PHILEBUS AND *TIMAEUS*: PLATO 'SUGGESTS' READING THESE TWO DIALOGUES TOGETHER

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This text is a mere part of a far more complex reasoning. The underlying premise sets out from the belief (which I must assume as proven) that Plato writes in a protreptic manner – resorting to «games» that goad and sometimes force the reader to go beyond the literal meaning of the text. This also implies that the «games» are steadily increasing in complexity and «difficulty»[1]. On this basis, I seek to argue that Plato wrote these two dialogues in a «framework of unitary allusions», thus giving us some indications of the opportunity of reading them in close connection, as they complement each other. Consequently, the interpreter must 1) identify these signals, 2) establish, *on first approximation*, to what extent the two dialogues mutually «assist» one another, 3) show how this operation can help restore an outline of metaphysics and Platonic cosmology.

In this short text I shall limit myself to developing *one part* of the first point, although I will give details of all its passages, thereby offsetting any possible confusion that may arise from several claims[2], because the strength of the evidence lies as much in their combination as in their sheer number[3].

To begin with, both dialogues: 1. are named after fictitious characters; 2. carry out a discussion with a «fallback» character; 3. refer to a previous dissertation; 4. end abruptly, an extreme dramatic choice that calls for an explanation; 5. are linked to a Pythagorean context; 6. actually encompass two different discussions[4] that need to be intertwined in order to grasp the sense of the Platonic proposal; 7. feature dual natures that are equal and opposite: the *Philebus* develops an anthropological discussion and makes a contribu-

1. Cf. what I wrote in Migliori 2000, 2005 e 2007a.

2. Also for this reason the reader will find some of my works on the two dialogues listed in the bibliography.

3. This framework will be developed in its entirety in a specific chapter of the first volume of my *Plato* that will be published by Morcelliana in 2010.

4. The two treatises are respectively centered in the *Philebus* upon *peras*/*apeiron*/mixture/cause and measure, in the *Timaeus* upon a cosmogony revolving on the Demiurge's action and one dealing with material causes.

tion at a metaphysical and theological level, while the *Timaeus* plays out a cosmological-metaphysical reflection and provides from the outset useful elements for Platonic anthropology; 8. creates an interlocking effect: at an anthropological level, the *Philebus* works upon the ethical framework whereas the *Timaeus* puts forward elements of a political nature; at a metaphysical level, the *Philebus* speaks of Principles and of the Good, while the *Timaeus* discusses the demiurgic and the material Causes; 9. reveal a two-faced structure, both in terms of method[5] and argumentation[6], so that, to put it briefly, the *Philebus* is reductive- generalizing while the *Timaeus* i*s derivative-elementarizing*; 10. have unique characteristics compared to the other dialogue structures; 11. are grouped together in the same final set of dialogues.

Therefore, I shall only develop the first four points.

1. *The title character*

Both dialogues refer to *dramatis personae*. While the situation is not identical, it does feature similarities that cannot be overlooked, also because these are two very special cases.

Philebus

It seems odd that the dialogue should be named after Philebus, given that his discussion with Socrates took place *before the start of the dialogue* «staged» here, which actually involves Protarchus, instead. We have to ask ourselves what is the point of naming a dialogue after a character that is: 1. «made-up», and 2. not quite «positive» since (2.1.) he «refuses» to further the discussion and (2.2.) is «dogmatically certain» that he will not be swayed.

The reason may perhaps be gleaned from certain information embedded in the Platonic text. First, Plato illustrates some personal features that lead us to believe that this character might actually conceal a real person in flesh and blood, who would have easily been recognizable in his time. He is

5. The fundamental procedure in the *Philebus* applies the generalizing method, which charts the universal starting from the particular. Instead, the one in the *Timaeus* is «*elementarizing*», thus breaking down every thing in its smallest and most basic elements.

6. The *Philebus* proceeds reductively (upwards from below as when climbing the stairway of knowledge), linked to the *ratio cognoscendi*, from the realization of the one-manifold reality to its conditions. The *Timaeus*, which starts from the origin of the Cosmos and the Demiurge's action, seems to proceed from the top, that is, in a derivative manner, which, according to the *ratio essendi*, descends from remote principles towards elements pertaining to our experience.

deemed handsome by Protarchus (11c7) and Socrates (26b8) alike; he uses fond and familiar expressions when addressing the youths (16b), thus shedding light on the possible origin of «his name», as stemming from *fil-ebos*, the lover of youth (ἥβη); all this appears consistent with his hedonistic stance. He has all the trappings of a teacher, who has sparred «on a par» with Socrates, as confirmed by his few interventions[7]; we can assume he is no longer young, for he addresses the other youths as would an elder, so much so that he calls them boys (παῖδες, 16b3), and after he withdraws his stance is left to a minor character like young Protarchus to defend.

Moreover, Plato treats him with unwonted respect. The decision to abandon the discussion in the dialogues suggests that the interlocutor is not a true philosopher, and yet this is not held against him here. Likewise, when a coarse variety of hedonism surfaces, Socrates feels the need to clarify that Philebus is not involved in this (46b) –a pointless exercise if the character were a product of fancy. On the other hand, the title is justified because the dialogue revolves around the issue of the contrast between him and Socrates. As this discussion is an artifice Plato uses to establish the fiction of the dialogue, we must assume it refers to a factual encounter if its importance is to be warranted.

This inference is especially true since the dialogue seeks to prove that «Philebus is not a party» to the discussion taking place here. It is stated right from the outset and witnessed by both the Goddess and Protarchus (who takes his place) that Philebus is no longer involved in the ongoing discussion. The debate will follow its course with or without his approval (12b). The mooted arguments are not strictly speaking his own, then. This need «not to compromise» him reaches its highpoint when, as we have said, his own hedonism is distinguished from its coarser versions (46b). We are obviously looking at a well-bred hedonist and it would be unfair to mistake his standpoint with others far worse. Such precautions would be inexplicable if Philebus were a made-up character, or worse «the prototype of the fanatic, equally unable to convey as to understand reason»[8]. Socrates has already come across characters of that ilk, and the treatment reserved to them was fitting to their faults. Yet we find no real aggressiveness towards Philebus here.

Finally, this character is unwilling to yield anything: when Socrates «assumes» what the solution will be –the third way that blends knowledge and pleasure– Protarchus accepts this proposal, while Philebus remains stubbornly and unilaterally in favor of the primacy of pleasure (12a). Indeed, Socrates points out that the lifestyle suggested by Philebus is merely pleas-

7. Therefore we should reject statements such as he is but a peevish boy, far less mature in the mind than Protarchus that nothing will ever drag away from his hedonism (12a) (Taylor 1968, 634 n. 2).

8. Diès 1941, LIV; same assessment in Löhr 1990, 23.

urable and bound up with nothing else (27e). This is easily explained, if the character's mask hides a real person who has never abandoned the hedonistic position: in that case Plato was «compelled» to present him with a close-minded attitude, as such «not condemnable», because otherwise he would have committed a «historical falsehood» - and a downright stupid one. Moreover, Philebus turns out to be harsh debater who is best left alone. This is laid bare when the time is deemed right to address the issue of a one-many connection in the sphere of Ideas (15ac). Protarchus agrees to discuss the matter and says «and perhaps we ought not to ask Philebus any questions right now (ἐν τῷ νῦν) better not rouse him from his slumber» (15c8-9).

So, *at this time and on this ground*, it is best not to needle Philebus; this alone should lead us to believe that he was an opponent not only in the field of ethics, but also in the handling of Ideas and Principles, which steers us away from a purely hedonistic sphere and summons to mind the Academy. To some extent, though, he is also the object of scorn: the expression used by young Protarchus is akin to our «let sleeping dogs lie». To regard this as a token of Socratic irony[9] does not work in the narrative drama of the dialogue. The reason is twofold: firstly, the words are spoken by Protarchus, and secondly, there is little point in making a fictitious character - left out of the discussion - the target of one's irony. The situation acquires ironic meaning only if one refers to a real person, who was a sharp polemicist (at the Academy). Finally, despite formal respect thereof, his thesis is severely censured. Let us not forget that Socrates ends the dialogue by saying that all the beasts testify for pleasure (67b).

At this stage the question becomes: what real-life person, probably at the Academy, would have fit such descriptions at that time? Despite the dearth of information available, the only figure boasting all these traits is Eudoxus[10], a mathematician and philosopher who taught at the Academy. His relations with Platonists were complex[11], yet it is unlikely that he was not a member of the school. «Indeed a) Eudoxus has a doctrine of Ideas; b) Aristotle speaks of him as one of the Platonists c) his thesis on pleasure stirred such reactions at the Academy that may only be explained by assuming that, for some time at least, he had belonged to the School; d) too many sources confirm that Eudoxus had been an auditor at Plato's lectures (see references in Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen*, 6 vv., Leipzig 1922, II, 1, Darmstadt 1963[6], 993n.3). It is nonetheless true that the cooperation between Plato and Eudoxus must have been short-lived and disagreements must have arisen that resulted in a rift»[12]. Relations between them were intense and

9. Deschaux 1980, 403 n. 21.

10. On the debate over identifying Eudoxus as the objective in the *Philebus*, cf. Giannantoni 1958, 146-157, especially 150n.3.

11. He is thought to have come to Athens with his school to discuss common problems with the Academics at the same time as Aristotle, around 367 (cf. Jaeger 1935, 18-19 and n. 1).

12. Reale 1975, III, 90 n. 1.

they most likely had a biunique relationship[13], which can explain the varying of the doxographic tradition[14].

Moreover, he represents the hedonistic position[15] at the Academy, and that Aristotle pays such heed to this is evidence of the weight of Eudoxus' arguments[16]. Hence, the issue ranges far beyond the possible singling out of «Eudoxan»[17] arguments, also because the debate is not with Philebus, but merely arises from *the discussion held with him beforehand*.

To say that the elderly Plato wrote this dialogue *because of, or chiefly against* Eudoxus does appear somewhat unfounded; but to say that it was written unbeknownst of the polemic with Eudoxus, however, amounts to nonsense that is hard to muster. Indeed, if one accepts this identification between Philebus and Eudoxus, the strangeness hanging over this «made-up» character is shed, and it is plain logical that the dialogue should be dedicated to him, even though he does not partake in the debate: we read Philebus, but the title actually reads Eudoxus – that is how it makes sense. Otherwise we would almost be faced with a nonsense. Moreover, since Eudoxus' brand of hedonism was coupled with an upright behavior in life, the «fine distinctions» that we came across in the text seem almost mandatory. Finally, he also raised fundamental metaphysical issues. Aristotle tells us that his concept of Ideas was of the immanent kind: he thought ideas and things blend together just like any two substances. The core of the theory is that of the *mixis*, which had a physicist significance, so much so that Aristotle associates it with the mixture in Anaxagoras[18]. One understands better, then, this inter-

13. So much that Krämer 1982, 165 n. 29, says that «the system of homocentric spheres devised by the astronomer Eudoxus, whom Plato must have stimulated (*Test. Plato. 16*), rests well, with his adaptation of planetary motions to regular circular motions, under the aegis of Plato's philosophy of elements».

14. «All sources agree on this proximity, varying however in claiming Eudoxus to be an *elikiotes* or an *etairos* of Plato's, or, alternatively, his master, and differently ranking his importance in the school itself, to the point of suggesting that Plato entrusted him with its stewardship during the second voyage to Sicily » (Napolitano Valditara 1988, 209; cf. also 275, nn. 131 and 132; cf. also the whole treatise, 209-229).

15. On this theme, cf. Isnardi Parente 1974, III, 2, 1023-1027.

16. Aristotle gives us an account of four theses by Eudoxus (*Eth. Nic.*, X, 2, 1172b9-28): 1. All living beings tend to pleasure, that which is desirable is the Good, that which is most desirable is the Best, that what is desirable by all is the Supreme Good; 2. Argument *e contrario*: pain is avoided as evil, and pleasure, being its opposite, is chosen as good; 3. Most desirable is what one desires for oneself; pleasure is desired for oneself: no-one wonders wherefore pleasure is enjoyed; 4. Every attainable Good is more desirable with pleasure, but the Good may be increased by itself only.

17. For Dies 1941, LVI, only in the first and fourth of the arguments mentioned by Aristotle can one detect some link, albeit very ambiguous, with our dialogue. On the other hand, hedonistic themes are mixed in with them: as recalled by Giannantoni 1958, 152 n. 2, the four arguments that Aristotle attributes to Eudoxus «are easily found in Cyrenaican doxography» (cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, II, 87-88).

18. *Metafisica*, A, 9, 991a14-17; M, 5, 1079b18; cf. Reale, 1975, III, 91; Isnardi Parente 1974, III, 2, 1019-1023.

locutor's game of presence-absence: if Plato had drawn Philebus-Eudoxus into the discussion, he could not have developed only the ethical issues specific to this dialogue, but would have also - if not solely - had to discuss Ideas. That is why it was best «to let sleeping dogs lie».

Sadly, all this adds little in the way of understanding the text: a possible link between Eudoxus and the Pythagoreans[19] would lead us deep into a domestic struggle among Pythagoreans. Besides, in the light of our knowledge, this route appears scarcely viable, especially since nothing in Philebus' words recalls Pythagoreanism, whereas, as we shall see, it is beyond doubt that Socrates' words reveal more than a Pythagorean element.

Timaeus

In some ways the situation of Timaeus is identical: this is an imaginary character, yet is treated with such a wealth of references that he seems to point to an identifiable figure. Worse still, this figure is «created». In fact, while Timaeus is mentioned by tradition, there is no source that does not refer straight to the Platonic dialogue[20]. So powerful was the spell cast by our author that the ancients made this character real, awarding him a life and a piece of writing, a Doric pseudo-Pythagorean text[21] «that, in the opinion of the ancients, constituted the model for Plato's *Timaeus*»[22]. A perfect reversal of the historically reconstructed relationship, indeed.

Let us see what data on this «mask» can be drawn from the text. Timaeus is a native of Locris, a city of Magna Graecia renowned for being a seat of a Pythagorean «sect» and for being ruled by good laws. He is second to none of his fellow citizens for wealth and stock, and has held the highest political offices (20a). These are all details that tend to make a rough description less likely, especially as it is claimed that «he has also attained, in my opinion, the very summit of eminence in all branches of philosophy» (20a4-5). Again, at 27a3-5, it is said that he is «our best astronomer», among those

19. A belief held, for example, by Gosling 1975, 166-167.

20. «This is only known to us from the Platonic dialogue dedicated to him» (Reale, 1994, 33); from the Platonic dialogue «stems all the other subsequent information (Cicero, Proclus, etc.). The booklet attributed to him, *On the Nature of the World and the Soul*, is nothing but a paraphrase of the *Timaeus*; indeed, it is likely thanks to Plato that Timaeus of Locris was included in the list of the Pythagoreans» (Giarratano 1985, 467 n. 15); cf. also Taylor 1968, 676).

21. «A sizeable body of *pseudopythagorica* shows a certain degree of homogeneity, be it linguistic, literary, and philosophical. These writings are written in a probably artificial Doric, bearing the names of the ancient Pythagoreans, more or less famous, or in some cases otherwise unknown» (Centrone, 1996, 153).

22. Cf. Centrone 1982, 293; cf. also 293-294 and n. 2. To Centrone, this text, «though derived from the *Timaeus*, nonetheless represents a sort of commentary to the Platonic dialogue (probably the oldest)» (295).

present and «one who has studied more deeply the nature of *the whole* (περὶ φύσεως τοῦ παντὸς , 27a4)». Thus he is a dialectical philosopher, who has devoted himself to studying the highest spheres of the natural world, i.e. astronomy and cosmology, and he is also a revered statesman. These details would seem rather odd in a wholly made-up character.

Still, we are unable to pinpoint a matching historical figure, even though we might hazard the guess that this mask conceals either Philolaos or Archytas, but cannot provide «strong» arguments in support of either one. Let us only say, then, that in the *Timaeus* we have a mask, which probably hints at a real-life character, but to us represents only the prototype of Pythagorean philosophy, «revised» by Plato of course.

As with Philebus, this is all the more confirmed by the name: «if we consider the name of the character, Timaeus, we can see that the Greek meaning of the matching adjective, τιμαῖος «esteemed, revered, famous, great» and for the famed character from Locris to be given such a name -*nomen est omen*, as the Romans would say- is a bizarre coincidence to say the least, which strengthens the assumption of a made-up character»[23].

2. *A «fallback» interlocutor*

From this standpoint the *Philebus* does not represent a problem, because the change of roles from Philebus to Protarchus is manifest and repeatedly recalled. As we have tried to show above, it also has a «logical» explanation, even though the Platonic narrative drama.

The Timaeus and the *Unnamed*

In the *Timaeus* we find an altogether different question. A first problem that should not be underestimated is posed by the character, which is recalled at the very beginning of the dialogue (17a1-7) as being present the day before but has now «taken leave of absence due to sickness». We stand before a reference that appears unfathomable at first, forcing us to find a reason for a device that cannot be «meaningless» but as to which the text provides no clues.

We can however say that this is an important character –at least for the sake of our grasping what Plato strives to tell us through the narrative drama– for three different reasons:

1. «he is mentioned at the start of the dialogue in a highly visible position to the reader»[24] and in a truly brash manner.

«SOCRATES - One, two, three, but where, my dear Timaeus, is the fourth of our guests of yesterday, our hosts of today?» (17a1-3)

23. Cannarsa 2007, 11.
24. Cannarsa 2007, 12.

2. his absence is without a doubt a lamentable situation:

«TIMAEUS - Some sickness has befallen him, Socrates; for he would never have stayed away from our gathering of his own free will» (17a4-5).

3. Socrates forthwith entrusts Timaeus and the others with the task of «replacing» him.

«SOCRATES - Then the task of filling the place of the absent one falls upon you and our friends here, does it not?» (17a6-7).

So, not only the fourth one's absence is stated immediately, but also the reader is even told that Timaeus *will take his place* in developing the discourse. Taylor's argument whereby, since Timaeus takes his place, he belongs to the same group of «Italic» philosophers[25], appears neither persuasive nor exhaustive. If Timaeus is already a «Pythagorean» mask, what is the point of duplicating this reference? It is far better, then, to assume that Plato himself is the absent one[26], although in this case we would find ourselves in a situation that does not seem to work too well[27] in the narrative drama. Above all, given our limited knowledge that keeps us from grasping any other hints that Plato may have dropped in the text, «any assumption would be destined to remain entirely uncertain and lack any substantiation»[28].

The issue changes quite completely if, rather than wondering «who the Unnamed is», we enquire on the situation brought about by this «odd invention». In other words, the problem ought to be tackled less from the perspective of the «storyline» of the narrative drama, and more from the point of view of the message that Plato strives to convey. The confrontational emphasis given to this absence, in fact, serves the purpose of informing us that -as in the *Philebus*- we are about to read the best and most thorough exposition. Missing is the man who better would have said what Timaeus, standing

25. To then draw the conclusion, referring to the thesis suggested by Burnet, whereby Plato's intention is simply to acknowledge what he owes the 5th Century «Italics» philosophers (Philolaos or even Empedocles) for his dialogue (Taylor 1968, 678-679).

26. Proclus already (*In Platonis Timaeum*, Diehl, p. 7 b) presents the view of Dercyllides, whereby the unknown interlocutor of the *Timaeus* is actually Plato; the hypothesis is not ruled out by *Adorno*, 1952, III, 59) and is submitted again, very cautiously, by Cannarsa 2007, 12-13, on the basis of a brilliant linguistic consideration. To justify his absence in the *Phaedo* (59b10), Plato writes that he was «sick»; similarly in the *Timaeus* Timaeus replies that this unknown character had been stricken by some «sickness» (17*4). This parallel terminology –as Cannarsa notes– already reported by various scholars like Fraccaroli, Rivaud, Taylor and Adorno, should not be underestimated. But since I believe the underlying assumption to be excessive, I merely observe that, when Plato has to justify an absence «for reasons of force majeure», something that «was not meant to happen», he uses health reasons.

27. Socrates, in the presence of Critias and Hermocrates, would await the young Plato for this discussion well before 403 (death of Critias). Now, even though we should not be surprised by any anachronisms in Plato and even though in this case we would have a further parallel with the presence of Eudoxus in the *Philebus*, here the scenic framework would seem to become not only paradoxical, but «pointless».

28. Reale 1994, 277n.2.

in for him, will have to say –equally well nonetheless. Else, one would struggle to make sense of this «unfathomable» announcement, which bears no further weight throughout the whole dialogue. In short, also in this case Plato tells us that he will not deliver the perfect treatise, but one developed - so to speak – by an intermediary, who is a mask, to boot!

At this point, an addition is called for. The Academy notably split early on over a debate regarding the *Timaeus* and the meaning ascribed by Plato to several utterances. This shows how such a dual reference does not alter the fact that, in its allusive and convoluted form, the text voices Plato's philosophy at level that would warrant a big clash over meaning and interpretation. This explains why the text so strongly emphasizes the outstanding qualities of this «substitute»[29].

In conclusion: Despite their obvious differences, the *Philebus* and the *Timaeus* are centered on two masks and two «substitutes». Moreover, *the opening sentence in both* strongly points to the very situation that calls for a replacement.

For sure there is a two-stranded, fundamental difference here: Philebus is an opponent and remains silent, whereas Timaeus is a friend and does the talking. Besides, Philebus is bitterly opposed on both ethical and (if the man behind the mask is Eudoxus) philosophical grounds, and he would have hindered the progress of the analysis. On the contrary, Timaeus (whoever he is in truth) is a friend and therefore can act as an effective substitute.

As for the replacement, Protarchus is a necessary interlocutor so that Socrates, the master, may gain a positive outcome; Timaeus stands in for another friend «absent due to sickness» and plays out the master's role with Socrates acting as an «auditor». To sum things up, the drama is crafted in keeping with a process that develops in the *Philebus* whatever Plato has drawn from his Socratic dealings. In the *Timaeus*, instead, it develops whatever he gleaned from his early and ongoing relations with Pythagoreans[30].

In short, I believe one cannot play down the fact that these are the only two cases, in which Plato resorts to a game of masks, allowing him to say or not to say things, or to say them in a roundabout way without causing offence. At any rate, this situation has nothing to do with other inventions such as the Eleatic Stranger.

29. «In the *Timaeus*, the Southern Italian statesman, who without a doubt represents the "wise man" in the dialogue... speaks to a select audience (to "suitable" people cf. *Phaedrus*, 276 E 6)» (Szlezák 1988, 59n.6).

30. One should never forget the presence of Simmias and Cebes in the entourage of Socrates on the one hand, or the complex relationship with Philolaos (at least insofar as the «writings») and Archytas on the other.

3. *The overture*

Both dialogues feature a very unusual, if not unique, situation[31], in that both can be traced back to a previous debate, which plays a crucial role in the *Philebus* and a very important one in the *Timaeus*, as well.

The *Philebus*

The situation which Plato puts us in at the beginning of the dialogue appears quite remarkable: we stand before what elsewhere would have been regarded as a «turning point» within a lengthy debate. After a seemingly bitter confrontation, Philebus has resolved not to continue discussing with Socrates. There are two alternatives: either call the whole thing off or find someone to bear out the hedonistic theses, now forsaken. Those attending must naturally have found the topic interesting and do not want the debate cast aside, for Socrates is willing to continue. Protarchus is identified as a young man ready to take on the burden of upholding the hedonistic position. At this point the dialogue begins: Socrates' first sentence presents the rundown on the theses bequeathed upon the young man by Philebus. In short, we have a classic element of Platonic dramatics, switching of dialogue partners, though in relation to a discussion not found in the text.

Socrates merely outlines the wording of the two arguments. Hence, if we dwell on the *Philebus*, it is unlikely that the meaning and ramifications of the previous dispute may be pieced together: the issues here remain somewhat «unspoken», which, in actual fact, does not constitute a problem for two reasons. First of all, this topic has already been addressed in many other dialogues; therefore, in confirming the protreptic structure of his writings, the reader will have no trouble reconstructing the details of the «clash»[32]. Secondly, it is precisely this «omission» that breathes life into the «theme» of the dialogue: Plato is set to put forward a kind of «overhaul» of the classic juxtaposition: the possibilities for Socrates are not two but three. He puts forward a hypothesis which seems «hazy indeed»: should another position arise - more persuasive than a unilateral assertion of pleasure or thought - he will accept it (11d-12a). This confirms the desirability of not recasting analytically the details of the terms of comparison: we have reached a turning point because the third option appears immediately successful even though the dialogue will show that this seemingly «middle of the road» proposal actually

31. The other reference may be to the *Statesman*, which is a wholly different case, though, because it rests in perfect and intentional continuity with the *Sophist*.

32. Any direct referral to other works must be consistent with the manner in which the previous discussion is presented here, since this fiction «refers to a dialogue in the rebuttal style of the conversation with Callicles reported in the *Gorgias*» (Gadamer 1983, I, 88n.1).

represents the triumph of thought and knowledge. So, just as the prologue reaches back to an earlier situation and to a prior debate, it also ushers in a new one with the dual purpose of defining a good life filled with pleasure and knowledge, and establishing the superiority of the intellectual dimension.

The *Timaeus* and its connection with the *Republic*

A similar reference, while at the same time very different and far more troublesome, opens the *Timaeus*. Indeed, there is a deep-seated «belief» that the opening «summary» (17b-20c) of the encounter made on the day before is actually a brief summing up of the *Republic*: «by envisaging this dialogue as the continuation of the *Republic*, Socrates recalls what he had said the day before about the ideal City, and above all goes over the fundamental political thesis that he had set forth»[33].

Now, one thing is clear: «the content of this conversation... despite some changes, basically consisted of the idea of the model State developed by Socrates in the *Republic*»[34], i.e. his template of the ideal City. However, one should find out whether a) it is the same model, and b) the *Timaeus* may, in some respect, be regarded as a credible continuation of the dialogue we find in the *Republic*. The answer to both questions is utterly negative; therefore one also needs to identify the (misguided) assumption that leads so many scholars to support this unlikely thesis.

In fact, what steps in here is our «ideological» bond with the written culture that tends to reduce everything to oneness. This leads many worthy and important scholars to go to great lengths to claim that the summary set forth in the *Timaeus* refers to the encounter made and told in the *Republic*, despite obvious differences in terms of a) content, b) characters, c) timeframe. I shall not hark back at the debate and all the imaginative assumptions crafted just to overcome these difficulties. I shall merely point out beforehand that these *never* explain why Plato would have ever created this *monstrum*: there is *not a single line* or *even a slight hint* pointing to *anything that remotely resembles* the *Republic* and its characters, or to any other concrete and identifiable feature. Nothing! If this is meant to be some sort of summary of the encounter described in the *Republic*, we ought to wonder why Plato goes about it thus. This basic question has been overlooked because critics are so used to grappling with the (seemingly) «unexplainable» and (seemingly) «inconsistent» progressions of the Platonic text that they concede almost anything, without raising issues as they would with any other author.

33. Reale 1994, 7; cf. also Calvo & Brisson 1997, 11: «If the *Timaeus* begins with a summary of the constitution (*politeia*) as described in the *Republic*, to then recall ancient Athens victorious war against Atlantis, it is because Plato wants to give a "natural" basis to the constitution described in the *Republic* showing how ancient Athens, closer to that model than today's Athens, allowed the human being to fulfill his objectives better».

34. Erler 1998, 12.

A. The model is different

In the «summary» Socrates recalls that the first thing (πρῶτον, 17c7) to be mooted is the division of the City's citizens into classes, in accordance to the people's different nature, highlighting that the soul of its Guardians must have a very particular nature, at once spirited and philosophic, so special attention to its training is required (18ab). The focus then switches to women, who must be allowed to take part in any task, including war. Finally, communal childrearing is talked about, and presented as a topic easy to recall because of its manifest novelty; marriage unions should be decided by fixed lots, in order to best handle procreation and education (18c-19a).

Now, with respect to the *Republic*, not only a slew of relevant facts (the *Cave* or the «wedding number», or matters pertaining to the soul or to condemning art, etc.) has been left out but, more importantly, the decisive structural figure is missing: the philosopher-king and, hence, all references to the true philosopher's education based on mathematics and dialectics.

Plato knows exactly what he is doing, as shown by the redundant set of confirmations uttered by Timaeus: the speech was just that (17c4-5; 18b8; 18c5; 18d6; 19a3-5). To wrap it all up, at the end Socrates asks outright if anything has been overlooked in this quick summary (19^{a}7-9) and receives a clear answer: «Certainly not οὐδαμῶς, this is precisely what was said, Socrates» (19b1-2).

So, *nothing has been omitted*. One fails to see what more Plato could have written to disclose that –since «nothing is missing»– the object of the discussion the day before was most certainly not the model of the ideal City that we find in the *Republic*.

There is one more important point, «there is something missing from what we do have: the debate. Once again, Timaeus' meaningless responses draw our attention to this, especially what is said at the beginning of the summary (17c4-5): «And they were also stated, Socrates, just as we all expected». This is odd, if we think of the debate that is roused between Glaucon and Socrates over the latter's revolutionary proposals - ranging from the role of the State's Guardians and of women to the idea of «selective» procreation –as it were– and the listeners' opposition to them; this difficulty was bypassed with the example of selecting hunting dog breeds, and resulted in the famous «two waves». In the *Timaeus*, instead, Socrates simply says that it is "easy to recall due to the novelty of the things that were said"»[35]. In actual fact, this summary does seem to trivialize what had been set forth in the *Republic* as a series of dreadful «waves» ignoring the last and biggest one.

35. Cannarsa 2007, 16-17.

B. The dates do not match and the characters are utterly different

There are many aspects here that stand out:

1. The feast mentioned in the *Republic* is Bendidia, while the one in the *Timaeus* is the Panathenaea; now, the former falls on the 19th or 20th of the month of Thargelion (May), while the Panathenaia is on 28th Hecatombaion (end June-early July)[36].

2. The text emphasizes the type of meeting that took place the day before. Socrates asked four men to attend a «banquet of speeches» and they feel somewhat obliged to do the same now (17a); in fact it was they (not Polemarchus, Glaucon or Adeimantus) who asked him to develop these issues (20 B, confirmed in 26a) and Socrates agreed, in the belief that no-one better than these men could further the conversation, as now we'll try to do. He gave them this task, which they accepted and talked about this both in his presence and even later, as Hermocrates records (20 BC). So we are not faced with a reading or a story[37], but with a debate that has involved these interlocutors and not others.

Unless we wish to utter a series of inexplicable oddities, these facts should demonstrate that we have no elements to join the discussion in the *Republic* to the one occurring «the day before» in the *Timaeus*. Nothing at all, but for a few aspects relating to the setup of the ideal State. But how must we think that, amid the scenic make-believe, Plato might not be claiming that Socrates had spoken again and again, in different contexts, of his concept of the ideal State? If we say this, we recognize immediately that the model State outlined «the day before» does not coincide at all with that of the *Republic*. This is no «oversight» -and neither can it be one since Plato tells us outright that nothing was omitted.

The conclusion seems obvious and the traditional approach does not reach it because it is hampered by two preconceptions that actually run against what Plato is expressly advocating.

The first preconception is that the Platonic model has an absolute value, in the sense that it is a real utopia, and not simply a regulatory framework.

36. Cf. Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum*, 9b26-27. To get out of this situation, Proclus suggested that the speech of *Timaeus* took place on the first day of the *Lesser Panathenaia*, i.e. on 20th Thargelion, but this does not seem "true", because both *Lesser and Great Panathenaia* were held on 28th Hecatombaion, the only difference being the frequency: the Great every *four years*, the Lesser *annually*. Cannarsa, 2007, 36n.88, concludes: «So Proclus has manipulated the calendar (as, incidentally, Porphyrius did, too)».

37. Taylor 1928, 9, has developed a complicated solution, starting from the fact that the *Republic* is a *dialogue recounted* the day after the debate (the *Republic*, I, 327 A). Then the meeting mentioned in the *Republic* would have been held on the festive day of Bendis, the day after Socrates had told the story to Timaeus, Critias, Hermocrates and the unknown fourth man, and the day after the meeting in the *Timaeus*. Aside from the difference in the pattern, though, Plato had no reason to contrive all this without any plausible excuse and especially without somehow making it known.

But the *Statesman*, which indeed speaks of the absolute value of the scientific approach, makes it quite clear that this model *ought never be applied, but only imitated*. Indeed, Plato reiterates the divine nature of the paradigm and separates it completely from the six human constitutions, which in fact should be considered

«with the exception of the seventh, for that must be set apart from all the others, as God is set apart from men» (*Statesman*, 303b3-5)[38].

The second preconception –a clear by-product of the first– is that Plato already had *an* ideal model, *one and one alone*, so if he presents it again, he clearly has to trace it back to what is *written* in the *Republic*. Now, this is expressly negated in the *Laws*, which state the existence of several models. Let us keep to the more obvious references[39]:

«Nonetheless, it will be clear to him who reasons it out and uses experience that a State will probably have a constitution no higher than «second» in point of excellence. Probably one might refuse to accept this, owing to unfamiliarity with lawgivers who are not also despots: but it is, in fact, the most correct plan to describe the best polity (τὴν ἀρίστην πολιτείαν), and the second best, and the third, and after describing them to give the choice to the individual who is charged with the founding of the settlement» (*Laws* V 739a3-b1).

«Wherefore one should not look elsewhere for a model constitution (παράδειγμα γε πολιτείας), but hold fast to this one, and with all one's power seek the constitution that is as like to it as possible (μάλιστα τοιαύτην ζητεῖν κατὰ δύναμιν). That constitution which we are now engaged upon, if it came into being, would be very near to immortality (ἀθανασίας ἐγγύτατα), and would come second in point of merit. The third we shall investigate hereafter (μετὰ ταῦτα), if God so will; for the present, however, what is this second best polity, and how would it come to be of such a character?» (*Laws* V 739e1-7).

But if there is more than just one model, it follows that Socrates may have suggested to others a reflection on the ideal State like, but not identical, the one discussed in the *Republic*. Also, if one accepts this variety of models and compounds it to Plato's exposition techniques, one grasps «the positive sense of an absurdity». While in the *Republic* Socrates stands before characters with lowly philosophical qualities, the discussion that took place the day before, according to the *Timaeus*, featured at least two outstanding theoretical speakers, the Unnamed and Timaeus. *Hence the reason why we are dealing with an absurdity*: despite such a high-profile context, there is no mention of the philosophically thorniest issue, the role of philosophers and everything that goes with it. Yet, the topic was dealt with in far humbler discussion in the *Republic*. However, if the real dialogue is

38. Cf. also 293e, 302c, 302e.

39. Cf. what we have said on the matter in Migliori 2003b, 30-36.

the one that the author, protreptically, engages in with his readership, then the matter changes entirely: there is no reason to put forward the same model twice, all the more so since we are speaking of a work that is certainly not «political».

In short, there was no reason for the *Timaeus* to tie in with the *Republic*, and yet again, as in the *Philebus*, one refers to a discussion held beforehand. The difference in this case is equally clear: the comparison with the *Philebus* deals with the issue of the truly good life, while the one in the *Timaeus* recalls the centrality of the anthropological dimension, whose importance is stressed in the dialogue.

4. *The closing*

The formula used to bring both dialogues to an end is extreme indeed: a narrative break, a choice too remarkable to be, once again, a mere coincidence.

The *Philebus*

The end of the dialogue (66c-67b) is doubly disconcerting. First of all, having made the third offer, to Zeus the Savior[40], the sense of the confrontation is brought up again, so much so that a somewhat bemused Protarchus notes that, by saying «the third time», Socrates meant they should take up again the argument from the beginning. But Socrates is unfazed, and continues his summary, wherein he recalls all the formal traits of the Good that led to the initial choice in favor of a lifetime of knowledge and pleasure. Such traits were then classified as «small points» (μίκρ' ἄττα, 20c8), while in reality expressing the condition of the Good (τὴν τἀγαθοῦ μοῖραν, 20d1), i.e. the formal conditions for its presence: that the thing be perfect (τέλεον, 20 D 1; τελεώτατον, 20d3), sufficient (ἱκανὸν, 20d4) and desirable. The final summary contains references to the methodical principles of self-sufficiency and perfection (ἱκανὸν, 67a3; τοῦ ἱκανοῦ καὶ τελέου, 67a7-8) that shaped the initial choice. So the Good is not presented in the form hinted at immediately above, which had taken us «into the very *home* of the Good». Instead, it is only portrayed in those "merely" formal features, which all had agreed on *right away, at the start of the treatise*. Can a philosophically watchful reader fail to notice that Plato had taken a «backward step»? We should say

40. As Diès 1941, 93n.1 recalls, three offers were made at banquets: one in the honor of Olympian Zeus and the other Olympian gods, the second in honor of heroes, the third in honor of Zeus the Savior (cf. *Carmide* 167a, *Republic* 583b).

no, also because the subject has been expressly brought up twice before (66d; 67a).

The speech continues with an outright condemnation of pleasure and of all those who give more credit to animal urges than to thoughts befitting humans. Socrates then says that the search is over and asks to be let go, to which Protarchus replies:

«There is still a little left (σμικρὸν ἔτι τὸ λοιπόν), Socrates. I am sure you will not give up before we do, and I will remind you of what remains» (67b11-13).

Here ends the dialogue clearly and bluntly cut off following an utterance that, at this point, becomes "extremely meaningful", as it gives rise to a paradoxical situation: in the narrative fiction Protarchus *rightly* says *Socrates cannot* go before completing the speech with the «small thing» that is missing, but *Plato actually does* it! The author states that something is lacking, but seems so set on not writing what it is that he drops the pen, as it were. This proves how it is not just one of the many overlooked topics, because a scene left hanging is indeed an «extreme» device in dramatics. In contemporary theatrical language such a choice is akin to the sort of *audience provocation* caused by the curtain dropping in the middle of the scene. But it is also as much in Platonic dramatics: here we find an extreme version of that technique of postponement, which is one of the classic moments in the dialogues when key issues arise, such as the Good.

In actual fact, this is what it boils down to. The discussion is not over, because the reader can only have "guessed" or "inferred" what the Good is, and «suspected» the complex relationship between the Good and its manifestations, or between Good and *Nous*. Yet, all this has not been clarified. The Good must now become the subject of discussion, since we have been led right up the hallway of its home, and since Socrates has never expressly refused to discuss this topic. Now it should be easy, given that we have clarified its manifestations. But Plato well and truly stifles «his song» –thereby making his silence more conspicuous.

Any other hypothesis leaves this blunt conclusion both *unexplained and inexplicable*. To think that a great author like Plato resorted to a technique of this kind so as not to talk about the many truly small things that he had to skip in the previous exposition is indeed an insult to his intelligence and a hermeneutical error. The fact is that Plato said in the *Philebus* all that he felt inclined to write on his doctrine of Principles, so his games become more intricate and intense. He *dramatically announces*, *out of no intrinsic need stemming from the narrative drama,* that he will never write these «small things», unlike those other «small things» which were the formal, lesser definitions of Good. And this is the treatment Plato reserves for the most important issues, such as the Good.

The *Timaeus*

The statement is less straightforward in the case of the *Timaeus*, for one is referred to the bizarre «Appendix», the *Critias*. We clearly cannot address the complexity of the problems this strange Appendix raises; we shall merely suggest two specific considerations that will allow us to uphold the parallel with the *Philebus*: the «unlikelihood» of some of the characters and the sense of breaking the *Critias*.

«Unlikely« characters.

Let us obviously set Timaeus and the Unnamed aside, and start from Hermocrates, a man we could *certainly regard as disliked* by Plato. He was a general from Syracuse, allied with Sparta in the struggle against Athens, which he defeated during the Peloponnesian War. He was also an unscrupulous politician who, banished from the city, died in a bid to seize it by force in 408/407[41]. Plato must have also deemed particularly relevant the man's relationship with Dionysius the Elder, who succeeded him in Syracuse. Some sources say that the tyrant had been a follower of his, and the bond was so strong that Diogenes Laertius III.18, even introduces him as his son. We can safely say that his presence is somewhat disturbing.

As for Critias, I fail to see how a debate could have sparked over this character's identification, stating that it was certainly not, unlike all scholars prior to Burnet thought, the same Critias known as the «oligarch», but the tyrant's grandfather instead[42]. Now, we have no precise details as to dates, but if we think about the three characters, we do get the clear impression that they are the same age. Socrates was born in 470/469 and addresses the other two «historical» figures with some condescension, as if they were a little younger than him. In fact, Critias was born around 460 and Hermocrates is perhaps a little younger still, albeit slightly (he was indeed respected in 424, when he rallied the Sicilian cities against Athens). Instead, if we place the Critias, grandfather of the tyrant, on the scene, we should imagine a truly elderly Athenian, Socrates' elder by *at least* 40/50 years. Whatever the age we give Socrates, it just does not add up[43]. Therefore, we accept to identify Critias with the famous politician, Plato's kinsman, one of the Thirty Tyrants who died fighting the democratic Thrasybulus in 403BC. He was also a famous sophist, speaker, and author of tragedies and works in poetry and prose[44]. An acquaintance of

41. Cf. Thucydides, *History*, IV, 58 ss.; VI 32 ss., 72 s., 75 s., 96 ss.; VIII, 39-45; Xenophon, *Hellenica*, I, 1, 16 ss.

42. Taylor, 1969, 676-677.

43. Unlike Brisson, I cannot even find reasons to entertain a «deliberate ambiguity» according to which Plato would have deliberately «forced» the family tree –on the one side– to be linked to the distinguished forbear, Solon, and - on the other - to give the story that topicality that only Critias the tyrant could have given it (Brisson 1992, 327-335).

44. Many fragments of writings by Critias, both poetry and prose, have survived to the present day; cf. Diels-Kranz, 88.

Socrates in his youth[45], he later became his enemy for personal reasons[46], as well as for Socrates' refusal to carry out an unfair order bidding him to arrest Leon the Salaminian (*Apology*, 32cd).

That Plato relies on such a character to recount the old tale (dating back to Solon, who had passed it on from the wisdom of the Egyptians) of Athens' glorious past as a perfect and orderly State, is certainly problematic and has spawned several hypotheses, which do not seem to gain footholds in this text[47]. However, we must consider that the *Timaeus* sets out to conduct a thorough examination to bind up the metaphysical-cosmological framework with the anthropological dimension. The first theme is treated in a highly interesting manner by Timaeus, but the same cannot be said for the anthropological dimension. This is instantly presented with the theme of the ideal State, but is forestalled by Critias, whom Plato allows to take up the story-telling. But the account of the story rendered by Critias the oligarch is actually played out by the grandfather of the future «tyrant» (21c-25d), and everything takes place in a very positive atmosphere. This is in stark contrast with the fate of his grandchild, when he holds his speech.

But let us first look at any other signs we can glean from the text. After his «summary» Socrates asks for someone to show him "by way of reasoning" (λόγῳ, 19c3), how the State conducts itself, something which he is unable to do (19ce). Since the same inability befalls poets and sophists as well, one must seek a man who is at one Statesman and philosopher, as are Timaeus, Critias, and Hermocrates. Now, no one may cast doubts over the standing of the characters present, but surely they do not all fit the bill in the same way. This was noted with some irony[48], while it should be taken seriously. «If we look carefully at the passage in which Socrates «introduces» the three interlocutors (20a1-5), we see a downward climax in which: 1. Timaeus is said to be second to none, either in wealth or rank a) as a Statesman, for the honors and offices held, and b) as a philosopher, having reached, in the opinion of Socrates, «the very summit of eminence in all branches of philosophy»; 2. Critias is said to be «no novice in any of these subjects», as all those present know; 3. Hermocrates is said to possess such nature and education that is «suitable» to the task, as testified by many

45. Appearing in the *Carmides* (153 C, 169 B) and *Protagoras* (316 A); cf. also Xenophon, *Memorabilia,* I, 2, 12-16; 24.

46. Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, I, 2, 29-31, tells that Socrates heavy-handedly mocks Critias' attraction to handsome Euthydemus, and that is when Critias began to hate the philosopher.

47. Adorno, for example, assumes that Critias is the prototype of the aristocrat spoilt «by the environment and by the decadent class he belonged to», while «had he been well educated, Platonically speaking, he would have been a perfect politician, because he also had a philosophical nature, as well as having blood ties to the great tradition of Solon of Athens» (Adorno 1952, III, 725n.4.). But nothing in the *Timaeus* evokes this situation, indeed Socrates states (yet all those who know the history of Athens know that it is not true) that they are able to sing this praise by nature and nurture (twice repeated, 19e-20a; 20b).

(πολλῶν), witnesses, thus suggesting that Socrates does not speak out of firsthand knowledge. In this light, we might say that the three are not on the same level, quite the opposite: only Timaeus seems capable of fully meeting the requirements set out by Socrates, while as for the other two – whether out of firsthand or secondhand knowledge (Critias and Hermocrates, respectively) – Socrates seems to harbor more expectations than certainties»[49].

But then, what is the role of Critias?

The *Critias*: a text brutally cut short

Let us start from here: the closing sentence of this dialogue is left hanging:

«And Zeus, the God of gods, who reigns by Law, inasmuch as he has the gift of perceiving such things, marked how this righteous race was in evil plight, and desired to inflict punishment upon them, to the end that when chastised they might strike a truer note. Wherefore he assembled together all the gods into that abode which they honor most, standing as it does at the center of all the Universe, and beholding all things that partake of generation and when he had assembled them, he spoke thus…» (121b7-c5).

This kind of occurrence is "normally" explained by the author's sudden death, still «clutching the pen». But that is certainly not the case here. Any other assumption seems wanting in reason. One cannot shelve the matter, as ancient and modern scholars alike have done, by putting it down to Plato's elderly age[50], almost forgetting that he has yet to write the *Laws*, or by mooting a posthumous edition[51], of which there is no trace in tradition. Above all, though, these explanations seem loath to acknowledge that, far from an incomplete work, we are faced with a real challenge, a provocation perhaps more extreme than the one in the *Philebus*: even an unfinished work can have a sentence completed, as its author's successors, students, or publisher make additions to the broken sentence or do away with it entirely. How can it be that someone has rearranged the *Epinomis*, perhaps revised the *Laws*, and no-one has lifted a finger for poor *Critias*? Clearly the Academy was sent a very strong signal that this discourse had to be left incomplete.

In accepting this text [52], we must acknowledge that we stand before an extreme dramatic sign. Perhaps we can grasp it, if we recall whom Critias gives voice to. I do not know what Zeus[53] might have told other gods about

48. Welliver 1977, 11n. 8.

49. Cannarsa 2007, 17-18.

50. Cf. Plutarch, *Life of Solon*, 32; Wilamowitz 1919, 529.

51. Alline 1915, 34; Welliver 1977, 3 and n. 6 and n. 8.

52. Brisson 1992, 392, n. 196, wonders whether the manuscripts may have been damaged.

53. *Contra* Taylor 1968, 714, supposes that, if the work had been completed, one of main points would have been the triumph of patriotism and moral righteousness over technical ability.

the chastisement he had in mind for men to make them better, but I am sure that Critias the «tyrant» was among those worst-equipped to relate it. The mooted proposal would be harsh, but tempered by the wisdom and equity of Zeus: something quite unrelated to the Thirty Tyrants. At least that is the view in the *Seventh Letter*, where Plato speaks of his outrage towards that government, whom he had at first deemed capable of stewarding Athens from lawlessness to equity (ἔκ τινος ἀδίκου βίου ἐπὶ δίκαιον τρόπον, 324d4-5).

Hence, I do not think it is fair to consider the *Critias* as abridged in the normal sense of the term, just because it ends abruptly, and before «getting into the heart of the matter»[54]. It is an extreme form of postponement to make us think that here Zeus should have laid not trivial things on the line but core principles like the Good. In this case there is no referencing: Critias is not allowed to say any further! In fact, none worse than the future tyrant could have continued to speak for the father of the gods.

At this point, however, we should briefly mull over the nature of the dialogue and then over its «role». The *Critias*, which certainly has an ethical-political flavor[55], has suffered greatly from the widespread belief that it was no more than a "non dialogue" lacking relevance[56] or a pointless mythical digression[57]. Yet one cannot underestimate that the treatise begins with a request from Socrates and the grand speech of Timaeus is slipped into an ethical-political «frame» and is sandwiched between the two tales of Critias.

On the other hand, this text cannot be underestimated because «as an appendix it seems somewhat awkwardly unrelated to (the speech delivered by) Timaeus. Moreover, this awkwardness seems to have reverberated throughout the so-called literary frame of the dialogue, ultimately considered a mere prelude to the *Critias* completely set apart from the cosmological discourse»[58]. So the *Critias* is an odd appendix that may only be joined to Critias' opening speech in the prologue. This leads to a *de facto* denial of the unity of the dialogue[59].

But here lies another problem: as with the bond between the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, we are looking at two texts placed in perfect sequence that

54. As noted by Rivaud 1925, 233.

55. Diogenes Laertius: when citing the catalog of Thrasyllus (III 60), ranks it under the «ethical» heading, but, when defining its feature, reckons it as «political».

56. Taylor 1968, 713.

57. When not the outcome of a «wretched story» for this band of works. On this ground, as recalled by Cannarsa 2007, 25 n.15, we reach «a veritable dismembering» by Rosenmeyer 1956, according to whom Plato would have written 1) before the whole story of Atlantis as a monologue of Critias or «*Ur-Critias*» (from the *Timaeus* 20d to 26e, plus *Critias* 109 and following), 2) then an «*Ur-Timaeus*» as theogony devoid of references to mankind (from the *Timaeus* 27c to 69b), 3) and once again to a «dialogue of transition» in line with the *Critias* 106a-108d, and so on up to eight passages overall!

58. Cannarsa 2007, 5.

59. This is for example the opinion of Taylor 1968, 681, and Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1919, 599 and 626.

are as much a single dialogue as two distinct ones. So we must ask ourselves why Plato insisted on both unity and separation[60].

If we start off from the rift, the fact that must get us thinking is that, having stated the issue Timaeus must develop, Critias then proposes himself

«After him I am to follow, taking over from him mankind, already as it were created by his speech, and a select number of men superlatively well trained. Then, in accordance with the word and law of Solon, I am to bring these before ourselves, as before a court of judges, and make them citizens of this State of ours, regarding them as Athenians of that bygone age whose existence, so long forgotten, has been revealed to us by the record of the sacred writings: and thenceforward I am to proceed with my discourse as if I were speaking of men who already are citizens and men of Athens» (27a7-b6).

The myth of Atlantis thus reveals its purpose: to do what Socrates had said at the beginning of the dialogue, join up the two speeches – the onto-cosmological one and the ethical-political one[61]. Now, two aspects take shape. First, a «mythical» connection would have a purely indicative, suggestive character, akin to how the prosopopoeia of the laws in the *Crito* mythically hints at the far more demanding speeches of the *Statesman* and the *Laws*. Secondly, given the initial presentation, it is beyond doubt that Timaeus, a fine politician, is much more suited than Critias to develop this theme, however, he cannot offer a story dating back to Solon and pertaining to Athens. Only Critias can do it, but he will be barred for not being worthy enough. Yet Plato wanted to tell us that, even though it is postponed here, this discourse should have been developed.

Ultimately, I think it is more interesting to enquire about the type of connection that Plato established between such different issues and the reasons for this connection, a theme that is so important and so overtly «hinted at» in this work, only to be then «broken».

60. Otherwise, we should think along with Welliver about the same silly Platonic who, because of the great difference in value, struck off the final part of the *Timaeus*, and incomplete to boot! (Welliver 1977, 58-60: *Appendix B: Did Plato write the Critias as a separate work?*); this assumption is deemed likely by Adrados 1997, 38.

61. For this reason too, I cannot be intrigued by the question of historical truth or otherwise of this story. To investigate the issue I shall refer to the introduction of the *Critias* by Brisson, 1992, 313-325, who submits three theories: 1) it is fiction, paradoxically, a scarcely followed argument (Brisson himself feels it is too radical and not very defensible, since Plato repeats that it is a «true story»), but supported by Aristotle who, according to Strabo, (II, 3, 6 and XIII 1, 36) would have said that «the man who invented Atlantis is the same one who made it disappear»; 2) it is a historical *document*, this theory, originally championed by Crantor (Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum*, I, 76, 1-2, Diehl), academic and first commentator of the Timaeus, asserts that the lost continent really existed (Brisson naturally rejects the historical fiction hypotheses and recalls the argument linking this tale to the end of Minoan civilization and to the volcanic blast that destroyed Thera fifteen centuries before Christ); 3) it is a «myth», a «political allegory» presented with the language of historians, this being a widely popular belief.

This leads us to dwell upon continuity. The sequence that ensures the unity of the dialogue is both required and reasserted. Plato stresses that the two discourses must proceed together. The issue was already clear in the wording of the theme proposed to the sole Timaeus:

«Seeing that Timaeus is our best astronomer (ἀστρονομικώτατον) and has made it his special task to learn about the nature of the Universe (περὶ φύσεως τοῦ παντὸς), it seemed good to us that he should speak first, beginning with the generation of the Cosmos (ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου γενέσεως) and ending with the nature of man (εἰς ἀνθρώπων φύσιν)» (27a3-6).

Noteworthy is the complexity of nuances, played along two tracks, one being the knowledge of Timaeus and the other being the speech that he must deliver. As for the first issue, the knowledge is all centered upon the cosmic dimension, astronomy and nature of the universe, while the discourse will actually cover the *generation* of the cosmos and the *nature* of man. This is exactly what we will find: not the nature of the universe, but its origin from two different points of view, one being that of the Divine Cause and the other that of the Material Principle (i.e. the Necessary Cause). Utterly lacking, therefore, is a discussion starting from the formal cause, which is constantly cited, however. Predictably, the Nature of man follows. So the anthropological dimension is already present from the speech of Timaeus. Then, as we have already seen, Critias suggests completing the discourse himself, talking about the Athenians of yesteryear (26 A-B). A discourse that needed doing, but here it is blocked. It is no coincidence that the anthropological dimension is central to the musings in the *Philebus*, which hints in powerful excerpts at the higher dimensions of Principles.

Finally, let us reflect very briefly on a hypothetical latter intervention by Hermocrates. While it may be difficult to explain why Plato involves Critias to then take back the floor, it seems highly unlikely that he would have such a shady character play a positive role. Better make him stay outright silent!

In conclusion: in any case, one fact remains unambiguous: despite their obvious, deep-rooted differences, both dialogues are, most uniquely, open «both ways»: they begin referring to a discussion held beforehand, relevant to the development of the theme, then come to a close with an abrupt break that underlines the strength of what is left unsaid. Can this be regarded as a coincidence? Or would it not be more logical to see it as a sign of a link that, connected to others, would then have to be substantiated in terms of philosophical content?

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