rehabilitation. On the other hand, impious people who are "beastlike (θηριώδεις)" in character are to be expelled to Magnesia's countryside and forbidden from returning to within the city's borders even after death (X.908e5-909c6; cf. 905a6-b2). The imprisonment of the impious mirrors their future, post-mortem demotion to worse places, and the placement of good and bad characters in different locations creates a topographic division within Magnesia that resembles that of the cosmos as a whole. This aspect of the Athenian's cosmology both casts the natural world as the basis for Magnesia's practices and reveals the extent to which political ideas may influence the image of the cosmos that he presents. Although the cosmos is undeniably prior to and more important than the city, the similarities between their structures and operations encourage a view of the latter as a

[144] Brill (2013) 198-199.
[145] Saunders (1973) 244.
[146] Cf. Brill (2013) 202.

genuine microcosm of the former rather than a stage we must ultimately transcend on our way to a higher reality.[147]

Besides suggesting that there are certain key structural parallels between city and cosmos the Athenian also—and perhaps more importantly—portrays order and virtue within the city as an integral part of cosmic order and excellence. The Athenian's cosmology, that is to say, portrays cities as making an essential contribution to cosmic order and happiness, without which the whole would undoubtedly be worse off. Some of the evidence for this comes, once again, from how the Athenian speaks of the post-mortem punishments and rewards. Yet what matters here is not where souls go after death, but the kinds of behavior the Athenian claims the god chooses to reward and punish and why. According to the Athenian, the god devises his system of post-mortem punishments in order that each of the cosmos' parts reside where "it may most easily and best secure the victory of virtue and the defeat of vice within the All (νικῶσαν ἀρετήν, ἡττωμένην δὲ κακίαν, ἐν τῷ παντὶ παρέχοι μάλιστ᾽ ἂν καὶ ῥᾷστα καὶ ἄριστα)" (X.904b4-6). In order to secure virtue's victory within the whole cosmos, the god has determined that souls will be relocated in accordance with how virtuous or vicious they are: the more virtuous a soul, the better its post-mortem dwelling will be, while more vicious souls will be settled in worse and worse places (904c6-e8).

The Athenian offers no indication in this incantation that he is using the terms 'vice' and 'virtue' in any different sense from how he uses them throughout the rest of the *Laws*. We can assume, then, that the god rewards ordinary, civic virtue and punishes those who act against it. As Richard Stalley points out, the Athenian's eschatology stands apart from other Platonic myths about the soul's post-mortem fate in emphasizing the importance of being just in a conventional sense rather than portraying philosophy as our only salvation.[148] By focusing on how the god rewards civic virtue and conventional justice rather than philosophical achievement, the Athenian is able to present his audience with a vision that shows what is good for them individually as also benefiting the city and the entire cosmos. In this vision, the gods recognize the virtue that individuals acquire and enact within cities as beneficial for the entire cosmos and contributing to its overall excellence, which is why they reward it. Furthermore, insofar as they educate people in virtue and provide a context in which virtuous actions can be performed, cities make an important contribution to cosmic order. A good city not only reflects order in the cosmos—it is a genuine and necessary part of that order. Even if it points us to a nebulous 'transpolitical' reality superior to civic life, the Athenian's cosmology nevertheless invests the city with cosmic significance by revealing it as a key locus for the emergence of virtue and order, which the cosmos' overall wellbeing demands.[149]

This view of the city as an essential contributor to cosmic order is supported by a further claim the Athenian makes while arguing against those who believe that the gods can be swayed by offerings from wrongdoers. At 906a2-7, he says:

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[147] For further detailed discussion of the city-cosmos parallels in the Laws, see O'Meara (2017) 117-134.

[148] Stalley (2009) 204-205.

[149] Cf. Carone (1994) 297 on *Laws* X: "Plato does not seem to think of the universe as a complete whole unless we include human affairs as a *central* part of it."

> ἐπειδὴ γὰρ συγκεχωρήκαμεν ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς εἶναι μὲν τὸν οὐρανὸν πολλῶν μεστὸν ἀγαθῶν, εἶναι δὲ καὶ τῶν ἐναντίων, πλειόνων δὲ τῶν μή, μάχη δή, φαμέν, ἀθάνατός ἐσθ᾽ ἡ τοιαύτη καὶ φυλακῆς θαυμαστῆς δεομένη, σύμμαχοι δὲ ἡμῖν θεοί τε ἅμα καὶ δαίμονες, ἡμεῖς δ᾽ αὖ κτῆμα θεῶν καὶ δαιμόνων.
>
> Now, since we have come to agree with one another that the universe is full of numerous good things and of the opposite as well—the latter, in fact, being greater in number—we say also that this is an interminable battle that demands amazing vigilance. But the gods and spirits are our allies, and we in turn are their property.

In this passage, the cosmic victory of good over bad, i.e. the overall excellence and wellbeing of the entire world, appears far from certain, demanding significant effort and commitment from both humans and gods. This differs from the Athenian's preceding arguments and myths, which portray the god as easily punishing wrongdoers and establishing an order in the cosmos that ensures its overall excellence. The effect of casting cosmic excellence as dependent on constant struggle is that it emphasizes even more than the Athenian's prior comments the gods' dependence on humans and our endeavors to cultivate order and virtue for achieving their ultimate goal. Furthermore, the Athenian's odd reference to humans as both the gods' allies and their property suggests that our role in the cosmic battle is essential even if we play a subordinate role in it. Though the Athenian makes no explicit reference to political order and excellence here, cities undoubtedly play a key role in the cosmic battle by promoting order among humans and enabling them to become virtuous and advance the cosmic good. Once again, the Athenian's cosmology implicitly affirms the legitimacy and cosmic significance of social and political order.

If our analyses are correct, the Athenian's cosmology does not simply encourage its audience to transcend the political realm and place themselves within a greater whole. Rather, the cosmology elevates the city, revealing its cosmic significance even if it never explicitly refers to it. The cosmology does introduce its audience to a 'transpolitical' realm that transcends the political reality they are embedded in, but it does not encourage them to neglect or become detached from the latter. The appearance of this higher realm, the greater whole of which the city is ultimately one part, adds to the significance of civic order instead of diminishing it. This higher realm allows the audience to see the values and actions their city praises and encourages as having a farther-reaching impact than they previously assumed. In light of the Athenian's cosmic picture, the city can be seen as promoting not only its citizens' and its own wellbeing, but also that of the cosmos as a whole. This is a cosmology that should inspire or confirm the audience's love of their city and deepen their appreciation of it as a providing not only the citizens but also the whole world with an indispensable good.

Although neither of them offers any explicit comment on the relation between the cosmos and the city, the Athenian's cosmology and Timaeus' offer fundamentally different perspectives on political order and its cosmic significance. Recall that Timaeus' cosmology makes each human's orderliness and happiness a matter of taking advantage of the faculties with which the gods have equipped each of us. Irrespective of whatever political context we happen to have been born in or belong to, it is within our power to

cultivate our rationality and restore our souls to order. For Timaeus, we do not, strictly speaking, need a city to achieve our ultimate end and it may even be necessary for us to detach ourselves from our earthly context and come to see the cosmos as our genuine home if we are to be happy. Furthermore, Timaeus presents the cosmos as a perfectly self-sufficient living being, enjoying complete happiness without need for anything or anyone else from the very beginning of its existence (*Tim*. 33a6-34b9; cf. 68e3-4). He gives no indication that either individual humans or entire cities can make any significant contribution to the happiness of the whole. Overall, Timaeus appears uninterested in how humans ought to act in order to contribute to the cosmos' excellence, focusing instead on how nature facilitates our cultivating rationality and achieving individual happiness. The Athenian's cosmology, on the other hand, suggests that the order and virtue that our political environment fosters in each of us are both necessary for our individual happiness and allow us to contribute to the cosmos' overall excellence and happiness. For the Athenian, the city is necessary not only for most people to achieve their own happiness but also for the entire universe to be maximally virtuous and happy. The two cosmologies offer sharply contrasting visions of the city and its importance for the individual and the cosmos, with each of them reflecting or supporting a different conception of our ultimate end.

As I have already suggested, the different perspectives on the importance of the city and our ultimate end that Timaeus and the Athenian present are adapted to the particular rhetorical context each of them faces. On the one hand, Timaeus' emphasis on intellectual achievement and how we can attain it by turning our attention away from our earthly context to the heavens can function as a counter to the parochialism and devotion to Athens that Critias embodies. The Athenian, on the other hand, faces a very different audience and his priorities in developing a cosmology diverge from Timaeus': throughout the dialogue he is concerned with discovering what institutions and beliefs foster virtue and obedience to the law among citizens. It is fitting, therefore, that his cosmology endows civic virtue and order with cosmic significance, as this would affirm citizens' conviction that they ought to pursue virtue and obey the laws.

iv. Why do Timaeus and the Athenian Present Contrasting Views on the Polis?

Our analyses suggest that key elements of each character's cosmological vision are closely adapted to the particular conception of happiness they advance and the particular rhetorical context toward which they direct their cosmologies. Yet the question of why Plato has Timaeus and the Athenian present meaningfully different cosmologies in different rhetorical settings calls for further explanation. In this section, I discuss the various purposes Plato's presentation of divergent cosmologies in different dialogues might serve and how they are both ultimately part of a unified philosophical project.

(α) Cosmology's Adaptability to Different Rhetorical Contexts

There is no straightforward answer to the question of why Plato has his philosophers articulate contrasting visions of the cosmos and its gods. Previous scholarship

has not directly taken on this question, but its general trends can help orient our attempts at explanation. Overall, earlier analyses point to two main ways of approaching the divergent cosmologies. On one side, developmental readings of Plato's cosmologies suggest that differences between the cosmologies of the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* reflect the evolution of Plato's thinking on cosmological matters, particularly on how to account for evil and disorder in a world created by a benevolent deity.[150] In such readings, the *Laws* takes precedence over the *Timaeus* insofar as the former more accurately represents the views and explanations Plato ultimately settled on. On the other side, numerous commentators see the differences between the two cosmologies as reflective of the different contexts in which they are presented. Whereas Timaeus confronts an audience with an active interest in philosophical matters, which allows him to present a fairly sophisticated account of the cosmos, the Athenian faces a decidedly less philosophical audience and must present a cosmology that can appeal to them and to citizens who are for the most part innocent of philosophy. For these scholars, Timaeus' cosmology represents a more esoteric exposition of Plato's understanding of the natural world, while the Athenian's is the more exoteric display suitable for a popular audience and the political realm.[151]

The latter camp of interpreters is likely correct in pointing out that the differences between the cosmologies reflect variations in dramatic context rather than Plato's philosophical evolution. Nevertheless, their reading seems to me to fall short in some key respects. First, though these interpreters acknowledge cosmology's adaptability to different contexts, they do not explicitly discuss it as a distinct form of discourse or acknowledge its rhetorical potential. Though they are mindful of how dramatic context can affect the presentation of cosmological ideas, their principal interest nevertheless lies in reconstructing Platonic cosmological and theological doctrine. While these interpreters see Plato's philosophical characters in the dialogues as tasked mainly with presenting the author's ideas in a manner that is appropriate to their particular situation, my view is that the audiences and interlocutors these characters face lead them to pursue specific rhetorical goals in each dialogue. While interpreting each cosmology, we should pay attention to how the dramatic context limits what each protagonist is able to say, but also possibly motivates them to include or exclude, highlight or deemphasize specific ideas within their presentation.

On my reading, the different contexts of the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* do not simply determine how fully or freely Timaeus and the Athenian can present Platonic cosmological ideas, but also how they aim to move their audience through the presentation of those ideas. It is probable that, as a number of previous commentators suggest, Timaeus presents the more detailed and sophisticated of the two cosmologies because he faces a more receptive and sophisticated audience than the Athenian does. Nevertheless, as I have already argued, even Timaeus' relatively urbane audience—or at least part of it—stands to benefit from a more fundamental and forceful philosophical challenge to their perspective

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[150] For the most recent example of this type of interpretation, see Mason (2013) and (2014). Cf. Solmsen (1936) and (1942) and Mohr (1978).

[151] For a recent, lucid presentation of this perspective, see Kahn (2013) 214-219. Others who share this view include Hackforth (1936) 6; Moreau (1939) 56-59, 84; Vlastos (1939) 78-79; Brisson (1974) 56; Carone (1994) 275, 295-96; and Menn (1995) 17-18.

than the bare presentation of cosmological ideas could provide. Timaeus is responsive to his particular audience's needs and shortcomings, presenting his cosmology in such a way that it can offer them an appropriate challenge. His cosmology therefore reflects the context in which he presents it not only by featuring a level of detail and sophistication that only a fairly receptive audience would tolerate, but also by addressing and challenging a specific viewpoint represented by that audience. Along similar lines, what sets the Athenian's less elaborate cosmology apart is not only its accessibility to a wider, less sophisticated audience, but also that it aims to confirm that audience's commitment to civic virtue. In both cases, then, context determines both how detailed a cosmology Plato's characters are able to present and the persuasive goal that their presentation serves.

The last point is key to understanding why Plato has different characters present cosmologies in such different settings. By proceeding thus, Plato can show readers that cosmology has potential as a rhetorical resource across very different settings and in the pursuit of divergent goals. Whether one is looking to convince people who are friendly toward philosophy or not, and whether the aim is to encourage them to transcend politics or strengthen their devotion to their city's wellbeing, cosmology may prove singularly useful.

One could object, of course, that although the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* show us cosmology being used to persuade people or convert them to a specific perspective, neither dialogue gives us any clear indication that the cosmologies do in fact have this effect. We would expect that the case for a specific form of discourse as a resource for persuasion showcase it not only being deployed but succeeding as well. If, however, the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* leave open the question of cosmology's efficacy as a means of persuasion, this is not because they are ultimately unconcerned with cosmology's rhetorical function and potential. Rather, it is because the case they make for cosmology's persuasive power is tentative and exploratory. Cosmology is not a magical incantation that can somehow overcome all of the challenges that beset philosophical persuasion, but one of various tools and alternatives available to philosophers as they grapple with those problems. The *Timaeus* and the *Laws* explore possible rhetorical uses of cosmology without making any promises as to its effectiveness. These dialogues advertise cosmology's rhetorical potential not by making any guarantees about its efficacy but rather by showing how adaptable it is to different contexts and aims. This is but one of the ways in which both dialogues together advance a distinctive, unified project.

(β) The Cosmologies' Shared Philosophical Core and Their Accuracy

To claim that Timaeus' and the Athenian's presentations display cosmology's potential as a means of persuasion is not to say, however, that they are mere rhetoric and aim only to persuade their target audience. Even though the two cosmologies' serving divergent functions in different settings results in significant points of contrast between them, both of them are nevertheless based on the same philosophical core. That is to say, both cosmologies convey genuine philosophical ideas, their rhetorical dimension and function notwithstanding. At the heart of the cosmologies' shared vision is the notion that the natural world as a whole is a rational order fashioned or arranged by a benevolent deity

that is supremely rational—if not reason itself. While the *Timaeus* presents this deity very vividly as the Demiurge and the *Laws* features no more than a few nebulous references to it (e.g., X.903d5-e1, 904a6-c4), the basic notion that a rational god is responsible for cosmic order is one both dialogues share. Furthermore, according to both Timaeus and the Athenian, a key feature of the cosmos' orderly disposition is that it ensures that we will be punished or rewarded after death for the conduct and lifestyle we choose. The cosmos is not only a rational order, it is a just one as well. Granted, there are significant divergences between what Timaeus and the Athenian claim is rewarded or punished at the end of our lives—for Timaeus, rational contemplation and study are the key to a good post-mortem fate, while for the Athenian simple virtue is sufficient—but once again both characters agree on the basic idea: the universe is such that our ultimate fate will necessarily reflect our character and conduct adequately. In spite of many significant differences, both cosmologies are built on the same basic ideas about the natural world and divinity. Both cosmologies are part of Plato's effort to communicate some fundamental ideas about the cosmos and the gods to diverse audiences.

These ideas about the cosmos and the gods are not merely a foundation on which a rhetorical edifice is built; convincing their respective audience of these ideas' truth is an important element of the cosmologies' persuasive task. In the *Timaeus*, the Demiurge's responsibility for the natural order and our ability to share in immortal rationality are central to Timaeus' attempt to convince Critias and others like him to look beyond the confines of the city for the true measures of divinity and human happiness. In the *Laws*, the Athenian's arguments for divine control of celestial motions and the movement of souls across the cosmos all undermine the impious doctrines he identifies as a singular threat to moral and political order. Both cosmologies aim to persuade their audience of ideas that are not only specifically beneficial to them and others in a comparable position, but also grounded in a genuinely philosophical understanding of the gods and nature. Though the cosmologies are adapted to appeal to specific standpoints and psychologies, their aim obviously goes beyond simply reflecting those perspectives to themselves and includes drawing audiences toward philosophy. Rhetoric does not exclude philosophy. It is possible to see the cosmologies as exemplifying the various ends to which cosmology can be put and at the same time recognize how they advance a philosophical perspective.

At the same time, the substantive divergences between the two cosmologies raise the question of which of the two is more accurate. Reflecting on this problem can further illuminate how the cosmologies complement one another. As I have already pointed out, some scholars favor the *Laws* as Plato's last word on cosmological matters, while others regard the *Timaeus* as a freer and more transparent exposition of philosophical cosmology. On the whole, the case for Timaeus' cosmology as the more accurate representation of a Platonic philosophical understanding of the cosmos is the stronger one. As Charles Kahn emphasizes in his interpretation of the *Timaeus*, a notable feature of its cosmology is how it extends the theory of forms to apply it to the natural world. Timaeus achieves this by developing the notion of the Receptacle as the stable substratum of the phenomenal world in which images of the forms appear and describing at length how mathematical structures are the means by which sensible particulars participate in forms.[152] Unlike the Athenian in

[152] Kahn (2013) 176-206.

Laws X, Timaeus contributes to the exposition and resolution of key issues in Platonic metaphysics. His cosmology therefore has more credibility as a means for Plato to refine and expose one of the core features of his philosophical edifice. By showing a greater interest than *Laws* X in displaying the continuity between metaphysics and natural philosophy, the *Timaeus* better integrates different aspects of philosophical inquiry and therefore better represents the Platonic philosopher's synoptic perspective.

Beyond its sophisticated metaphysics, there are further aspects of Timaeus' cosmology that favor regarding it as more genuinely philosophical than the Athenian's. First, Timaeus adopts a completely different approach to earlier philosophical inquiries into nature and the cosmos: rather than dismiss his predecessors in natural philosophy as noxious atheists, Timaeus appropriates or updates aspects of their accounts and incorporates them into his own. Timaeus' debt to earlier inquiries into nature is evident, to the point that it is reasonable to regard it as either a kind of *summa* or a radical update of this tradition.[153] Second, Timaeus more openly acknowledges his account's deficiencies and internal contradictions than the Athenian does (see esp. *Tim*. 29c4-7), alerting his audience that a measure of skepticism toward aspects of his account may be warranted. He appears on the whole more self-critical and aware of his inability to render all aspects of his thinking accurately than the Athenian, who pins his account's shortcomings on his audience's inability to follow more sophisticated arguments (X.892d2-893a7) and proceeds more dogmatically throughout.[154] Overall, Timaeus displays more epistemic humility and a more Socratic spirit toward the material he presents than the Athenian, and this contributes to his presentation appearing more genuinely philosophical. Last, as a protreptic Timaeus' cosmology summons his audience to study the cosmos and practice philosophy far more convincingly and directly than the Athenian's does. While the Athenian's end in delivering his cosmology is to defend the city's gods and preserve the religious sentiment that sustains the citizens' morality, Timaeus' goal is to persuade Critias and others in a similar position to look beyond the city and study the cosmos to become as rational and happy as possible. The life toward which the Athenian calls his audience is one of obedience and lawfulness; Timaeus, on the other hand, encourages his listeners to care for their immortal, rational soul by taking up astronomy and philosophical cosmology. Of the two characters, only Timaeus suggests to his audience that their salvation and flourishing depend on exercising the part of themselves that thirsts for knowledge and understanding. Only Timaeus uses his cosmology to explain and justify the philosopher's love of wisdom and commitment to study as essential to human happiness.

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[153] Lloyd (1968) and Menn (2010) are two notable accounts that focus on aspects of earlier natural philosophical speculation that Timaeus incorporates into his cosmology. Cherniss (1951) concludes with the suggestion that Timaeus' cosmology gathers together and transcends the disparate strands of Presocratic philosophy.

[154] For a discussion of the Athenian as a dogmatist, see Nightingale (1993) 294-296. For a contrasting view, see Pangle (1980) 378-379.

(γ) Cosmology's Political Dimension and the Promises of Philosophy

Though we have good reason to see Timaeus' cosmology as a more accurate representation of the Platonic viewpoint than the Athenian's, it would be a mistake to regard Timaeus' cosmology as unqualifiedly superior. For the portrait of philosophical study that Timaeus offers within his cosmology is ultimately one-sided and restrictive. In Timaeus' vision, the key benefit of studying astronomy and philosophy is that it allows humans to transcend our earthly environment and mortal nature. The philosopher primarily takes care of himself and works toward his own intellectual fulfillment and happiness. As I have already suggested, there is a performative tension between Timaeus' elevation of intellectual development above all else and his own outstanding political career: while his cosmology preaches withdrawal and devotion to the intellect, his life indicates that those who cultivate their intellect still have a sense of civic duty, which Timaeus in particular fulfills by ascending to Locri's highest political offices. Politics, Timaeus' life suggests, is more than just a distracting turn away from divine, immortal things toward mortal matters. By presenting a contrasting vision wherein politics and contemplating the cosmos appear more compatible with one another, the Athenian's cosmology could well function as a useful supplement to the one-sided picture we find within Timaeus' cosmology.

How the two cosmologies contrast with and supplement one another on the relation between contemplation and politics is more instructive than what either of them would suggest on its own. For each of them represents one of the key promises or aims that are supposed to justify devoting one's life to Platonic philosophizing. Timaeus, on the one hand, celebrates philosophical cosmology and astronomy as means of personal liberation and salvation; the Athenian, on the other hand, advocates for them as uniquely capable of benefitting and saving the city. The former recommends study for our own sake, while the latter shows its value to entire communities. Timaeus and the Athenian, that is, represent two contrasting ways of answering the question of why cosmology and philosophy deserve our attention and are worth pursuing. It is not clear that either alternative should take precedence over the other, so it is fitting that Plato has his characters present both of them for our consideration. The contrast between the two cosmologies on this point is instructive because rather than definitively answer the question of why cosmology is worth pursuing it invites readers to reflect on two alternatives and why they are in tension with one another.

As we reflect on these two alternative justifications of cosmology, we should note that the tension between Timaeus' explicit focus on study as key to individual self-care and salvation and the Athenian's polis-centric orientation reproduces a tension between philosophical contemplation and political engagement that recurs throughout Plato's work. As early as the *Apology*, for example, Socrates casts himself at once as the god's gift to the city and as a quiet citizen who avoids political participation (30d6-31b5; 31d2-32a3). Similarly, the *Gorgias* presents us on the one hand with a clash between the withdrawn philosophical life, embodied by Socrates, and the active life of the ambitious politician, Callicles, and on the other hand with Socrates' claim that he is the only one in Athens who attempts the genuine art of politics (521d6-8). In dialogues such as the *Phaedo* and the *Theaetetus*, Socrates presents philosophy as entailing forms of withdrawal more radical than avoiding politics: in the *Phaedo*, he famously affirms philosophy is the practice of dying, since philosophers ought to take leave of their body and sense-perception to the

extent that it is possible and focus on intelligible, imperceptible reality instead (esp. 64a4-68b6; 82b10-84b7); in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates describes the philosopher as completely estranged from and oblivious to the environment where his body happens to dwell, training his mind instead on the study of nature and abstract entities (esp. 173c7-175b6). Yet even in these dialogues Socrates' talk of the philosopher as far removed from ordinary reality and practices is difficult to square with his concern for his fellow Athenians and his vigorous advocacy of philosophical virtue.[155]

The tension between political participation and philosophical contemplation is famously a crux within the *Republic*, where Socrates presents philosophers as at once uniquely capable of governing and reluctant to do so. Much like Socrates' ideal philosophers in the *Phaedo* and the *Theaetetus*, philosophers in the *Republic* are naturally devoted to learning and train their minds on intelligible objects rather than sensible particulars. Through their studies, they come into contact with a reality far more beautiful than what the majority of people experience. As Socrates puts it, "they would not act voluntarily, thinking that they have been settled in the Isles of the Blessed while still alive (ἑκόντες … οὐ πράξουσιν, ἡγούμενοι ἐν μακάρων νήσοις ζῶντες ἔτι ἀπῳκίσθαι)" (VII.519c5-6). They appear to prefer study and withdrawal above all. Unlike in the *Phaedo* and the *Theaetetus*, however, in the *Republic* Socrates argues that the very knowledge that philosophers thirst for and that sets them apart from the mass of mankind is what makes them especially qualified to rule (VI.500c2-d8; VII.540a4-b7). Thus, although philosophers would rather avoid political service, they must be compelled to govern if the city is to be as happy as possible.[156]

Although in the *Republic* Socrates manages to present a twofold justification for philosophy by casting it as promising both unparalleled happiness to individuals who engage in it and a reprieve from evils to cities that come under its governance, he nevertheless fails to adequately resolve the tension between philosophic withdrawal and political engagement. His philosopher-kings pursue both learning and ruling, but nevertheless regard the latter as a burden that detracts from their contemplative bliss. If their case is representative, then philosophy cannot make both individuals and their city

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[155] For discussions of the discrepancy between Socrates' conduct and that of the supposedly ideal philosophers he describes in the *Phaedo*, see Rowe (2007) 111-119; Peterson (2011) 190-195. For analysis of the tension between the philosopher as described in the *Theaetetus* digression and Socrates' way of philosophizing, see Hemmenway (1990) 331-336; Rue (1993); Blondell (2002) 298-301; Peterson (2011) 59-89.

[156] Whether philosophers need some form of external compulsion to take on the labor of ruling in the ideal city is of course a controversial question in scholarship on the *Republic*. For readings that deny that external compulsion is needed to get the philosophers to 'return to the cave' and enter politics, see: Kraut (1973), (1991) and (1992); Waterlow (1973); Cooper (1977); White (1979) 23-24, 193-195; Annas (1981) 267; Miller (1985); Reeve (1988) 202-203 and (2007); Mahoney (1992); Shields (2007); and Silverman (2007). Readers who take the need for compulsion more literally and emphasize it in their readings include both Straussian interpreters, e.g. Bloom (1968) 407-408 and Rosen (2005) 280, and, more recently, scholars in the analytic tradition such as Brown (2000) and (2004); Sedley (2007b); and Buckels (2012).

supremely happy at the same time. Furthermore, though in the special case of the ideal city's philosopher-rulers justice demands that they obey the laws and reciprocate for the education the city has given them by ruling, it seems that they would be under no obligation to serve in unideal cities (and perhaps ought to avoid politics there altogether). The conflict between contemplative withdrawal and political engagement in the *Republic* thus raises two distinct but related questions: What activity or activities lead philosophers to their superlative happiness? What is the proper way for philosophers to act and engage with the world around them? Various answers to these questions about the relation between contemplation and action in the philosopher's life can be found in the scholarship on the *Republic* and other dialogues.[157] Our concern here, however, is to reflect on: a) what the reappearance of the tension between contemplation and political engagement can tell us about both the cosmologies; and b) how the cosmologies in turn can help us better understand this tension and formulate possible responses to the questions it raises.

First of all, we should note that the cosmologies' contrasting portrayals of the relation between studying the cosmos and political participation suggest that cosmology is analogous to the whole of philosophy, whose tense relation with political engagement is illustrated in the other dialogues that I have mentioned. Like philosophers in the *Republic*, astronomers and cosmologists in the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* are at once the most capable of governing and most able to distance themselves from the earthly realm of politics. Though it might appear reasonable to regard cosmology as simply an important part of a comprehensive philosophical education, these dialogues present it as an image of sorts for the whole of philosophy, a part that somehow takes the place of and represents the entire discipline. It appears, therefore, that what these dialogues tell us about cosmology applies to philosophy at large. Furthermore, that both cosmologies touch on the complex relation between philosophical contemplation and political engagement shows Plato's sustained interest in addressing and raising questions about this relation until the very end of his career. This is not to suggest, however, that the cosmologies somehow present Plato's most definitive words on the relation between philosophy and politics. Rather, they show a readiness on his part to revisit the issue and continue to provoke his audience to reflect on it.

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[157] While many commentators take the philosopher's apparent preference for withdrawal and otherworldliness at face value and accept that their 'return' to the realm of politics entails some self-sacrifice, others suggest that the philosopher's turn to action, which can but need not include politics, somehow completes their philosophical trajectory and augments the happiness they attain in contemplation. This question is naturally closely related to the question of whether the philosophers are compelled to rule or not (addressed in the preceding note). Scholars who favor a deflationary reading of philosophers' being compelled to rule emphasize how their contemplative activity necessitates engagement with the world and is augmented or completed by it. On the other side, Straussian readers who take compulsion literally claim that philosophers are in fact worse off if they participate in politics, while more recent analytic interpreters who stress that the philosophers must be compelled to rule add that philosophers are justly compelled and benefit from obeying the city's command.

What, then, do the cosmologies help us see about the philosopher's fraught relation with politics? To start with, the contrast between how the two cosmologies approach political engagement suggests that whether one emphasizes the philosopher's alienation or withdrawal from politics or his singular aptitude for governing may depend on the protreptic aims one is pursuing. If Timaeus presents the study of the cosmos as an activity that draws one away from politics and other earthly concerns, part of his motivation to suggest this likely lies, as I have suggested, in his aim to provoke Critias to transcend the limitations inherent in his devotion to politics and his native city. We can take a similar approach to the Athenian's effort to persuade his immediate audience and future citizens of Magnesia that studying the cosmos will confirm their belief in the gods' existence and goodness: what prompts him to emphasize this may be his desire to show that genuine philosophy does not pose a threat to political order but can in fact serve as its powerful and indispensable ally. What changes from one dialogue to the next is not what Plato thinks about the philosopher's stance toward politics, but rather how each character decides to represent this relation depending on their rhetorical strategy for advancing philosophy. This should be true of every dialogue, not only the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*.

If these observations are on the right track, they can help us formulate some partial answers to the questions raised by the tension between philosophy and politics as it appears throughout Plato's corpus. First of all, both Timaeus and the Athenian seem to accept the idea that what makes philosophers singularly happy is engaging in contemplation, though for the Athenian political engagement may make philosophical types more godlike by allowing them to contribute to the world's rational structuring. At the same time, Timaeus and the Athenian can serve as correctives to the notion that the philosopher's natural preference is toward contemplative retreat. Both of these characters' conduct suggests that philosophers ought not to withdraw from politics altogether and should endeavor instead to bring philosophy to political power to the extent that it is possible. Even Timaeus, whose cosmology describes the consummate philosopher as withdrawing to study the heavens and neglecting mortal concerns, has enjoyed an outstanding political career and advances philosophy's cause before a political audience. Though we do not know what motivates Timaeus or the Athenian to maintain their interest in politics, their commitment to making politics more philosophical in the absence of any external compulsion sets them apart from Socrates' retreating philosophers in the *Republic* and elsewhere.

With Timaeus' and the Athenian's different uses of cosmology, Plato offers readers concrete examples of the philosopher's natural inclination to intervene in politics and make it more rational. Even if they face very different audiences and constraints when presenting their cosmic vision, both Timaeus and the Athenian use cosmology to address different political problems and orient political figures toward a more philosophical understanding of cosmos, city and soul. Though each of them presents philosophy and its relation to our happiness and ultimate end as humans in a different light, both illuminate philosophy's indispensability for proper political engagement and its longing to reshape the political realm in their use of cosmology. What each of them claims explicitly as the ultimate end for humans reflects their dramatic context and protreptic aims above all; it is what both characters exemplify in action that tells us more about how Platonic philosophers should think about their calling and how contemplation and politics form part of it. Neither

Timaeus nor the Athenian shows us how to dissolve the tension between philosophical contemplation or study and politics. They do show us, however, that philosophers can—and should—labor to combine philosophical reflection and political participation notwithstanding the uneasy relationship between the two. While other dialogues may point us to a similar conclusion, what sets apart the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* is that they show cosmology and its rhetorical potential as one of the various means available to philosophers who aim to make their perspective influential in the realm of politics. Both of these dialogues offer vivid examples of how the *Republic*'s philosopher-kings may put their knowledge and ambitions into practice. They also show how such interventions, even if they fall short of the work of ruling, can benefit a variety of civic audiences, from open-minded philosophical dilettantes like Critias to Dorian traditionalists like Kleinias and Megillus.

For all the contrasts between them, then, there are a number of ways in which the cosmologies of the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* work as complementary parts of a single philosophical project. First, they both display and invite reflection on cosmology's rhetorical adaptability and its potential for advancing a variety of protreptic goals. Second, they are both useful as representations of Plato's effort to transmit basic principles of philosophical cosmology to a wide audience, regardless of which of the two turns out to do this more accurately. Third, the cosmologies' different perspectives on the relation between philosophical study and political engagement echo and develop earlier Platonic reflections on the philosopher's fraught relation to politics. Last, they suggest cosmology itself may play a role overcoming the tension between philosophical reflection and political intervention, insofar as it can enable philosophers to make citizens and the polis more rational.

Retrospective Epilogue

I would like to take stock now of what this dissertation has sought to achieve. In the first chapter, I presented a novel reading of the *Timaeus*' dramatic frame and its significance for our interpretation of the dialogue's cosmology. I began by showing that the *Timaeus* does not represent a conversation between like-minded philosophers but rather includes a variety of perspectives, of which at least one, Critias', displays some distinctly unphilosophical traits. I am not the first to single out Critias as a problematic presence in the *Timaeus*, but I have offered a unique perspective on the specific problems he raises and why they matter for our interpretation of Timaeus' cosmology. What makes this interpretation unique is its focus on Critias' stance toward his strange tale about the ancient confrontation between Athens and Atlantis as well as his perception of Athena and her relation to the Athenians. Critias is problematic because he thinks of himself as an Athenian above all else and is unduly devoted to his native city and its patron goddess, Athena. Since Plato has Critias' narrative and his political perspective frame Timaeus' cosmology, it is fitting to reflect on how, if at all, the two are related. Although Timaeus does not offer a direct rebuttal of Critias' Athenocentrism, the views on the nature of the gods and humans' relation to divinity, the cosmos and the city that he advances in his cosmology have the potential to remedy Critias' ailments. The first chapter's primary contribution, then, lies in its identifying a particular set of problems raised by the dramatic frame of the *Timaeus* and to show that even the sophisticated and detailed cosmology presented in that dialogue works as a response to particular rhetorical and political exigencies. This chapter set the stage for the rhetorical analysis of the *Timaeus*' cosmology in the two subsequent chapters by illuminating the peculiar rhetorical context and problems Timaeus faces when he presents his vision of the cosmos.

In the second chapter, I undertook a detailed examination of the theological content of the cosmologies in both the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*. First, I assessed how Timaeus and the Athenian Visitor speak about the traditional Greek pantheon and its relation to the philosophical pantheon peopled by celestial and cosmic gods. I showed that each of these characters places his theology in a different relation to traditional stories and opinions about the gods: on one hand, Timaeus signals respect for the traditional pantheon without concealing what sets his own perspective on the gods apart from received opinion; on the other hand, the Athenian is at pains to cast himself as a defender of established traditions and opinions while nevertheless advancing their reformation and gradual alignment with philosophical theology and celestial worship. Both characters' stance toward traditional religion is complex and ambiguous, and in each case this complexity and ambiguity reflect the speaker's effort to adjust a philosophical approach to divinity to the distinct concerns and needs of their target audience: while Timaeus can afford to be more direct about the differences between his and the traditional views of the gods because Critias is a relatively urbane Athenian who is interested in philosophy, the Athenian must cast himself as a staunch traditionalist to make his theological innovations palatable to the old-fashioned Dorians who would people the city he is designing.

After addressing how Timaeus' and the Athenian's positions on traditional deities differ, I undertook an examination of the positive theology that each character advances. I divided this examination into three parts: a) what the speaker says about the gods' nature;

b) what he says about their activities and role in the cosmos; c) what he says about their relation to human beings. On the gods' nature and activities, we found that Timaeus and the Athenian are broadly in agreement with one another, casting the gods as supremely good and rational beings responsible for the beautiful and harmonious order of the natural world. There is less agreement between Timaeus and the Athenian when it comes to the gods' relation to humans, however. For Timaeus, the gods' generosity toward and care for humans lies mainly in their enabling us to live as semi-divine rational beings, whether through their original creative work—the Demiurge's case—or their constant orderly motions—the case of the cosmos as a whole and the other celestial deities. Timaeus' gods embody a philosophic ideal of contemplative rationality; it is ultimately up to us to embody this ideal and lead the best, most rational the life that the Demiurge and his assistants have put within our reach. Neither the Demiurge nor the lesser gods have an active role steering our lives or affairs—they are essentially distant or absent from the human realm. This is the opposite of the image of the gods the Athenian advances in the *Laws*: for him, it is essential that the citizens for whom he is legislating believe that the gods pay attention to human matters and resolutely punish those who transgress against the laws. Quite unlike Timaeus, the Athenian aims to reinforce his audience's confidence in vigilant and caring gods. That is because the Athenian's goal is to put religion and theology in the service of public morality and civic virtue, while Timaeus' theology is consistent with a protreptic that encourages focus on oneself and each person's capacity for contemplation, for the sake of urging Critias and others in a similar position to transcend the views on happiness and divine care promoted by their native polis. The two characters take somewhat divergent positions on the gods' involvement in human affairs to fit the particular rhetorical situation and problems they face. At the same time, even the Athenian casts the divine perspective as radically unlike the human viewpoint and casts some doubt on the gods' solicitude for lesser creatures in his more plainly theological pronouncements. This suggests that, if there is such a thing as a genuine Platonic position on the gods' character and relation to humans, that position is likely closer to Timaeus' vision when it comes to the gods' distance from humans. Timaeus' theology not only responds to the specific problems raised by his particular internal audience, then, but in its fullness of detail and greater emphasis on contemplation and rationality it also offers a more genuinely philosophical perspective than the Athenian's. Overall, this chapter serves to show both: a) the extent to which for Plato theology is an adaptable for of discourse that should respond to a variety of rhetorical situations and goals; and b) how, notwithstanding its adaptability and rhetorical uses, theology nevertheless always builds on core philosophical principles that can be found across different versions.

In the third and final chapter, I examined the contrasting perspectives on the cosmic significance of the polis and human sociality that are advanced in Timaeus' and the Athenian's cosmologies. On one hand, Timaeus discusses human happiness and our ultimate end as being completely independent of our political and social identity and affiliations. His views on human psychology and on the highest, noblest activity we can engage in are surprisingly apolitical. In his cosmology, the polis does not appear to make any contribution to either individual human wellbeing or the beauty and overall happiness of the cosmos. On the other hand, for the Athenian the city plays a necessary role in the attainment of both human happiness and cosmic order. In each case, I argued, the

cosmology presents a perspective that has been adapted to the specific dramatic and rhetorical setting the philosopher faces: Timaeus' avoidance of the political fits his strategy to orient Critias and others like him toward a less parochial and more cosmopolitan perspective, while the Athenian's casting of the polis as indispensable for order at both cosmic and personal levels suits his deployment of cosmology to bolster civic religion and obedience to the laws.

Yet the two cosmologies' contrasting perspectives on politics and sociality are more than a reflection of the differences in the rhetorical contexts in which they are delivered and the different goals they pursue. There is not only contrast between the cosmologies of the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*, but complementarity as well. For reading the two cosmologies side by side as parts of a single philosophical project can shed light on cosmology as a form of discourse and its relation to philosophy as a whole. First, Plato's choice to put cosmology to such divergent uses in the two dialogues under discussion displays cosmology's versatility and potential as a rhetorical form: no matter the specific way a philosopher wishes to intervene in civic religion and politics, cosmology may prove especially useful to him. That is not to say, however, that cosmology is merely a rhetorical tool. As we have already stated, the two cosmologies ultimately share core philosophical ideas. In the contrasting political uses to which cosmology is put in the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* we see not only the form's rhetorical adaptability, but also a reflection of philosophy's own ambivalence toward the political realm. Philosophy's ambivalence results from two competing desires: on one hand, philosophy yearns to transcend politics and orient itself toward a greater and more stable whole than the city can possibly be; on the other hand, it recognizes that this very yearning for transcendence puts it in a uniquely suitable position to transform politics and human affairs for the better. We see indications of this ambivalence throughout Plato's corpus, most notably in the *Republic*.

For Plato, then, the detailed cosmologies of the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* are not only rhetorical experiments, but they are also an occasion to revisit a problem that preoccupied him throughout his career. While in their contrasting perspectives the cosmologies of the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* recall the tension between philosophic withdrawal and political engagement we see elsewhere in Plato, in the end both cosmologies ultimately demonstrate how such a form of discourse offers philosophers an opportunity to mediate between their longing to transcend politics and their desire to make politics more philosophical. Cosmology affords philosophers a way of intervening in politics without becoming fully immersed in the challenges of governing, but also a manner of thinking about reality and nature that has a unique potential to reform political life after their principles.

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