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The Theodicy of the Timaeus

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(for reading Dec. 28, 1990, Harvard room, Boston Marriott)

Given the controversy that has swirled around the interpretation of the *Timaeus* from just about the time of its appearance, I make no apologies for beginning any fresh attempt to assess its purported theodicy with some brief remarks on my methodology of interpretation of the dialogue as a whole.

First, my general source of interpretation will be hints that appear to emerge from the text itself, rather than (though not to the exclusion of) a broad range of commentary over the ages, ranging from the view that the description of a supposed temporal beginning to the universe was elaborated by Plato the way it was simply as a pedagogical device¹ to the view that the dialogue does not set out to expound Plato's views at all.² Xenocrates's view has for some time now enjoyed large-scale, though not universal acceptance, leading a significant number of scholars to write off the Demiurge as symbolic rather than real.³ I myself take it as a sound principle of interpretation that *Timaeus* is to be understood literally except on those occasions (such as 34b-c) when he explicitly indicates that he is *not* to be so taken, on the simple grounds that it makes no sense on Plato's part to have gone out of his way so to indicate had he intended the *whole* work to be understood in some (unspecified) non-literal way. The resulting interpretation of the dialogue in general and its theodicy in particular

1 The view is attributed by Aristotle to Xenocrates, *De Caelo* 279b 32-280a 1 (= fr. 54 Heinze), and may also have been held by Speusippus and left open as a possibility by Theophrastus; for estimates of the evidence see A. E. Taylor *ad loc.*, H. Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy* I (Baltimore 1944) n. 356; G. Vlastos, "The Disorderly Motion in the *Timaeus* (1939)", in *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, ed. R. E. Allen (London 1965) (= Vlastos I) 383 ff.; and L. Tarán, "The Creation Myth in Plato's *Timaeus*", in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, edd. John P. Anton and George L. Kustas, SUNY Press 1971, nn. 140-143 (he adds Crantor to the list and possibly Heraclides Ponticus).

2 The view espoused by A. E. Taylor.

3 For details see T. M. Robinson, *Plato's Psychology* (Toronto 1970) 101, n. 20 and Richard D. Mohr, *The Platonic Cosmology* (Leiden 1985) 40. More recent adherents to the view include E. Ostenfeld (see below, n. 17) and G. Carone, "Sobre el significado y el status del demiurgo del *Timeo*", (*Methexis* 3 [1990]) 33-49).

seem to me of at least as much philosophical interest as a number of prevalent non-literal interpretations.

Turning to the theodicy, we can begin as Plato himself does with a crucial metaphysical and epistemological distinction. "We must, then," he says, "in my judgment, first make this distinction: what is that which is always real and has no beginning of existence, and what is that which comes into existence and is never real?" (27d5-28a1). The translation of the sentence is crucial. If at 27d6-28a1 the correct reading is *ti to gignomenon aei*, we apparently have, "at the top of the show", so to speak, a broad hint on Plato's part that his interest in the subsequent discussion will be in an eternal world of Forms and a co-eternal universe over and against them, whatever the "temporal" drift of his own narrative. As it happens, however, and as Whittaker pointed out many years ago in a much-overlooked article,⁴ *aei* almost certainly did not appear in Plato's argument: he was instead simply setting the stage for the discussion, in the immediately subsequent lines, not of the ontological status of the eternal world of Forms and the eternal world of genesis, but of the ontological status of any Form and any sense-object and the implications thereof for that greatest of all sense-objects (as he saw it), the universe itself.

The point is reinforced immediately by Plato in the very next sentence, where a sense-object is described as something that "comes into being and goes out of being"; no manuscript carries a trace of any lost adverb *aei*.⁵ Which is not, of course, to suggest that in the *Timaeus* Plato has given up on the *Republic* doctrine that our world is a world of genesis₂ (= process), merely that in the present context what he is describing is simply genesis₁ (= beginning).

The stage for the argument is set in two rapid moves. First, with the epistemological assertion, familiar to all readers of the *Republic*, that one of the two objects - i. e., the Form - is "apprehensible by insight, along with a rational account", the other - i. e., the sense object - being "the object of opinion, in conjunction with unreasoning sensation" (28a1-4). Second, with the assertions a) that anything that comes into existence must do so thanks to some causal agent; b) that that agent uses a model to serve as his paradigm in the fashioning process; c) that the only two types of model possible are ones described respectively as "everlastingly and unchangingly real" (i. e., Forms) and ones that have "come into existence" (i. e., sense objects); and d) that anything produced in accordance with the former

4 John Whittaker, *Phoenix* 23 (1969) 181-185 and 27 (1973) 387-388 2; cf. more recently John Dillon, *AJP* 1989 (1).

5 For further instances in which what would have been an analogous *aei* is conspicuous by its absence see 28a1, 37b2-3, 48e6-49a1.

class of model will be *kalon*, anything in accordance with the latter class not so (28a4-b2).

With this as his basis (none of it new to readers of the *Republic*) Plato can now construct an argument concerning the universe. Having just divided the real into everlasting objects and objects that have a beginning of existence, he classifies the universe without further ado as belonging to the latter class - i. e., as having had a beginning of existence - on the grounds that "it can be seen and touched and has body, and all such things are objects of sense" (28b2-8).

Satisfied on the above grounds that the universe can be reasonably described as a sense object and hence something that came into existence, Plato then has no trouble positing a causal agent to account for its coming into existence, an agent he calls its "craftsman and father",⁶ a craftsman he immediately admits it is hard to "discover" and impossible to "declare" (= "satisfactorily describe"?) to every person (28b8-c5).

A few final moves complete the argument. Like any other causal agent, the world's craftsman too must have used one of two available models, and Plato declares that it must have been the one of an "everlasting" nature, on the grounds a) that the universe is not only *kalos* but in fact "the *most kalos* of things that have come into existence" and b) that its craftsman is the "best of causal agents"; the contrary supposition - i. e., that the Demiurge is not *agathos* and the universe not *kalos* - is "something one cannot even mention without blasphemy" (28c5-29a6).

A great deal has been said here by Timaeus in very short compass, and we shall have to return to it. For the moment however I wish only to stress that up to this point nothing has been said one way or the other about whether he expects his words to be construed literally or otherwise. But a useful statement - wholly misconstrued by many scholars - emerges as the argument concludes, to the effect that in the matter of "gods and the beginning of the universe" (29c4-5) we should accept the "likely story" (*eikota mython*) (29d2) and nothing more. Many⁷ have seen this reference, and other, more frequent references in the dialogue to "likely account" (*eikos logos*) as further evidence that Plato expected his story - including the Demiurge episode - to be understood figuratively, not literally, but the judgment is premature. The word being stressed is "likely" (repeated

6 The terms are not ones that Timaeus confines rigidly to efficient causes. At 50c he will compare Space to a mother, the eternal Form to a father, and the universe they form between them to offspring.

7 E. g., Cornford, 28 ff.

later in the dialogue as "*particularly* likely", 44c7-d1, and not only "*no less* probable than another [account], but *more* so", as far as Timaeus can make it, 48d1-3). As for the phrase *eikos mythos* (found three times in the dialogue, as against eight usages of the phrase *eikos logos*), it is in context clearly a synonym for the phrase "likely account", and to that degree a perfect instance of the use of *mythos* in its well-authenticated neutral, non-fictional sense.⁸

The points are worth emphasising, since Cornford, convinced as he is from the outset of the "mythological" status of the Demiurge and his activities, has a habit of unwittingly so translating to fit his preconceptions. At 29b5-c2c, for example, he translates: "an account of that which is abiding and stable and discoverable by the aid of reason will itself be abiding and unchangeable ...while an account of what is made in the image of that other, but is only a likeness, will be itself but likely". The Greek however simply reads "a likeness", not "*only* a likeness", and "likely", not "*but* (i. e., *merely*) likely". Plato's perfectly straightforward statement is subtly downgraded to suggest that his account will turn out to be less substantial than it seems, when in fact he is merely reiterating a basic epistemological and metaphysical claim, first seen in the *Republic*, that the world of sense perception and its processes are the object of opinion not knowledge, and that some opinions, while still remaining opinions, are in fact sounder opinions than others. One such "particularly sound" opinion (see 44d1, *malista eikotos*) is his account of the formation of the cosmos we know by the Demiurge.

The desire by so many to explain away the Demiurge is, *prima facie*, surprising, in view of the clear references to him in the *Republic*, where he is called "the craftsman of the senses" (507c6-7) and "the craftsman of the universe" (530a6). Nor should it come as a surprise to readers of the same dialogue that the craftsmanship of the universe, like any other act of craftsmanship, will be founded on some sort of rational plan (*aitia*, 29d7). This plan, it is said, consists of the Demiurge's desiring that "everything come into being <with attributes> as close as possible to <those possessed by> himself"; a desire stemming immediately from the fact that the Demiurge is "good", and "without *phthonos*" ("jealousy", or perhaps better "grudgingness"). More surprising, perhaps, is the statement that the above principle concerning "a universe's coming into existence"⁹

8 See Vlastos I (above, n. 1) 380 ff.

9 The figure of speech I take to be hendiadys, as also apparently at 29d7-e1 (*genesin kai to pan tode*). Cornford's translation "becoming and the order of the world" is both an over-translation and a mistranslation, and once again leaves the reader with the idea that Plato's purpose is to

(literally: "coming into existence and a universe" [*geneseos kai kosmou*]) is one that we would do rightly to accept from "men of understanding"; whatever the trappings of rational argument so far, this particular principle, for reasons left unclear, is one apparently less immediately accessible to the reasoning processes of the majority.

In light of the principle, the Demiurge's first actions are described by Plato as follows (tr. Cornford, with some changes):

1. "Since he wished all things to be good (*agatha*),¹⁰ and, as far as possible, no thing to be imperfect, the god took all that was visible¹¹ - not at rest but moving in discordant and unordered fashion - and made efforts to reduce it¹² from disorder to order, considering the latter to be in all ways better than the former."

2. "Now it neither was nor is acceptable that he who is the most good should bring about anything other than <what is itself> the most *kalon*.¹³ Weighing the matter, then, he kept finding¹⁴ that, among things by nature visible, no product devoid of intelligence will ever be more *kalon* than one possessing intelligence, when each is taken as a whole, and what is more that intelligence cannot possibly come to be present in anything without <the prior presence of>

discuss the operations of (this) world of becoming, rather than - as it purports to be - to discuss its supposed coming into existence. Were he right, Plato's hendiadys would of course have been reversed, and have read to *pan tode kai genesin* rather than *genesin kai to pan tode*. Which is not of course to deny that for the Plato of the *Timaeus* the world which had a beginning (*genesis*₁) was also a world characterised by process (*genesis*₂), but rather to suggest that the examples of hendiadys found at 29d7-e8 and 29e4 cannot be read as references to such process.

10 The word will again come as no surprise to readers of the *Republic*, though it raises immediate questions as to the role, if any, played by the Form of the Good in the scheme of the *Timaeus*, and its possible relationship to the Demiurge and his activities. On this see below, p. 8.

11 The tense is significant. Cornford characteristically translates "is visible" (my italics), in line with his understanding of Plato's intentions.

12 The tense is not aorist, but imperfect, underlining the difficulties faced by the Demiurge in his task.

13 The reference (immediately above) to all things being desired by the Demiurge to be good (*agatha*) suggests that by *kalon* Plato means something nearer to that notion than to that of simple physical beauty, so I leave it in transliteration.

14 See above, n. 12.

soul.¹⁵ In view of this reasoning, he who put together the universe made efforts, in doing so, to fashion intelligence within soul and soul within body, so as to prove to have fashioned a product as *kalon* and as excellent as it could by nature be. This...is how we must say, according to the likely account, that this world came into existence, by the god's providence, in very truth a living creature with soul and reason".

As Cornford points out (p. 34), "the dialogue yields no more information about the Demiurge" than is conveyed by the above short account. We should therefore pause a while at this juncture and make a preliminary assessment of what we at any rate appear to have been told. It can be described in summary form as follows:

1. The world, like any of its constituent parts or contents, is a sense object, since it is seeable, touchable, and possesses bulk, and is hence contingent for its existence upon a causal agent other than itself.
2. Like all sense objects, it had a beginning of existence and a maker/father.
3. The model to which this maker/father looked is an eternal one, guaranteeing that the world itself will be good; and the indisputable goodness of the world itself is an argument for the eternal nature of its model.
4. The Demiurge is not only good, but the "best of causal agents" and the world he fashioned not only good but the "best of things (worlds?) that have come into existence".
5. Over and against the Demiurge, apparently *ab aeterno*, are not just the Forms but moving, unordered matter of some sort, which at a certain point the Demiurge made successful efforts to reduce to some type of order, producing the cosmos we know.
6. On the principle that no product not possessing intelligence is ever better than one that does, and that the exercise of intelligence is contingent upon the <prior> existence of soul, he made the world a living, intelligent creature, possessed of soul, intellect and body.

Taking these points in turn:

1. As Taylor (pp. 69-70), picking up on point emphasized in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, indicated long ago, Timaeus's argument is gravely weakened by the assumption that the world is a sense object in the way, apparently, that its parts or contents are sense objects. One can go

¹⁵ Literally, "apart from soul".

further, in fact, and wonder whether any argument of the sort could be valid if it assumes that the world is *any* type of "object" at all, rather than a general concept indicating the finite or infinite sum of what exists/is the case. As so often, Plato's realism assumes the referential nature of general terms and goes off in vain search of the putative referent.

2. Given the basic philosophical weakness of the notion of the world as sense object, Plato's further contention that it is, like all sense objects, *contingent* - and apparently *temporally* contingent¹⁶ - upon a causal agent other than itself is *pari passu* shaky. But it has the great value, in interpretational terms, of indicating clearly to the reader that reductionist attempts to equate the Demiurge with the world, or with the world's soul, or with the world's intellect, could never have met his approval.¹⁷ If the world, its soul and its intellect are all understood as contingent, as they are indeed apparently understood, they will always, according to Platonic doctrine, be dependent on some prior principle to account for their existence, whether the Demiurge is explained away or not, and whether the world is eternal or not. If this is the case, reductionists must find a reductee that is, as a minimum requirement, unequivocally understood as non-contingent.

The only such candidate that has been brought forward, to my knowledge, is the everlastingly self-activating *soul* described in the *Phaedrus* and *Laws X*. This point will be discussed later.

3. The model - the Eternal Living Creature - used by the Demiurge in forming the universe is a clearly recognisable Form, though one unmentioned in previous dialogues, where its relevance would not in any case have been clear. And like all Platonic Forms (excepting the Form of the Good) its role and status is purely paradigmatic. It is also eternal,

16 Throughout this paper I shall be using the terms contingent and non-contingent in their time-honoured cosmological rather than their current logical sense. I shall also be using them in their weaker rather than in their stronger sense, i. e., to express a relationship of dependency, but without invocation of a supposedly necessary being as explanation of a chain of existents. The basic *data* of the real as described by Timaeus - the Demiurge, Forms and Space - are just that apparently, *data*; no further claims in terms of their supposedly absolute - as distinct from hypothetical - necessity are proffered.

17 See above, n. 3. Erik Ostenfeld, *Forms, Matter and Minds: Three Strands In Plato's Metaphysics* (The Hague 1982) 246, suggests that the Demiurge is to be equated with the Circle of the Same in the world's soul.

as the Demiurge is presumably eternal, and neither one is described as contingent for existence upon the other. So further reductionist attempts to equate the Demiurge with this (or any other) Form, except perhaps the Form of the Good - on which later - can have little chance of catching Plato's intentions.

The analogue of Plato's vision is rather, as so often, to be found in the *Republic*, where the philosopher-king (queen) sets out to form a good society on the pattern of the Form of the Good. But it is not an exact analogue, since the Form of the Good is there credited with what appear to be powers of efficient, not simply paradigmatic causality, and to that degree the philosopher can indeed be said to be contingent - if only at several removes - for existence upon a Form. On the other hand, in the same dialogue the Demiurge too is credited with efficient causality, leaving Plato with a problem that could only be solved by a ruthless exercise of Ockham's razor. That exercise is it seems performed in the *Timaeus*, where the Demiurge is left as the sole efficient cause of the world's formation, and the Form of the Good, if it is to be found at all, is reduced to the paradigmatic status of all other Forms.

What of Plato's argument concerning the world and its paradigm? There are it seems to me two major problems with it.

a) It is unclear why the everlastingly unchanging status of the Form Eternal Living Creature should guarantee the world's *goodness* rather than its status as a (contingent) *living creature*. What is more, *Timaeus* has also apparently opted to endow the *Demiurge* with the twin attributes of efficient and paradigmatic causality previously enjoyed by the Form of the Good ("he wanted everything to come into being <with attributes> as close as possible to <those possessed by> *himself*").

Matters are complicated further by the apparent continuance in existence, in the *Timaeus*, of the Form of the Good, at least as a standard (paradigmatic) Form, and at the level of what now seems a mere cosmic whisper. In a much-overlooked phrase at 46c7-d1 *Timaeus* says, "Now all these things are among the accessory causes which the god uses as subservient in bringing to completion (*apotelon*), as far as possible, the form of the best". For no good reason that I can see Taylor, followed by Cornford ("in achieving the best result that is possible"), discounts the clear possibility, seen by Archer-Hind, that we have here an echo of the notion of the Form of the Good, but now playing the role of paradigm rather than efficient cause.¹⁸

¹⁸ A minor problem attaching this scenario is the fact that, were it the case, Plato would appear to finish up with

b) Statements at 28a and 29a suggest that Timaeus has either caught himself in the coils of a circular argument or perhaps unwittingly affirmed the consequent. At 28a the (hypothetical) argument runs:

If a craftsman looks to an everlastingly unchanging model, the product will be one that is *kalon*; if to one that has come into existence, it will not be so. So structured, the argument, had Timaeus completed it, would - to be a valid (though not necessarily sound) one - have concluded as follows:

The model the Demiurge uses is in fact everlastingly unchanging.

Therefore the world he produces is *kalon*. In fact we have to wait till 29a for Timaeus to return to the matter, but this time he argues from the self-evident *kallós* of the world and goodness of its Demiurge (contrary thoughts being deemed blasphemy) to the everlasting nature of the model! Spelled out, the argument runs as follows:

If the world is *kalos* and its Demiurge *agathos*, the model used will be everlasting; if the world is *aischros* and its Demiurge *kakos*, it will not be so.

The world is *kalos* and its Demiurge *agathos*.

Therefore the model is everlasting.

But this of course will not do. The argument at 28a was never completed, and the second antecedent of the argument at 29a is based not on argument or observation but the fear of being caught in blasphemy. Even were the *first* antecedent soundly based, however, the *consequent* (i. e., that the model used will be everlasting) would still be far from obvious, unless the reader were already convinced of the validity of the *previous* argument begun but not finished at 28a. But this argument never affirmed, let alone attempted to prove, the critical antecedent that the world's model is everlasting. So the reader is left with the uncomfortable choice of accusing Timaeus of planning (but not completing) the argument of 28a along the lines suggested above, and hence of being caught in an egregious piece of circular reasoning, arguing first from the everlastingness of the model to the *kallós* of the world and then from the *kallós* of the world to the everlastingness of the model; or of planning to complete the argument (fallaciously, unfortunately) as follows:

three paradigms for the world's goodness, the Form of the Good, the Eternal Living Creature and the Demiurge himself. To which Plato might have replied, had the question been put, that the significant quality of the Demiurge, in the matter of world-making, is his causally efficient status; whether the goodness of the world that got made had as its paradigm the goodness exemplified by the Form of the Good or by the Form Eternal Living Creature or by the Demiurge or by all three was of lesser moment.

The world produced by the Demiurge is in fact *kalon*. Therefore the model is everlastingly unchanging, and so perhaps avoiding the charge of circular reasoning in the combined arguments, but committing the fallacy of affirming the consequent instead.

All this, of course, has to do with the validity of Timaeus's arguments, not their soundness. Even were the former granted, *argumenti causa*, the notion that the world is self-evidently (to non-blasphemous people) *kalos* would remain something of unclear philosophical foundation.

4. In view of the problems raised by the above, Timaeus faces it seems even bigger hurdles with his further claim that "the world is the most *kalon* of things have come into existence" and the Demiurge "the best of causal agents". The latter claim could of course simply be true by definition, the Demiurge playing the part of first and best among the gods in the way Zeus is first and best among the Olympians. And the former claim could have been based on the assumption that the totality of *kala* is quite clearly *more kalon* than any of its constituents. But the sceptic would still press Timaeus to explain a) why and in what precise sense the world is *kalon* rather than *aischron* (and the Demiurge by the same token *agathos* rather than *aischros*) and b) why the notion of the world as a sense object on an ontological and epistemological par with its own constituents is not the untenable outcome of a fallacy of composition.

5. Over and against the Demiurge lies a realm described by Timaeus as "all that was visible - not at rest but moving in discordant and unordered fashion". This is presented as a cosmological *datum*, like the Demiurge and the Forms, and is like them presumably to be understood as non-contingent; every other item in the cosmology is described in terms of contingency. Since there were no physical spectators of this supposed pre-cosmos, the word "visible" is perhaps surprising, but ultimately of little import; as early as the *Phaedo* (79a6 ff.) Plato was apparently using the word as a synonym for "physical". We shall return to the whole question of the role and status of the pre-cosmos and its components in Timaeus's scheme of things. Suffice it for the moment to notice in passing that at this introductory stage the stuff (for want of a better word) of which the cosmos will eventually be formed is described as being - and as presumably always having been - in chaotic motion; and there is no hint of any *alterum quid* that might be understood as the initial or ongoing source of that motion. Nor is any reason offered at this stage why Demiurgic intervention to reduce chaos to some sort of order took place at one moment rather than another.

6. As a paradigm¹⁹ himself apparently possessed of soul and reason²⁰ the Demiurge naturally imparts the same qualities to his ordered universe, though Timaeus as it happens offers as the reason the (far from obvious) supposition that no thing not possessed of reason can ever be *better* (and the best possible product is of course the Demiurge's objective) than one that is; and taking it as self-evident that only living things can reason, he sees the presence of soul, the life-principle, as an indispensable condition for the operation of reason, and in that sense logically if not temporally prior to it. These claims are worth careful study in themselves; for the moment we can simply note that both soul and reason are described here in terms clearly suggesting contingency, being as they are direct objects of Demiurgic production. The same, it might be added, must be said of the planetary, solar and lunar gods and the goddess Earth; all are unequivocally described as being direct Demiurgic productions.²¹

A central argument in favour of a non-literal interpretation of the dialogue's creation account, including the role and status of the supposed Demiurge, is the claim that, despite

19 See above, p.8.

20 A notion rightly defended by Vlastos, "Creation in the *Timaeus*: Is It A Fiction?" in *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, ed. R. E. Allen (London 1965) (= Vlastos II) 407, against Cherniss, *op. cit.* Appendix XI. For a restatement of the Cherniss position see Tarán, *art. cit.* n. 34.

21 Despite this description, it has been suggested by Cornford (280) that the ease with which in the final part of the dialogue (69a ff.) Timaeus blurs the distinction between the Demiurge and the gods of his formation is further evidence of the mythical character of the formative powers attributed to both. A less drastic and surely more likely explanation is that Timaeus, on the assumption that the said gods, ever heedful of and obedient to their father's commands (42e6-7), were at all times implementing the wishes of the Demiurge, felt free to talk indifferently of their or the Demiurge's activity, the crucial conceptual and real difference between them having been made with clarity earlier on. In the same way Timaeus, when the spirit moves him, will use a vivid present tense in the midst of a standard set of descriptive aorists (e.g., at 37d6, *poiei*, e3, *mechanatai*); or will indeed on one occasion (53c-66d) dispense with all talk of divine construction when faced with the task of covering a large mass of complex terrain in a manageable amount of space and where a constant adversion to detailed activity on the part of the gods would probably slow down the accomplishment of a more important objective - the detailed description of such things as the actual figures of the primary bodies, the nature of motion and rest, and the like.

the apparent contingency of the world's soul upon Demiurgic production, there is one major statement in the dialogue of the *Phaedrus* doctrine that all soul is self-activating activity, or self-moving motion.²² To many this has suggested that Timaeus's real view is that all soul is in fact *non-contingent*, whatever the apparent thrust of the rest of his account, and that as a result the Demiurge is a superfluous entity, all of his productive activities being easily ascribable to the world's soul, or perhaps to its rational aspect.²³ But this conclusion should it seems to me be resisted, on a number of grounds.

1. It is far from obvious that the *Phaedrus* was written prior to the *Timaeus*, as I have argued elsewhere. And if it was indeed written later, it is methodologically risky to import its doctrine of soul into an interpretation of the earlier dialogue, unless the *Timaeus* itself has a clear statement on the matter.

2. As far as the latter point is concerned, the crucial evidence is found at 37b5, where Timaeus talks of discourse being carried on "within the thing that is self-moved". Cornford correctly²⁴ elucidates this as a reference to "the Heaven as a whole", but then adds, "which, as a living creature, is moved by its own self-moving soul". In some non-technical sense, this may be thought to be self-evident; Plato, like Aristotle after him, thought that a distinguishing feature of animals was that, unlike plants, they moved themselves (see, e. g., *Tim.* 77c4-5). Such self-movement is however merely *contingent* self-movement; one needs an explicit argument to show that the soul which lies at the source of such movement is itself self-moving in a manner that is *non-contingent*. And no such doctrine is found with clarity in Plato's works before the *Phaedrus*.²⁵

22 *Phdr.* 245c ff., *Tim.* 37b5.

23 See above, n.3.

24 For Cherniss, "The Sources of Evil According to Plato", *PAPS* 98 (1954) 26, n.24, the reference is to self-moving soul, and he cites as evidence 37c3-5, especially the words *allo plen psychen*. But this is far from clear. The passage would appear rather to be about the universe which *has* a soul (cf. the words *autou ten psychen*, 37b7), followed by a description of a pair of prominent features of that soul (37c5-7).

25 Cherniss (*op. cit.* 428) has argued that the following passages in the *Timaeus* presuppose a doctrine of psychic self-motion: 37b5, 77c4-5 and 89a1-5. But all of these passages can be explained without difficulty as references to a *contingent* form of self-movement; there is no hint of the presence, even at the level of assumption, of the more drastic and all-embracing *Phaedrus* doctrine of *non-contingent* self-movement.

As far as the present passage is concerned, nothing can be inferred from the fact that *Timaeus* uses, to describe the world, the phrase "moved by itself" in a way not unsimilar to the use of a phrase to describe soul in the *Phaedrus*, for he goes on to clarify himself immediately afterwards by talking of the world as "*set in motion (kinethen) and alive*"; the passive voice is unequivocal, and sure evidence that the *world's* self-motion is in *Timaeus's* view contingent. Nothing has been said, or even hinted at, concerning the *soul* of the world -- whether it is itself self-moving, and whether, if so, its self-motion is of the contingent or non-contingent variety.

The fact is that all *Timaeus* needs for his argument to go through at this point is a notion of soul as possibly self-moving - but if so merely in the commonplace sense that animals are said to be self-moving - but in any case merely contingently so,²⁶ and this is of course exactly in line with his earlier description of the world's soul as being of direct Demiurgic construction. In a later dialogue Plato will come back to the question of soul, and will attribute to *all* (rational) soul²⁷ the quality of *non-contingent* self-

26 The phrase used by Cornford (95, n.2) to describe soul - to *heauto kinoun* - is of course taken from the *Phaedrus*, and is nowhere to be found in the *Timaeus*, with or without the world's soul as its ostensible referent. On the two single occasions when the world-soul's motion is referred to in the dialogue, at 37a6-7 and 37c6, the voice is passive, not middle, as Cornford's own translations concede: "whenever (the world's soul) is in contact with anything that has dispersed existence or with anything whose existence is indivisible, she *is set in motion* all through herself..."; and "when the father who had begotten it saw it *set in motion* and alive..." (my italics).

27 As Hermias saw, the argument at *Phdr.* 245c refers to rational soul only. It is also significant that it refers to the *totality* of soul, whereas the *Timaeus* does no such thing; the soul possessed by the Demiurge cannot be argued, as it is argued by Tarán, *art. cit.* 394 n. 30, to possess of necessity the same constituents as the world's soul and hence to be clearly one and the same as it. (The argument is based on an assumption that the Platonic doctrine of soul is a uniform one, but this is of course the very question in dispute.) The whole point of the description of the world's soul is to demonstrate its contingent self-motion and its "intermediate" metaphysical and epistemological status; the Demiurge, by contrast, is a non-contingent *datum* of the real, and no more "intermediate" than those other non-contingent *data*, Space and the Forms. What *Timaeus* would have said about the composition of his *psyche* we do not know, but it seems hard to doubt that, had he wished to spell out the details of the *activity* of that *psyche*, he

motion which in the *Timaeus* would appear to characterise merely the soul of the Demiurge.

A number of very careful pieces of linguistic usage concerning the concept of duration are further evidence, it seems to me, of how anxious Timaeus is to maintain a real and critical distinction between the Demiurge, the world of Forms, Space, and the world and its soul.²⁸ To the world of Forms, and uniquely to the world of Forms, he applies the neologism *diaionios*, to signify a type of eternal existence in which no manner of *kinesis* exists or is a possibility. Space and the Demiurge, by contrast, being co-eternal with the Forms, merit, along with them, the description *aei einai*, but differ from them and from each other in their being subject to *kinesis*, in the case of the Demiurge the *kineseis* of thought and desire, in the case of Space its own particular shaking motion and that of its contents (52e3-4).

The formed world and its soul are not eternal but everlasting, in the sense of having duration without end but with a beginning in time. For this manner of duration Timaeus studiously avoids the use of *aei* and the verb to be, talking instead of "abiding (*menein*) forever" (the astral gods are so described at 40b6) or of being "in motion forever" (at 58c3 he talks of the *aei kinesis* of the four primary bodies), or of "existing perpetually throughout all time" (at 38c2-3 the formed universe is so described), or of making a "divine beginning of ceaseless and intelligent life for all time" (at 36e4-5 the world's soul is so described).

Locutions like the above keep clear metaphysical and cosmological distinctions that can easily become blurred, particularly given the ambiguities of the adverb *aei*. With their help as fail-safe devices, one can draw up the following schema:

1. *Aei* with *einai* is used strictly for eternal duration, and applies to the Forms, the Demiurge, and Space.
2. *Aei* with *menein* is used strictly of everlastingness, and applies to the formed world, its soul, and the time whereby this manner of duration is measured. For the duration of the four primary bodies the analogous locution is *aei kineisthai*. (*Menein* without *aei*, by contrast, is used of strictly eternal duration, describing Eternity itself at 37d6 [*menontos en hen*] and at 42e5-6 the eternal wont of the Demiurge's nature.)

would have described it in terms that we would recognise as clearly non-contingent self-movement.

28 For a more detailed discussion of the matter see T. M. Robinson, "The *Timaeus* on Types of Duration", *Illinois Classical Studies* 11 (1986) 143-151.

3. In problematic instances the possibility that *aei* will mean "invariably", "on each and every occasion" or something similar has to be carefully investigated. At 49d4-5, for example, Timaeus is not talking of what is perpetually changing, but of "whenever we see something coming into being". (Cf. also e5, e7-8: "that which invariably recurs as similar", "that in which each of them invariably appears"). And at 52a6 he is not talking about what is perpetually in motion but of what is "invariably the subject of *phora*".²⁹

4. As far as the famous *gignomenon men aei* of 27d6-28a1 is concerned, if (as I doubt) *aei* happens to be the correct reading, it could, as Cherniss (?) followed by Vlastos have pointed out, just as well refer to everlasting as to eternal duration;³⁰ there is no clearly analogous passage in the *Timaeus* to tip the balance in favour of one or other interpretation.

A further attempt to collapse Demiurge and the world's soul (or the rational part of it) turns on two suppositions:

a) the view that the circles of the Same and Different in the world's soul represent rationality and irrationality respectively;

b) the complementary view that the irrational motions of the traces of matter in the supposed pre-cosmos have as their source eternally self-moving soul (cf. *Phdr.* 245c). Their supposed reduction to order by the Demiurge is in fact their evolution (in part) to rational order, the result being the part-rational part-irrational soul of the world known to us by sense-perception, their rationality and irrationality being described (see [a] above) as the movements of the Same and Different within them respectively.

To take the second view first. Part of its *prima facie* plausibility lies in the fact that *Ananke* (Necessity), the countervailing force to Reason in the world's formation, is apparently *persuaded* by Reason "to guide the greatest part of things that come to be towards what is best" (48a2-3), with the result that it would appear to be describable as an entity possessing a soul with at least as much plausibility as has been asseverated of the Demiurge. And if a soul, why not the irrational stage/part/aspect of the *world's* soul, in the way that the Demiurge has been described by some as its rational part/aspect? On such a scenario, eternal self-

29 The translations criticized are those of Cornford, followed by Erik Ostenfeld, "Plato's Development and the Date of the *Timaeus*", *Classica et Mediaevalia* 38 (1986) 70 n. 29.

30 Cherniss, *op. cit.* 420, Vlastos II (above, n. 21) 407.

moving soul will emerge as eternally part-rational part-irrational; appropriately hard-headed demythologisation will expose for what they are a supposedly personal Demiurge, a supposedly personal Necessity, and a supposedly temporal sequence in world's soul from wholly irrational to a part-irrational part-rational stage.

There are however large problems with this. While it is true that Timaeus uses the language of persuasion in talking of Necessity, he also carefully distinguishes what is *wrought* (*dedemiourgemena*) by Reason from what *comes about* (*gignomena*) through Necessity (47e4-5). As for the traces of matter in the pre-cosmos, he elsewhere (53b2-4) describes them as "altogether in such a condition as we should expect when deity is absent from it"; this presumably means *any* deity, including a supposedly personified Necessity.

But Timaeus has as it happens a much more positive argument at his disposal to indicate what really causes the sempiternal movement of the traces of matter. At 57e ff. we read:

"motion will never exist in a state of homogeneity. For it is difficult, or rather impossible, that what is to be moved should exist without that which is to move it, or what is to cause motion (*to kinesiōn*) without that which is to be moved by it. In the absence of either, motion cannot exist; and they cannot possibly be homogeneous. Accordingly, we must always presume rest in a state of homogeneity, and attribute motion to a state of heterogeneity (*anomaloteta*). Further, inequality (*anisotes*) is a cause of heterogeneity, and the origin of inequality we have already described". (Tr. Cornford)

As I have put it elsewhere:³¹

"While for an instant the reader may imagine that the *kinesiōn* mentioned here will be an existent of some sort - like, say, *psyche* - the subsequent references, in the same passage, to *anisotes* and *anomalotes* make it clear that Plato is referring to particular *conditions* under which, according to the passage in question, the "primary bodies" operate. As it happens, exactly the same conditions obtain, as Cornford sees (p. 240), for the movements in Space of the *dynamēis* of the pre-cosmos, which are described as "neither alike nor evenly balanced" (*meth' homoion... mete isorropon*), as having "no equipoise within any region of it" (*kat' ouden autes isorropein*), and "everywhere swayed unevenly" (*anomalos pantei talantoumenen*). The natural conclusion to be drawn from this can only be that, just as the eternal equipoise of a given Form (or of the World of Forms as a whole) is the basis of its/their eternally

31 T. M. Robinson, *art. cit.* (above, n. 29) 39.

unchanging state, the sempiternal *lack* of such equipoise among the *dynameis* of pre-matter accounts for their sempiternal *kinesis*; no further doctrine of a supposed presence of *psyche* need be imported."

Finally, it is worth mentioning again that the argument of *Phaedrus* 245c refers, as Hermias saw, to rational soul only; it is only later, in the *Laws*, that Plato's argument is apparently extended to cover *all psyche*. It is therefore particularly hazardous, even on the (to me mistaken) assumption that the *Phaedrus* in fact antedates the *Timaeus*, to use the argument of *Phaedrus* 245c as evidence for the existence, in the *Timaeus*, of a world's soul which is supposedly part-rational part-irrational.

Where, on the same assumption concerning dating, the *Phaedrus* argument *might* be used effectively (and this brings us to point [a] above, p. 15) is in the matter of the composition and activity of the world's soul. While many commentators have assumed that its "intermediate" composition and the activity of the circles of Same and Different within this soul express in some fashion its combined rationality and irrationality, a careful reading of the argument of *Timaeus*, as Skemp sees, makes it clear that in its composition and activities it is wholly rational; the two circles Same and Different are there, as are the "intermediate" versions of Existence, Sameness and Difference, as devices to assure the epistemological and metaphysical possibility of true positive and negative statements about the realms of both Forms and sense objects. As *Timaeus* himself puts it, to conclude his argument: "And the soul... revolving within its own limit, made a divine beginning of ceaseless *and intelligent* life for all time." (36e2-5)

If this is the case, those who take the *Phaedrus* to antedate the *Timaeus* might wish to argue that the world's soul, as described in the *Timaeus*, is in fact that (wholly rational) eternally self-moving soul described in the *Phaedrus*, and on these grounds continue to urge the excision of the Demiurge in favour of such a soul, on the grounds that the former's role is now clearly superfluous. But this argument in turn will not do, since it cannot account for the clear description, in the *Timaeus*, of the world's soul as *contingent*, for its existence and operations, upon an entity - whatever that entity might turn out to be - other than itself. Making the two of them co-eternal does not help, for the contingency-relationship remains, rendering a purely reductionist interpretation very implausible.

What I have myself been suggesting is that any explanation of the Demiurge that has a chance of being correct must take into account the fact that he is invariably described in non-contingent terms, and the entities to which many have

wished to reduce him (the world's soul, or the rationality within it) in invariably and unambiguously contingent terms.³² This holds true despite Timaeus's readiness to speak without apparent qualm of the Demiurge as either a father or a craftsman or both, or even - after the manner of Anaxagoras - to talk of him on occasion simply as Reason³³; whatever the variants in the overall description of him, nothing is ever said to detract from the basic assertion that he is the world's non-contingent rational orderer, and *qua* rational also of course himself ensouled.³⁴ To that degree he is the first instance of that psychic self-movement which in the *Phaedrus* Plato will later argue to be a feature of *all* rational soul.³⁵

As a rider to the above, the notion of the world other than the Demiurge, the Forms and Space as being contingent, a notion so critical to my argument, is it seems to me reinforced by a correct reading of the much-misunderstood use of the verb *pherein* at 48a7 (cf. 43a7). In introducing the causal nature of Necessity in the origin of the world Timaeus says: "If, then, one is really going to tell how the world has come into existence on the above principle,

32 I pass over the attempts to equate the Demiurge with a Form, such as the Form of the Good, or the Form Eternal Living Creature. While it is true that he occasionally describes himself in paradigmatic terms - see above, p.8 - this is easily subsumed within his more important role of efficient cause that is both good and alive. At no point does Timaeus hint that his relationship to the Forms is anything other than the relationship between the Forms and any other rational agent in dialogues such as the *Phaedo* and *Republic*, i. e., a relationship between two separate entities, the one a really existing paradigm and the other a really existing - and different - mind.

33 47e ff.

34 See *Tim.* 46d5-6.

35 It has been argued by Ostenfeld, *op. cit.* xxx, that at *Tim.* 30b soul is said to exist only in body, and that this constitutes yet another argument against the supposedly real existence of the Demiurge. But no such strong statement is to be found at *Tim.* 30b. All that Timaeus says is that the Demiurge, "when he framed the universe, fashioned reason within soul and soul within body". This was not because soul and body are invariably conjoined but because the Demiurge wanted the physical universe to be alive and rational as well as physical. The passage explicitly states that it is dealing with "things that are by nature *visible*," 30b1 (i. e., material; see above p.10) and to that degree clearly excludes the Demiurge. On the other hand, Ostenfeld has argued an interesting case for a generalised doctrine in Plato's later dialogues to the effect that soul is invariably embodied, which seems to me basically correct provided one excludes the *Timaeus* from the schema:

one must also bring in the character of the Wandering Cause - how it is its nature to *sustain (pherein)*". In context this will presumably mean "sustain in *motion*" the traces of matter in the pre-cosmos. While the traces of matter, thanks to their *anomolotes* (see above), are in contingent sempiternal motion, a matrix (*hedra*, 52b1) - Space, the Wandering Cause - is necessary (hence its further description as Necessity)³⁶ as a non-contingent *sustainer* of such motion. As in the case of the Demiurge and the soul of the world, Timaeus with his usual care keeps radically separate a further non-contingent item in his cosmology and that which cannot account for itself without the logically prior existence of such an item.³⁷

36 While there is force in Cornford's argument that the Necessity of the *Timaeus* is the necessity of indispensable condition, it is also the necessity involved in non-contingent *sustainment* (cf. the use of the terms *hedra* and *pherein*). In physical rather than modal terms it is described as Space, and in terms of its role in the scheme of things as the so-called Wandering Cause, that is, that cause of the sempiternal sustention in motion of the traces of matter within it thanks to the fact that it is itself forever in motion. Put somewhat differently, Space is both hypothetically necessary if the Demiurge wishes to form a universe and a *datum* of Timaeus's eternal, non-contingent tri-form reality (Demiurge, Forms, Space) whether a formed world comes into being or not. While its causality is of the type Timaeus elsewhere describes as producing its "sundry effects at random and without order" (46e5-6), enough order is nonetheless thereby mechanically produced (53a) to suggest why the Demiurge could finally "persuade" it, in the guise of its modal role as Necessity, to take the next step and "guide the greatest part of the things that come into existence towards what is best" (48a2-3).

37 Cornford translates *pherein* in the passage as "to cause motion", and cites as parallels [Pl.] *Epin.* 983b and *Tim.* 43a7. But neither passage suits the purpose. At *Tim.* 43a7 the circuits in the body did not "cause and suffer violent motions" but rather were rather "violently borne along by and bore along" (*biai epheronto kai epheron*) that "great river" which constitutes the body. (Analogously, Space both moves and is moved by its own contents, 52e4-5.) And at *Epin.* 983b God does not first put life into a body and then "make it move as he has thought best" (tr. Harward, followed by Cornford and Tarán) but rather "*sustain(s) it in motion (pherein)* as he has thought best". The natural sense of *pherein*, here as elsewhere, is "support" (of a pedestal bearing a statue) or "carry" (of a ship carrying passengers). And as such it is very well suited to Plato's purpose of underlining the relationship of contingency between particular items in his cosmology. Other examples of the usage are: (of sense objects) "invariably the object of *phora*" (*pephorememon aei*, 52a6); (of the two motions

assigned to the stars) one uniform in the same place "the other a forward motion, as each is subjected to the *circular carrying-motion (periphoras)* of the Same", 40b1-2; (of an image) that it is "invariably borne along (*aei pheretai*) as a semblance of some other thing", 52c3; and (of eternal being) that it is "characterised by no attribute that Genesis attached to things borne along (*pheromenois*) in <the world of?> sense," 38a5-6. Loose translations in terms of "movement" unwittingly blur a crucial aspect of Timaeus's argument.