

Richard D. Mohr and Barbara Sattler, eds.
One Book, The Whole Universe: Plato's Timaeus Today.
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One Book is a collection of papers stemming from a conference titled 'Life, the Universe, Everything—and More: Plato's *Timaeus* Today'. The result is a wide-ranging compendium bringing together a diversity of perspectives from physicists, philosophers, classicists, architects, and a film critic. Both through close readings of the text and creative speculation stimulated by this rich dialogue, *One Book* provides some excellent scholarship for those interested in the *Timaeus*. Topics range from the function of the receptacle (including a critique of Derrida's 'Chora'), divine craftsmanship, epistemology, what is meant by Plato's claim that the account is a '*mythos eikos*', as well as some 'postmodern' perspectives on physics, narrative, and architectural aesthetics. All of this is prompted by this ancient dialogue, and all of it falls under the tent of 'Plato's *Timaeus* Today'. Due to limited space only a few striking examples will be discussed here.

One reason why the *Timaeus* is such compelling reading is that its subject, the physical world, poses the greatest challenge to Platonic idealism. If reason, exemplified by formal and mathematical ideas, provides stability in the universe, then the physical world—changeable, perishable and replete with motion and time—is its greatest threat. The 'receptacle' in particular has provoked commentary from Aristotle through to the Neoplatonists. How forms can come to be in material space is taken up by Verity Harte, Ian Mueller, Donald Zeyl and Stephen Menn, among others. Harte poses the following, vital question: how, before the agency of the cosmic demiurge, can the receptacle somehow display traces of geometrical formal structure and yet be a featureless medium? She concludes that perceptibility, corporeality, and geometrical form are all linked in such a way as to explain both the pre-cosmic receptacle and the demiurgic imposition of geometrical form. Zeyl uses visualizing as a means of understanding how the receptacle qua space is also a material 'stuff'. He describes how a spatial matrix for becoming can also be a matter-filled field within which spatio-temporal particulars can subsist and move. Another way to examine this mysterious precondition of ordered creation in the cosmos is to link the description in the *Timaeus* to pre-Socratic physics. Menn relies on Cherniss' claim that pre-Socratic philosophy anticipates the natural philosophy of the *Timaeus*, which contains both a critique and a summa of pre-Socratic argument. Menn explains that Empedocles' 'oppositional account' involving Strife and Love trumps the more commonly accepted view that Plato's most pertinent predecessor is Anaxagoras. Menn demonstrates this by comparing Anaxagoras' Nous and its stable vortex to Plato's vertices as contrary causal motions.

Ian Mueller takes the reader through the intricacies of Neoplatonic interpretations

of the receptacle and its geometrical character. He compares Simplicius, Philoponus, and Proclus on the subject of Plato's geometrized chemistry. Philoponus, for example, makes first matter three-dimensional, while Proclus leaves room for a discordant and unordered matter. Zina Giannopoulou's piece critiquing Derrida's reading of 'chora' as somehow not cogent and therefore incommensurable with Plato's meaning is, perhaps, a more dubious endeavor. Any attempt to match up Derrida's metonymous play with terminology such as 'chora' and its very specific contextualization with the text of *Timaeus* presumes that there is a real way to make Derrida's post-modern semiotic project commensurable with Plato's cosmological account. They are worlds apart.

In an effort to situate the *Timaeus* as a project of natural philosophy within the Platonic corpus, Charles Kahn traces the trajectory from the *Phaedrus* to *Laws*, showing how the metaphysical epistemology of the earlier *Phaedo* and *Republic*, after the *Phaedrus*, augments the being/becoming distinction with the self-motion of Soul. The *Philebus* and the *Timaeus* prepare the grounds for *Laws* X through the limited/unlimited dichotomy, the world soul, and a teleological interpretation of nature. Soul, as the source of motion, provides an ontological principle that can mediate the opposition between the stability of dialectic and the changeability of nature. Barbara Sattler takes on the issue of how the model to which the Demiurge looks for guidance, which is rational and reliant on forms and mathematics, can be reconciled with the reality of process in the created world. She questions how time plays into this bifurcation. An important and correct analogy is made between 1) the connections enjoyed by the natural world with reason because of the numerical ordered motions of the heavens, and 2) the random motions and changes in the receptacle. Time serves as an intermediary for both reason and number, since the ratiocinated revolutions of the heavenly bodies, which are instruments of time, bring number to the world at large. Analogously, temporality in human processes can be based on this model for stability as well. The historical records of Egypt entailing a rational account of genealogy and temporal periods (before and after), ratiocinate human events in a regulated manner, just as law brings about stability for the polis.

A. A. Long's intriguing piece links up the Greek concept of a supreme cosmic divinity with the Greek notion of rationality. The demiurge as world-crafting deity synchronizes astronomical regularities with ideas and ideals of human rationality and a good society; cosmic teleology, meanwhile, explains how within an ensouled and intelligent creation cosmology, ethics, and politics can be related. Allan Silverman examines the notion that *Timaeus* has no relevance to practical philosophy. Against David Sedley's view he suggests that the cosmic world soul, the demiurge, and Nous all mirror the divided line of the *Republic*, where the Good rules all forms of knowledge. Intellectual and practical reason thus have a single common source. The textual support in the *Timaeus* for this reading may be thin, but it is enhanced by the intertextual reading derived from the *Republic* to the effect that knowing and doing Good is intrinsic to Plato's intentions.

The book contains several scholarly discussions that address issues which may elude the general reader perhaps unfamiliar with the pre-existing literature on Plato. Scholars have long contemplated what Plato meant by calling his account of nature an *eikos mythos* or *eikos logos*. Playing off Burnyeat's classical piece suggesting that *eikos*, instead of meaning 'probable' or 'likely', means 'appropriate' or 'reasonable', Mourelatos defends the traditional reading with a caveat. He provides a precise and philological examination of Plato's rhetoric and syntax, ultimately suggesting that the passages concerning *eikos logos* can be read as open to the possibility of multiple scientific explanatory paradigms. Construed as 'no better than other possible accounts', Plato's *eikos logos* leaves the door open to future research. This piece is a gem of its kind, but it might be difficult to follow for the non-classical scholar.

Many of the papers in this book address themselves to contemporary concerns of literary criticism, architecture, film or modern physics and cosmology. While finding analogies to current disciplines holds its own interest, it is a project that depends upon taking a wide departure from the *Timaeus* text as 'proof text'. Once the reader has accepted the trade-off between evocative speculation and textual integrity, however, there are many riches to harvest in these essays. Ann Bergren's article, for example, is well wrought and evocative. She makes an analogy between a contemporary model of architectural beauty, that of 'animate form', and the precosmic preformal *chora* of the *Timaeus* as it is crafted by the divine artisan. This 'craftsman' gives a schema or a pattern via formal paradigms that render the *chora* into a cosmic designed state. The combination contributes incalculability (*alogos*) to a copy of an eternal model. The result is that what is incalculable is given play within form and symmetry, stability is not static, and anomaly allows for biomorphological expression of beauty, much in the same vein as current architectural approaches such as Greg Lynn 1990's 'animate form' in architecture. Bergren makes a further analogy with calculus-based animation software that can calculate, measure, and construct continuously irregular curved surfaces, a 'continual architectural anomaly'.

Sean Carroll, a physicist, suggests that the questions the *Timaeus* raises regarding the physical world are of abiding interest. Did the universe have a beginning or is it eternal? Was the universe created by an external agent, or is it self-sufficient? He brings the reader up to speed on the current state of Big Bang theory, entropy, acceleration of the universe expansion, Boltzmann's second law of thermodynamics, etc., as examples of contemporary answers to these eternal questions. While specific links to the *Timaeus* text are not obvious, the fact that modern physics still essentially leaves these questions unanswered suggests that the *Timaeus* has opened up a perennial and paradigmatic quest.

Kathryn Morgan's article on narrative order in the *Timaeus* and *Critias* seems to be heavily influenced by modern literary criticism. Morgan draws an analogy between the cosmological account of *Timaeus* and diachronic narrative (both temporal and atemporal models) suggesting a non-identical but potentially fruitful analogy between such narrative

types and the *Timaeus*' account of a created and uncreated universe. The allegorical and symbolic implications of the Atlantis narrative in fact inspired interpretations from a series of Platonic commentators in late antiquity. Regarding the entire *Timaeus* as a narrative in the postmodern sense of 'narrative literature', however, is a bit of a stretch, even granting the possible analogy between orderly and circular motion in the circles of the world soul and a similarly modeled narrative. '*Timaeus* in Tinseltown: Atlantis in Film', by Jan Solomon, is a refreshing treatment of Atlantis, if not of the *Timaeus*. Solomon gives, without any pretence of interpreting the dialogue, a detailed history of the uses of this allegory. Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, its history with Blavatsky and followers among the 19th-century theosophists, Jules Verne, and filmmaking (in the 1930's and '40s, '60s and '70s, from Germany to the Philippines) are all described in detail and accompanied by vivid pictures. Since Atlantis has also been used to evoke imagery of all sorts including futuristic societies, Solomon admits these treatments might shock Plato.

There are two extremes in this book: on the one hand, detailed scholarly analysis of philosophical and historical issues relevant to the text, and on the other hand loosely inspired interdisciplinary speculation on the part of scholars from fields other than philosophy and classics. This very diversity is a living demonstration that the *Timaeus* can be mined for any and every kind of precious substance. The collection, however, is so eclectic a 'receptacle' that it could be two books instead of 'One Book': a volume of modern interpretations, and a volume of scholarly textual exegesis and interpretation. Included in the former would be those that are more imaginative and fanciful and that eschew adherence to the text. The latter would include those articles that have a more academic tone, for it is clear they are addressing internecine issues of *Timaeus* scholarship. Still, for the reader wishing a stimulating and evocative sample of current perspectives on a dialogue that has fascinated scholars through the centuries, *One Book* certainly holds interest.

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