The Transformation of Plato's *Republic*

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Limits of the *Timaeus*

On the above account of the dialogue as a whole, Plato's philosophy is not foundational but instrumental. It is not intended to present us with finished doctrines, but rather with models to focus our thinking, which are progressively transformed into something less rigid and more subtle. The *Republic*'s sequel, the *Timaeus*, begins by disclaiming the authoritativeness of its account. Timaeus acknowledges that "To discover the maker and father of the universe would be quite a job and, if we discovered him, to tell everyone about him would be impossible" (28c). Moreover, not only in the case of the creator but also in the case of his creation, we are told that an accurate account is not possible, because only what has being is susceptible of stable and rational accounts, while the universe belongs to the realm of becoming and therefore can only admit likely and unstable accounts (28b–29c)—which follows also from the Divided Line's contention that the visible world is accessible only to *doxa*, not *episteme*. Accordingly, the dialogue is presented as a *mythos* rather than a *logos*.

Nevertheless, the *Timaeus* is sometimes thought to demonstrate the opposite, that Plato had a foundational metaphysics in mind to which the other dialogues allude in various ways. For after these initial disclaimers, the narrative proceeds like a confident description of the nature of things, so there is some justification for the usual practice of downplaying the disclaimers and reading the subsequent account as a work of foundational metaphysics, a myth that may be translated into concepts as fully as the myth of the metals. Both before and after the disclaimers quoted above, however, there are other

indications that the account is not meant to be taken as definitive, although the indications are of a more indirect nature. If Plato wants us to take the metaphysics of the *Timaeus* seriously but not dogmatically, its limitations are better revealed only after we have had time to reflect on it, the way the tripartite soul and two-world models of Books 4 and 5 were tacitly softened after their initial appearance. He does this in the *Timaeus* not only by putting the teaching in the form of a myth, with the above disclaimers, and by putting the myth in the mouth of someone other than Socrates, but also by presenting an account that is self-consciously incomplete, and indicating the missing elements in a way that becomes apparent only after repeated readings.

Its incompleteness is signaled in the opening line, which must be the strangest opening line in Plato: "One, two, three, but where is the fourth, dear Timaeus, of those who were our guests yesterday and are now our hosts?" The strangeness of this line lies chiefly in the fact that the fourth person in this presumably fictitious gathering is in principle impossible to identify.[1] "Yesterday" refers to the day that Socrates narrated the events of the conversation of the day before yesterday, that narration being the *Republic*, much of which is summarized at 17c–19b.[2] But since the *Republic* is a monologue without a dramatic frame—there is no setting of the stage in an introductory scene—it gives no indication of who the audience was to whom Socrates was speaking. We could not possibly have known that Socrates was speaking to four people, let alone who they were. Why would Plato invent an unknowable member of the *Republic*'s audience to be absent from the *Timaeus*? The problem is not diminished if the reference was to some other occasion than the narration of the *Republic*. If the referent of Socrates' question is in principle unidentifiable, then the only meaning that Socrates' question can possibly have for us is simply that there is a missing fourth member. If we read the dialogue with the possibility in mind that the opening words are meant to alert us to a corresponding incompleteness in the account that is to follow, we will find that there are four passages in which a fourth member is missing from a series. In each case what is missing is a mediating term between the realm of individuals and the source from which they derive. The incomplete mediations mean that the metaphysics of the *Timaeus* is not a conclusive metaphysical system, and if Plato chose the opening words in order to signal the omissions, then the inconclusiveness was deliberately built into the metaphysics.

That momentary suggestion of a missing fourth is soon reinforced by a more elaborate one. We know now that Socrates' audience for the previous day's narration consisted of the three who are present for the *Timaeus*, and the absentee; and today's gathering consists of Critias, Timaeus, Hermocrates, and Socrates. Timaeus agrees that in exchange for Socrates' having entertained them the day before with his narration, the rest of the four will entertain Socrates in kind (17a–b), an offer that Hermocrates expressly seconds (20c). Later, however, when Critias tells Socrates how they plan to put this into effect, he mentions Timaeus' speech, and then his own, but makes no reference to Hermocrates (27a–b). This omission is not redressed later, nor is there any record of a dialogue called the *Hermocrates*, to accompany the *Republic*, *Timaeus*, and *Critias*. That Plato never wrote such a dialogue can be explained in any number of ways,[3] but Critias' failure to anticipate the fourth dialogue here, in the very dialogue where it is proposed, is surprising. Once again an impression is created that something is missing, again the fourth member of a series.

Groups of three and groups of four figure prominently in the *Timaeus*. Even on a casual reading the prominence of the number three is obvious: the world is composed of the triad form-body-soul, the soul itself is tripartite, and body is composed of triangles. Moreover, since the *Republic* like the *Timaeus* opens with a reference to the previous day ("I went down yesterday"), if we count Socrates' conversation with Glaucon, Adeimantus, and the others as the first day, the present conversation of the *Timaeus* takes place on the third day. But the number four makes frequent appearances as well. Socrates classifies people into four groups: ordinary people (like himself), poets, sophists, and philosophers (like Timaeus, Critias, and Hermocrates) (19c–20a); Critias' story is now in its fourth telling (after an Egyptian priest told it to Solon, Solon to Critias' grandfather,[4] and Critias' grandfather to Critias himself: 20d–e, 22b); there are four elements (fire, air, water, earth: 31b–32b); four types of sentient beings (gods, birds, fish, and land animals: 39e–40a); and, just as the dialogue opens with a reference to a group of four members, it ends with a list of the four species into which men devolve in their next life (90e–92b).

There are four passages, however, that present a threefold classification where we would expect a fourfold one, and in each case the fourth member is called to our attention in a different context. Since each missing member is one of the two terms by which contrasting realms are mediated, their absence produces fundamental aporias in the metaphysics of the dialogue, but in an implicit way that does not threaten to undermine at the outset the value of the metaphysics as *one* way of conceiving the teleological nature of reality.

Human Vocations (17b–24d)

Socrates begins his recapitulation of the *Republic* conversation with the words, "Did we not first separate in it the class of workers of the land, and the other crafts, from the class of defenders?" (17c). In the *Republic* there was an

ambiguity as to whether the city is divided into three classes or four. Although Socrates usually spoke of only three classes, that was because the two lowest classes, the farmers and craftspeople, are taken together; in some places, however, he kept them distinct, calling them the iron and bronze classes, while the auxiliaries are silver and the guardians gold (e.g., 415a–b). Where the *Republic* tended to collapse the distinction between the farmers and craftspeople, in the *Timaeus* Socrates preserves that distinction but collapses the one between the guardians and auxiliaries, so that we are left with three classes where we would have expected four. The *Republic* had made that distinction when the city evolved from spirited to rational (412d–414b), in order ultimately to distinguish the philosopher from the warrior. Here the distinction is never made, and the guardians are said to be both extraordinarily spirited *and* philosophical (18a). This position corresponds not to the philosopher-rulers of the kallipolis in Book 7, or even to the complete guardians of Book 4, but to the more primitive warrior society (375e) that preceded the separation of the philosophers and warriors.[5]

The omission of the distinction between spiritedness and philosophy is further emphasized by a second omission. In the *Republic* Socrates warned of three waves of criticism that his proposals about the guardians would provoke: one against the proposed equality of women (457b), a second against the replacement of families by communal equality (457c), and the third and greatest against the recommendation that there be philosopher-rulers (473c–d). Here Socrates repeats the first two waves (18c–19a), and then asks, "Then have we now gone through yesterday's discussion, as far as a review of the main points is concerned? Or do we still miss anything that was said, dear Timaeus, which has been omitted?" (19a). "Not at all", Timaeus replies; so the dialogue proceeds without reference to the third wave, in which the rulers would have been clearly distinguished from the spirited warriors by virtue of being philosophers. In this opening discussion then, the question "Where is the fourth?" could be applied to the class of philosophers, which remains submerged in the class of warriors from which the *Republic* had disengaged it.

The collapsing of the distinction between these two classes does not imply a recantation by Plato of the difference between spiritedness and reason, for they are clearly distinguished in what follows, reason being located in the head and spiritedness in the chest (44d, 69d–70a). In fact, shortly after the passages mentioned above, Socrates proceeds to praise Timaeus for 1) his wealth, 2) his status (offices and honors), and 3) his command of philosophy (20a). Those are the three distinctive orientations of the tripartite city and the tripartite soul, and are here once again treated as distinct. Most telling of all is that the middle section of the *Timaeus* will recapitulate the road to philosophy that is described in the middle of the *Republic*, but was omitted from this summary at the beginning of the dialogue. In training the warriors to become philosophers, the *Republic* had advocated using astronomy and harmony as propaedeutics to philosophy, since the two disciplines respectively use the eyes and ears to awaken reason to rational order and goodness (529c–531d). The *Timaeus*, leaving behind its earlier failure to distinguish between the practitioners of war and philosophy, now precisely recalls the teaching of the *Republic* in saying that the senses of sight and hearing, and the sciences of astronomy and harmony that they make possible, lead us "to the genus of philosophy, and no greater good than this has or will ever come to the mortal race by the gift of the gods" (47a–e). Why then is philosophy omitted from the earlier summary?

After that summary Critias relates a story about the founding of Athens that he heard at the age of ten from his ninety-year-old grandfather, who had heard it from Solon long before, who, in turn, heard it from a priest in the Egyptian city of Sais (20d–22b). The priest claims that many of the laws of present-day Sais resemble those of ancient Athens, in particular the division of the populace into four classes: 1) priests; 2) craftspeople; 3) shepherds, hunters, land workers; and 4) warriors (24a–b). Here the fourfold classification of the *Republic* is restored, except that now the ruling class is comprised of priests rather than philosophers. The priests assimilate to their own role the function of philosophers—the pursuit of wisdom (24b–c), just as in the *Republic* the philosophers appropriated to themselves the function of priests—the founding and supervising of the people's religion (379a *ff*, 414b–415c). The reason that each can appropriate the role of the other is that both mediate between the divine and human realms, the priests working downward from the divine by purporting to convey the will of the gods, the philosophers working upward from the human.

The discrepancy between the threefold division of farmer-artisan-warrior (17c–18a) and the fourfold division of farmer-artisan-warrior-priests (24a–b) leaves philosophy in an ambivalent position. In neither classification does philosophy appear as itself: in the former it is not yet separated from spiritedness; in the latter it is already absorbed into priestliness. This progression parallels the trajectory of philosophy in the *Republic*, where the philosopher originally emerges from the warrior class and eventually develops into something like a priest who rules with infallible divine wisdom. In their own way both roles are relevant to philosophy. Philosophy may begin in wonder, but it will not get far if the wonder is not accompanied by a fighting spirit that struggles against difficulties and against conventional beliefs—Socratic "irony", in its original sense, means the false modesty that cloaks hubris.[6] But

together with that false modesty and its presumptuousness is a genuine humility. Philosophers, like priests, must ultimately subordinate themselves to something higher than themselves. The goal of philosophy, if it is ever to become simple love of wisdom, must be to overcome the vanity of personal achievement that is, however, one of its original driving forces. Whatever wisdom we attain must initially be purchased with a spirited struggle; otherwise our conclusions will be indistinguishable from divine inspiration, and the philosopher indistinguishable from the priest. To the extent that philosophy is only polemical argument, as it was for the sophists, then the philosopher is engaged in just another form of competition or polemic; but if that element is missing entirely, wisdom will collapse into uncritical piety.

Nowhere in the dialogues does Plato claim to give an adequate account of what philosophy is. The second and seventh letters (314a–c, 341c–d) echo the *Republic*'s (533a) insistence on the impossibility of a verbal presentation of philosophy at its highest level; and in the *Timaeus* Socrates is so far from claiming to be capable of such a presentation that he does not even profess to be a philosopher himself—unlike Timaeus, Critias, and Hermocrates, on whom he ironically bestows that title, he is only an ordinary person (19c–20a). The difficulty of discerning the necessary and sufficient conditions that distinguish the philosopher from the warrior-like sophist on one hand, and the priest-like statesman on the other,[7] may be inferred from Plato's failure to write the promised dialogue, the *Philosopher*, which was supposed to succeed the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman*.[8] We are given no dialogue in which philosophy appears directly as itself, rather than indirectly in its examination of a particular question. The *Timaeus*' absorption of philosophy into the class of warriors in the three-part classification, and into that of priests in the four-part classification, reflects the same unstable polarity of philosophy between spiritedness and wisdom that the *Republic* and the unfinished Eleatic tetralogy reflect in their own ways.

Elements and Gods (31b–32c, 39e–41a)

Normally we think of a mean as a single mediation between two terms, but Timaeus points out that when the two terms are solids, like fire and earth, a double mean is necessary—a third and fourth term, one from the side of each of the extremes (32b). Thus the fire and earth are mediated by both air and water, air on the side of fire ("As fire is to air, air is to water") and water on the side of earth ("As air is to water, water is to earth") (31b–32b). The technique of synthesis by a double mean is often at work in the dialogues if we take it in an extended sense that is not always mathematical. The *Republic*'s Divided

Line, for example, mediated between the *eikastic* Cave and the *noetic* Isles of the Blessed by means of *pistis* from below and *dianoia* from above. In the *Sophist* the Eleatic visitor effects a double reconciliation between the "friends of the forms" and the materialists, from above by collecting their respective principles within the comprehensive genus of "power" (247d–e), and from below by having both parties recognize something of their opponents' claims (246e–247c, 248e–249d). And in the *Statesman* the Eleatic stranger says that the statesman will have to use a double bond—divine and human—in order to weave together the courageous and the moderate citizens (309b–c): the divine bond is a common belief in the nature of the good (309c–e), and the human bond is intermarriage (310a–b).

Shortly after the passage in which the *Timaeus* presents the doctrine of the double mean to link fire and earth by air and water, we are told that corresponding to those four elements and their regions are the four fundamental species of beings: gods, winged animals, aquatic animals, and land animals. The gods are mostly fire (40a), but Timaeus also mentions gods associated with other elements: the first and eldest of the gods within Ouranos (heaven, the province of fire) is Gaia (earth) (40b–c), and these two, Ouranos and Gaia, give birth to Oceanus (ocean) and Tethys (queen of the sea) (40e), parents of all the rivers of the world. After them are mentioned only Phorcys, who is associated with sea monsters, and Kronos, Rhea, Zeus, and Hera, all of whom are associated with heaven, Ouranos. Just as Timaeus' cosmogony began with heaven (fire) and earth, his theogony begins with the gods of heaven and earth. But whereas the cosmogony described two means that join the extremes (air and water), the theogony mentions, besides the gods of heaven and earth, only gods associated with water (Ocean, Tethys, Phorcys); and then, instead of proceeding to gods of air (such as Aeolus, Boreus, and Zephyrus), who are never mentioned, returns to those of heavenly fire. Gods of three of the elemental levels are mentioned, but not the fourth. Coming so soon after the explanation of a need for air and water as means between fire and earth, the reference to only three of these four in their divine personae is surprising.

In the first passage that we looked at, the class of philosophers was suppressed, who mediate between the divine and human from the side of the human, and only the class of priests was mentioned, who mediate between the divine and human from the side of the divine. Here again it is one of the means between two poles that is left out, but this time it is the upper mean, the one closest to heaven that is omitted, rather than the mean closest to us. Whether the opposition is between humanity and the gods, as in the first pair of classifications, or heaven and earth, as here, the implication is, once again,

that there is an incompleteness of mediation, a threefold classification where we have been led to expect a fourfold one.

Causes of the Cosmos (48c–53b)

The previous discussion, Timaeus says, divided the universe into two forms, paradigmatic form that is intelligible, and an imitation of it that is generated and visible. Now a third must be added, the receptacle that receives the imitation (48e–49b). Once again a fourth member is missing. In the previous discussion that Timaeus is referring to, there were three terms, not two. Not only did he distinguish between the model of intelligible being and its imitation in sensible becoming (27d–28c), but he twice added that there must also be a third term, the cause by which becoming is brought into its imitative existence: "everything that comes to be necessarily comes to be by a cause" (28a); "in the case of what comes to be we say that it is necessary that it come to be by some cause" (28c). But there is no mention here of that fourth principle, the cause by which what comes to be in the receptacle is brought into existence in imitation of paradigmatic form.

A section of the *Philebus* corresponds remarkably closely to the present passage. That passage too begins by saying, "Let us divide everything that now exists in the universe into two parts, or rather, if you like, into three" (23c). The three parts are limit, the unlimited, and the mixture of the two. In the *Timaeus* paradigmatic form corresponds to limit in the *Philebus*, the imitation of form in the realm of becoming corresponds to the mixture of limit and the unlimited, and the receptacle corresponds to the unlimited. But the *Philebus* then adds the fourth principle that the present passage of the *Timaeus* omits, and does so in almost precisely the same words that Timaeus used at 28a and 28c. Socrates says that we must consider not only the two elements and the mixture that arises from them, but we must also seek a fourth factor, the cause of the mixture, for "it is necessary that all things that come to be, come to be by a cause" (*Philebus* 26e).

The emphasis in the two dialogues is different. In the *Philebus* what is sought is the mixture of limit and unlimited, and its cause. The problem is to mediate between limit and unlimited, and the mixture ("becoming") functions as a mean between them on the side of the unlimited, while the cause of the mixture functions as a mean on the side of limit. Here in the *Timaeus* the problem is to meditate between the eternal and the temporal, that is, in the language of the *Philebus*, between limit and the mixture, not limit and the unlimited. These two—the eternal and temporal, form and becoming—like the two in the *Philebus*, are mediated in one way from below and in another way from above. The receptacle is the mean from below, on the side of the becoming,[9] but there must also be a mean from above, on the side of being. Why is there no discussion here of that fourth term, the cause that mediates downward by bringing becoming into existence in imitation of being? Its absence is accounted for by something that Timaeus said just prior to this passage: "We shall not now explain the principle or principles—or however we conceive them—of all things, for no other reason than because of the difficulty of making our beliefs clear according to our present type of method" (48c).[10] He had made the same point after mentioning the importance of the causal principle in the earlier passage as well, quoted at the beginning of this chapter: "To discover the maker and father of the universe would be quite a job and, if we discovered him, to tell everyone about him would be impossible" (28c). But the fact that a principle resists explanation does not mean that it should not be counted among the relevant principles and that the remaining principles are by themselves sufficient, as Timaeus claims here (48e, 49a).

Mythically, the first principle is represented by the divine demiurge (28c, 53b) but we are given no precise conception of what this mythological characterization represents in purely conceptual terms. We are told that, being good, he is not jealous and therefore made the world as much like himself as possible (29e–30a), but we are not told what it means to call him good, what goodness is. In his productive aspect he is creative mind, and since mind operates by reason rather than force his creative shaping of material necessity is described as persuasion (47e–48a), but the metaphor of persuasion does not generate clear and distinct concepts when applied to cosmogony. We saw in chapter 6 that the explanation of creation as a lack of jealousy suggests an emanation theory—in the absence of a deliberate withholding (jealousy) the world naturally follows from the creative principle—but Timaeus nowhere makes this explicit. What we are told is that the individuals that populate the world are created only indirectly by the demiurge, for all his direct creations must be eternal, and directly by the eternal gods that the demiurge creates. The necessarily immortal cannot generate the mortal except through the medium of the contingently immortal (41a–b). But the creative operations of the gods are no less mysterious and no less in need of demythologization than those of the demiurge, if we are to be able to distinguish philosophy from piety and philosophers from priests.

Since Plato usually calls the material imitation of paradigmatic form "participation", the entire creation myth of the *Timaeus* can be regarded as an image of the phenomenon of participation, in which temporal priority stands for ontological priority. But if, like Parmenides in the first part of his eponymous dialogue, we ask precisely what is meant by participation, which is after

all only a metaphor, we will find no answer in Plato. The concept of participation is one of the fundamental aporias in Platonic philosophy. Accordingly, whether we ask the question in mythic or conceptual terms, we will find no real answer to the question, "Where is the fourth?" (i.e., if the upward mediation between divine creativity and mortal createdness is the receptacle, where is the downward mediation, the cause of participation)?

Levels of Soul (69c–73a)

When the demiurge turns over the creation of all that is mortal to his offspring, they take the immortal soul, reason, which the demiurge had created from the not quite pure residue of the world-soul (41d), create around it the human body, and within the body add a mortal soul comprising spiritedness and appetite (69c). Reason was housed in the head (44d), and now the spirited element is housed between the neck and the midriff (i.e., in the top third of the torso) and the appetitive part occupies the middle third of the torso, the lower thorax between the midriff and the navel (70a–e).[11] But what about the fourth part of the body, the abdomen? This case is not problematic in the way the previous ones were, where the fourth member of a quartet is omitted altogether, for Timaeus does go on to discuss the abdomen after the discussion of the midsection is complete, but it is the one part of the central body that is never connected with soul. At that point he says, "The next subject . . . is the way the rest of the body has come to be" (72e). "The rest of the body" turns out to include only two categories, the abdomen on one hand, and the marrow and its products on the other, for the marrow is the originating principle of "bones, flesh, and all such natures" (73b). Marrow combines in itself all three types of soul and is therefore able to produce not only flesh and bones, but structures as different as the brain and the sperm, and the spinal cord in between (73c–d).

Thus the head, thorax, and midriff are each the seat of a particular kind of soul, while marrow combines all three. Only the abdomen, the fourth part of the body, seems to have no distinctive soul nature. It is a kind of counterpart to marrow in that, while only in the function of marrow are all three parts of the individual soul combined, only in the function of the abdomen are all three absent. Marrow bonds the soul to the body in life (73b), but three-dimensional kinds require two means to bind them (32b), and a second mean is never mentioned. Can the second bond between soul and body be found in the function of the abdomen?

A distinctive kind of motion does, in fact, take place in the abdomen, and that is a prima facie indication of the presence of some kind of soul, since soul

is the principle of motion. The distinctive motion of the abdomen is neither rational nor spirited nor appetitive—does it therefore imply a fourth kind of soul? Timaeus describes the function of the abdomen as follows:

> Those who were constructing our race knew the incontinence that would be in us for drinks and food, and that through greed we would consume far more than what is moderate and necessary. In order, then, that they not be swiftly destroyed by diseases and the mortal race come to an immediate end without reaching its end, foreseeing these things they set what is called the abdomen as a receptacle to hold superfluous drink and food. And they coiled the formation of the intestines around, so that the nourishment would not pass through quickly and force the body to quickly again require more nourishment, bringing about insatiability and, by virtue of gluttony, making the whole race end up unphilosophical and uncultured, and disobedient to the most divine part that we possess. [72e–73a]

Left to its own devices, then, appetite is subject to incontinence and greed. Spiritedness too is subject to a pair of "unwise counselors", the extremes of boldness and fearfulness (69d), but since appetite is further both in nature and location from reason than is spiritedness, it is even less obedient (70a) and more susceptible to unwise counsel. The purpose of the abdomen is to curtail our tendency to insatiable cravings, making us moderate and subduing the importunity of the body sufficiently to allow us to respond to the promptings of divine reason. Whereas spiritedness' tendency to excess need only be countered by the dictates of reason coming from above, the stronger tendency to excess in the appetitive part must be countered both from above by the alliance of reason and spiritedness (70a), and from below by the abdomen.[12] The fourth part of the body, then, becomes an additional ally of reason against the unlimited greed of appetite, and functions as a fourth player in the game, in addition to the three parts of the soul.

But Plato usually characterizes the body as being by nature opposed to the mind, the irrational to the rational.[13] In that case how can the mechanical body function here as the ally of reason? Is it only because of a design extrinsically added onto the body, by which reason uses the resistance of matter to its own advantage—or is there also some as yet unspecified *intrinsic* soul at work, a principle of motion not reducible to the other three? If so, the tension between the three-part division of the soul and the four-part division of the body will once again point to an unmentioned fourth category.

There is no obvious principle of motion in the abdomen. It seems that either the waste material would be conceived as being forced through the intestines by the new food entering from above, analogously to the case of

urination where downward pressure is exerted by air pressure from the lungs (91a), or else since it is akin to earth it naturally moves in the direction of earth (cf. 81a). Even mechanical processes like these are not entirely soulless, however, as they follow from the laws of nature (φύσεως . . . νόμους: 83e), that is, the world-soul. By denying any part of the tripartite soul to the lowest quarter of the body, Plato displays there the operation of the world-soul without the overlay of the vegetable (appetitive), animal (spirited), or human (rational) souls.

The cosmos as a whole is a single animal in which all other things, living and nonliving, are contained as parts.[14] Since nothing exists outside of it, its own waste provides its nourishment (33c). This refers not only to the fact that all living beings are subject to inflow and outflow (42a, 43a) so that the by-products of one are the nourishment of another, but also to processes among nonliving things, such as the interchange of fire, air, and water (49c, 54b–55c). That is what Timaeus means by saying that when the created gods made mortal animals out of the material of the cosmos' body, it was with the intention of paying it back (42e–43a): the natural elements appropriated by living bodies are returned to nature through elimination and exhalation while the organism is alive, and by decomposition after death. In fact, the two types of processes, living and nonliving, follow precisely the same laws. Speaking of the human body, Timaeus says:

> The manner of filling and evacuation comes about just as everything in the universe is carried out, in accordance with the principle that all that is akin is carried toward its kin. For the elements that surround us without always dissolve and divide us, distributing to each species its own kind. [81a]

It is on this principle of like returning to like that all bodily inflow and outflow is based. On one hand growth depends on food being converted to add bone to bone, flesh to flesh, and blood to blood. On the other hand, not only is our body worn away by its interaction with our environment, but our breath joins with outside air and our waste products with earth and water. Our feces and urine are expelled at a lower point than our breath because the natural places of water and earth are lower than the natural place of air (63c–e). The motions of elimination derive, then, not from the sentient soul of the individual (whether rational, spirited, or appetitive) but from the laws of nature. The continuing separation of the four kinds into their respective places is due to the fact that the receptacle, the site of becoming, is not evenly balanced, and therefore sways and shakes, its shaking separating the heavier and lighter elements the way a winnowing fan separates the wheat from the chaff (52e–53a). The motion of the receptacle is a purely mechanical motion, unlike the goal-directed motions of vegetative, animal, and rational souls, but it is not a soulless motion, since soul is the source of all motion—or at least all motion that is not irrational.[15]

The motion of the receptacle cannot exist without soul, since the reason why the elements came to be mixed together in the first place, and why they do not remain in their places once separated, is that

> the revolution of the universe, since it comprehends the kinds, and since it is circular and naturally wants to come together with itself, squeezes them all and allows no empty space to remain. . . . The coming together of the compression pushes the small elements into the interstices of the large ones. [58a–b]

We already know that this revolution of the universe is produced by the circular motion of the world-soul (36e), so the ultimate cause of the shaking of the receptacle is the world-soul, which forces unlikes together and thus creates the imbalance that results in the shaking. In fact, since the motion of the world-soul is a double circle—the circle of the same and the circle of the different (36c)—not only the centripetal motion that forces together the different, but also the shaking motion that separates the same must have its source in the motion of the world-soul. The receptacle itself and the differing weights of the elements are necessary causes of the motions of nature, but they are not sufficient causes. They are what in other contexts Timaeus calls contributing or subordinate causes (46c, 68e), the necessary cause rather than the divine (68e).[16]

Our question was whether in the function of the abdomen we can see the second bond between soul and body, the fourth element in the mediation, as in marrow we saw the first bond. Marrow is the means by which the three parts of the soul act on the physical world; for the double mediation to be complete there must also be a means by which the physical world acts on the soul. If we turn our attention outside the body, the most obvious example of this is sense perception (43b–e),[17] but if we confine ourselves to what takes place within the body itself, the clearest example of the activity of the body on the soul is the intestines' mechanical alliance with reason against the excesses of appetite (69d–72d). Within the human body the "soulless" abdomen is the only part where, in default of the presence of any of the three parts of the individual soul, the operations of the world-soul appear beside them as a fourth.

Conclusion

The four passages we have been considering are all characterized by a tension between a triadic classification and a quadratic one, and in each case the omitted term was one of the two means between the source from which we

come and the realm of becoming in which we live—either between truth and thought, gods and earth-dwellers, creator and creation, or whole and parts. 1) The philosopher is the upward mean between human thought and divine truth, as the priest is the downward mean. 2) The gods of the air mediate downward between the element of the gods and the element of humans, fire and earth (39e–40a), as the gods of water mediate upward. 3) The cause of the mixture of the rational and irrational is the downward mean between being and becoming, as the receptacle is the upward mean. 4) The world-soul is the downward mean between the cosmos and the individual—the whole and parts (30d)—as the individual soul is the upward mean.

As I suggested in the beginning, these four lacunae point to fundamental aporias in the *Timaeus*' account. 1) We are told that philosophy is the greatest gift that ever has or will be bestowed upon us by the gods (47b); however, what exactly philosophy is, not only is never explained (nor did the promised dialogue, the *Philosopher*, materialize), but is continuously conflated with mythology throughout the *Timaeus*. 2) From beginning to end the dialogues repeatedly emphasize our relationship to the gods; but how we are to conceive of the gods or their patronization of us is never explained in a non-mythic way. 3) The causality of the good and the forms appears throughout at least the middle and late dialogues; but we are given no conceptual metaphysical account of what that means—only mythic accounts like the *Timaeus*, or metaphors like "participating", "partaking", "imitating", and "striving towards". 4) The ascetic element in Plato that points us away from the body is balanced by the reminder that we should not turn our back too hastily on the corporeal world because we are also natural beings with a role to play in the natural world;[18] but how is that to be conceived? How can we understand ourselves as parts of a greater whole, when our appetite and spiritedness continually insist on our egocentricity? Plato provides us with no foundational metaphysics to complement the myth of Er and show how our physical life is entirely a product of the world-soul, the laws of nature, any more than he shows how our rational life is a product of divine reason.

In recent decades the *Timaeus* has frequently been linked with the *Parmenides* over the question of whether Plato repudiated his earlier theory of forms. The criticisms of that theory, which appear in the *Parmenides*, lend themselves to this interpretation, but the theory reappears intact in the *Timaeus* which, by all stylistic measures, was written after the *Parmenides*.[19] I would like to suggest a different way to understand their complementarity. To repeat what I said earlier, metaphysics functions in Plato instrumentally rather than dogmatically, as a means of thinking about the intelligible, not as a definitive account of truth. The *Parmenides* reminds us of the doctrinal

inadequacy of metaphysics by showing the aporias in the metaphysical theory of forms; but it reaffirms the instrumental value of the theory in a brief passage that appears to be a mere afterthought of Parmenides:

> Only a man of very great natural ability will be able to understand that there is a certain genus and essence, itself-by-itself, for each thing, and only a still more amazing man will be able to discover all these things and teach someone else to evaluate them properly. . . . But if anyone, in view of these and other such difficulties, will not permit the existence of forms of things or mark off a single form in each case, he will not have anything on which to fix his thoughts, as long as he does not permit the idea of each thing to be always the same, and in this way he will utterly destroy the power of discourse. You seem to me to have been well aware of this. [135a–c]

The *Timaeus* is the counterpart of the *Parmenides* in this respect. Whereas the *Parmenides* emphasized the limitations of metaphysics while reminding us, almost as an afterthought, of its importance, the *Timaeus* shows us the value of metaphysics by giving us the most ambitious metaphysical account in all of Plato, while at the same time reminding us almost inconspicuously—both by its mythic form and by its missing mediations—of the limitations of such an account.

Notes

1. For some of the historical speculation regarding this question see Sallis 1999, 10–11.

2. Not everyone agrees that the *Timaeus* is a sequel to the *Republic*, since some doctrines central to the *Republic* are left out of the *Timaeus*' summary. Some readers have suggested instead that the *Timaeus* was written after an early version of the *Republic* which did not include those doctrines, and before the version that we know: A. E. Taylor mentions Henry Jackson and R. D. Archer-Hind as defenders of this view (*A Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928], 27). But there is no evidence for this claim and it is rejected not only by Taylor (32) but by everyone since, as far as I know. Others make the opposite claim: not that the *Republic* (as we know it) supersedes the *Timaeus*, but that the *Timaeus* supersedes the *Republic* (i.e., that the abbreviated summary is meant to repudiate by their absence those doctrines of the *Republic* to which Plato no longer subscribes). W. K. C. Guthrie, for example, writes, "Plato is telling us explicitly that in the years since he wrote it his interests have veered from an idealistic view of society towards practical policy" (*A History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. 5 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978], 245). Still others consider the summary not to refer to the *Republic* at all, but to some other conversation. Thus F. M. Cornford argues that because matters that are important in the *Republic* have been left out, and because "Plato [gives] his own clear indication . . .

that the summary actually given is complete . . . Plato could not have stated more plainly that Socrates is not to be supposed to have narrated the whole conversation in the *Republic* as we have it. It follows at once that he did not intend the *Republic* to stand as the first dialogue in his new series. . . . [However,] no ground remains for any inference that Plato meant the contents of the later books of the *Republic* to be superseded or corrected by the *Timaeus*" (*Plato's Cosmology* [London: Routledge, 1937], 4–5). But Plato does not give a "clear indication" that the summary is complete—that judgement is made only by Timaeus (19a–b), the very person who requested the summary because of his inability to remember the conversation adequately (17b). Brann believes that Socrates' remark at about celebrating the festival of the goddess (*Timaeus* 26e) is a reference to the Lesser Panathenaea, "which occurred two months later". She suggests that "Socrates proposed this city on various occasions and that it was known as 'his'" (1967, 21). Also see Sallis 1999, 22–23. Be that as it may, Plato could hardly have written this part of the *Timaeus* without expecting his readers to be reminded of the *Republic*, so I shall treat it that way to see what follows from the comparison.

3. See, for example, Cornford 1937, 7–8 & n. 2; Guthrie 1978, 246n1.

4. Taking the subject of εἶπεν ("told") in 20e4 to be Solon (with Cornford and Jowett). The referent of the verb is grammatically ambiguous and is sometimes taken to refer to Dropides, Critias' great-grandfather, but Critias later refers to this as the story "that old Critias [the grandfather] heard from Solon" (25e).

5. In the timocracy that is the first stage of the degeneration (547b) the philosophers are still distinct from the warriors although they are now politically subservient to them.

6. Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.7.

7. Cf. *Statesman* 303b, 309c. The role of actual priests in the *Statesman* is more circumscribed, however: 290c–d.

8. *Statesman* 257a–258a; cf. *Sophist* 216e–17a.

9. The receptacle is ontologically an extreme but cosmologically a mean. Ontologically it is an extreme because it is the least determinate level of reality, as being (form) is the most determinate. But cosmologically it is a mean because individuals could not come into being if there were not already a receptacle. The *Timaeus* presents the cosmological side, the *Philebus* the ontological side. A similar duality arises in Plotinus, where matter must emanate from the One prior to individuals because it is the principle of individuation (a mean), and yet it must be considered as the last emanation of all (an extreme) because it is least determinate.

10. Even as he refuses to discuss the principle [ἀρχήν] he makes that omission as conspicuous as possible by using the same word in a different sense throughout the passage, as, for example, in the following sentence: "But holding to what I said at the beginning [κατ' ἀρχάς] about the efficacy of likely accounts, I shall try to give one no less likely than others, but more so as before, and speak from the beginning [ἀπ' ἀρχῆς] about each thing and the totality of all things" (48d). Also see Cornford 1937, 161. So far is Timaeus from explaining this principle, that there is little agreement among commentators as to even what he is referring to. It has been taken to mean that "what he is going to take as the ABC of things may be capable of further analysis, only 'for our present purposes' we shall not try to analyse any further" (Taylor 309). Or that Timaeus is employing "a method which aims only at 'probability' or 'likelihood': to attain to 'first principles' we should need to employ the 'dialectic' method" (R. G. Bury ed., *Timaeus* etc. [London: Heineman, 1929], 110n2). Or "This warning may mean that the elementary triangles themselves are reducible to numbers, and number perhaps to be derived from unity; but he will not here push the analysis so far. Or it may mean that no one can ever really know the ultimate constitution of body, because there can be no such thing as physical science, but only a 'probable' account" (Cornford 1937, 162.). But once we notice that the three-part classification of being (form), becoming, and the receptacle, omits a fourth term—the cause or principle which had been mentioned at 28c and 48c, and which corresponds to the fourth term in the *Philebus* classification—we can see that this is the principle that Timaeus is refusing to bring into his account.

11. This classification has a certain figurative plausibility even today: reason in the brain, spiritedness in the heart (as the etymology of "courage" testifies), and appetite in the stomach.

12. And even from within by the liver (71a–d).

13. Most notably in the *Phaedo*: see 64d–67a, 80a–b. In the *Republic* this opposition is expressed in terms of the conflict between rationality and appetite.

14. 30d, 32c, 39e, 69c, 92c.

15. *Phaedrus* 245c–e, *Laws* 10.895b–897b. Whether soul is also the source of irrational motion is a matter of continuing controversy; see Richard Mohr's survey of the literature (*The Platonic Cosmology* [Leiden: Brill, 1985], 116–19). Guthrie (1978) rejects the view that soul is the source of irrational motion, which dates back to antiquity (see Taylor 1928, 155 ff), and which has more recently been defended by Cornford (1937, 205), J. B. Skemp (*The Theory of Motion in Plato's Later Dialogues* [Amsterdam: Hakkert 1967], 3–5, 76), Leonardo Tarán ("The Creation Myth in Plato's *Timaeus*", in Anton and Kustas, *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy* [Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1971], 372–407), and J. S. Clegg ("Plato's Vision of Chaos", *Classical Quarterly* [1976]). Mohr, on the other hand, defends something like Guthrie's position. Guthrie's reason for rejecting the traditional view is that "even a myth (if this is all mythical) should be internally consistent, and in Timaeus' story the disorderly motion was there before the world-soul was created". Timaeus explicitly says, however, that although this was true of the order of his presentation, the opposite was true in the order of actuality:

> With regard to the soul, it is not the case that since we are now undertaking to speak of it after [the body], it follows that the god planned it to be younger. For when uniting them he would not have allowed the elder to be ruled by the younger. But we [humans], participating greatly in the accidental and random, also speak that way. But the god made the soul earlier and more venerable than the body, since soul was to be master and ruler, and body the subject. [34b–c]

Body could not have existed prior to soul, then, despite the sequence of Timaeus' narrative, and if not body then not motion.

16. Cf. *Phaedo* 99b.
17. Here again the law of nature that like goes to like is at work (e.g., 45b–d).
18. See, for example, *Phaedo* 61b–67b.
19. For details see Dorter 1994, 1–9.