

THE SUI GENERIS PROBLEM IN PLATO'S TIMAEUS

A Thesis submitted to the faculty of
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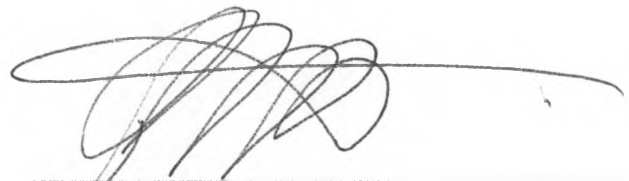
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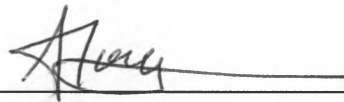
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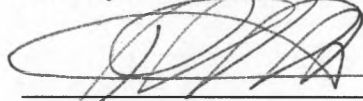
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THE SUI GENERIS PROBLEM IN PLATO'S TIMAEUS

Michael Jose Lucana
San Francisco, California
2015

In the *Timaeus*, Plato tells the story of a divine craftsman who, using the world of intelligibles as a model, produces a living and orderly universe from the pre-existing physical elements. The Demiurge in the cosmological narrative has at various times been identified by interpreters of Plato with the model, the product, or even simultaneously both. I intend to argue that there is a strong basis for Plato's cosmology to be structurally triadic, that is, between a distinct model, cause, and product. As such, the Demiurge, identified with the cause, can be interpreted as ontologically distinct from his product, the World-soul, as well as the model, the Forms. Thus, the Demiurge must be *Sui Generis*, ontologically distinct from model as well as product.

I certify that the ~~Abstract~~ is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.



Chair, Thesis Committee

5/8/15

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Introduction

In the beginning, according to Plato, there was the pre-cosmic chaos. The Demiurge looked down on this state of affairs and reasoned that order was better than disorder. Intent on making the world as orderly and divine as possible given the circumstances, he looked to the intelligible items which were eternally unchanging and used them as a model to form the World-Soul, a god, and its body, the cosmos itself. The story seems simple and straightforward enough, yet attempting to properly identify the ontology of the divine craftsman has been anything but simple and straightforward.

Modern as well as ancient interpreters of Plato have normally taken the Demiurge to be a symbolic representation of one of the following: either an intelligible, Nous, the intelligent World-Soul, an intelligent Uber-Soul, or more recently, simultaneously the intelligent World-Soul and the Form of the Good, an intelligible. In opposition to all of these stances, I take it that the Demiurge is none of these, but instead, a uniquely distinct entity in Plato's cosmology.

There are varying reasons for rejecting many of the positions I have outlined. Each interpretive route that will shortly be analyzed will be shown to have features that do not fully account for all the aspects of Plato's cosmology. As we will see, if we were to say that the Demiurge was merely a symbol for the intelligent World-Soul itself, then we would be in accordance, not only with the stipulation that the Demiurge is an intelligent causal agent, but also with the view that intelligence is a feature to be found only in a soul (Tim. 30b). However, in doing so, we would be denying the divinity of the

cosmos. It will be equally difficult to imagine that the Demiurge is simply an intelligent Over-Soul, distinct from the world of becoming. So, we will be left with interpreting the Demiurge as the Form of Intelligence, or Nous. This interpretation will still be found to be problematic however, because, in making the Demiurge an intelligible like Nous, we will have turned him into a formal cause, passive and in no way actively engaged in the act of creation.

A possible solution to this problem of interpretation which I will also discuss consists in making the Demiurge simultaneously an intelligible and the intelligent World-Soul. On this view, the Demiurge is an intelligible, the Good, simultaneously incarnating in the physical cosmos as the World-Soul. This interpretation seems appealing initially because it accounts for all of the capabilities that the Demiurge is presented as having, without having to make any compromises about his ontological status. I reject this view however, due to the fact that the ontological preliminaries of the *Timaeus* can be interpreted to strictly endorse a triadic ontology of a distinct model, product, and cause. This triadic interpretation that I am forwarding I will derive from recent interpretive work that has clarified how seriously Plato intends for his audience to take the creation myth in the *Timaeus*. I intend to apply the triadic interpretation, which I have derived, to the debate concerning the ontology of the Demiurge and conclude that if the cause, which is equivalent to the Demiurge in Plato's cosmology, is of a distinct ontological category as I have argued, then we must take it that the Demiurge is *Sui Generis*, of his own kind. While interpreting the Demiurge as *Sui Generis* will be found to entail problems of its

own, on the final analysis, it will be shown to be the closest approximation to how Plato actually thinks of the Demiurge.

The Demiurge is a Soul

There are very strong grounds for supporting the view that the Demiurge is merely a symbol for the intelligent World-Soul, the most recent attempt being made by Gabriela Carone (2005), who provides a two-fold argument (p. 42-45) for showing that the Demiurge is the World-Soul. In the first part of her argument, she points out that given the decision-making capabilities that Plato attributes to him, the Demiurge must be a thinking or intellecting sort of entity (Tim. 30c). But thinking involves change and motion which cannot occur without a soul. So, the Demiurge's intelligence must also be reducible to change, or motion, which is a feature of souls. In the second part of her argument, Carone further points out that motion requires space and space implies extension, i.e. having a body. So, a special or material medium becomes necessary for the motion which is the Demiurge's thinking. Thus, the Demiurge further becomes reducible to the World-Soul which must have emerged from the coalescing physical constituents of the cosmic body. What this interpretation has to offer is that the Demiurge's function as a reasoning causal agent can easily be explained since there is already a mechanism in realm of becoming, namely, a soul, that can account for the

movement that is necessary for intellecting, and intellecting is something the Demiurge needs to do if he is to act as the efficient cause between being and becoming.

Unfortunately, however much Carone's argument seems to comply with the Demiurge's status as a reasoning causal agent, as well as Plato's prescription that intelligence only comes to be through a soul, (Tim. 30b) it doesn't align perfectly with the World-Soul's special status as the most divine of all the created thing. The World-Soul's elder status in Plato's cosmology connotes a reverential attitude supported by reference to the World-soul's divinity and by it being called a god (Tim. 34b). So, on Carone's interpretation, not only is the World-Soul its own efficient cause, but it is also its own source of divinity, implying that it emerged from a pre-cosmic state into the state that it is in now. But this is somewhat similar to saying that the cosmos, which was once imperfect, is now perfect, or that it was once un-divine and now is divine. It makes sense that for the set of god-like entities that belong to the realm of becoming, the Cosmic-Soul is the eldest and therefore the most divine and intelligent. But to say that the Cosmic-soul gave itself divinity and intelligence is to ascribe a sort of arbitrariness to the way that these attributes come to belong to anything in the world of becoming. For, if divine intelligence like the World-Soul possesses is something that simply emerges out of the primordial chaos, then there is no reason why more than one divinity could have emerged.

Sarah Broadie (2012) has also argued in a similar vein, taking issue with this picture of cosmogenesis on the grounds that if the corporeal elements of the cosmos were

always alive and intelligent, then there would be no restriction on the number of cosmos that could have arisen from any one localized collocation of elements. This would effectively allow for an infinite multiplicity of cosmos' despite the fact that Plato is explicit that this cosmos is singular and unique (p. 27).

Broadie also references in her analysis, the Cosmic-Soul's ability of being able to animate the cosmos as a one-to-one relation (p. 18), in that the Cosmic-Soul's exclusive responsibility is to animate the orderly movement of the cosmos via the invisible circulations of heavenly bodies. The Demiurge, on the other hand, is the source of more than just one thing. Throughout the *Timaeus* we find the Demiurge constructing not only the Cosmic-Soul, but also the cosmic body, and even the visible gods. In short, the Demiurge can be said to have a one-to-many causal relationship, similar to the way that the Forms have to the particular sensible objects that instantiate them

So, we can further argue that, even if we were to jettison the reduction of the Demiurge to just the World-soul and instead leave it that the Demiurge is simply the intelligence belonging to the World-Soul, that intelligence would still be a feature we can pick out of the World-Soul and individual souls. After all, if Nous is a distinct feature, then it is something that can be predicated of the World-Soul, the souls of gods, and individual mortal souls, and if it is predicated of the World-Soul and other souls, then it can be interpreted to be a universal which instantiates in many particulars. And if that's the case, then intelligence, which we are now treating as equivalent to the Demiurge, is in actuality closer ontologically to a universal, i.e. a Form, distinct from the totality of the

realm of becoming. This final conclusion clues us in to intelligible-like nature of the Demiurge, and ultimately sheds doubt on the view that the Demiurge is merely the World-Soul, or even the intelligence belonging to the World-Soul.

While Carone's argument does much to alert us to an important aspect of the Demiurge's ontology, namely, the change involved in the act of reasoning about how to construct a world that is beautiful and good, it does so at the risk of making intelligence a spontaneously emergent feature of the cosmos, something which is far too arbitrary. While the Demiurge does need to be intelligent in order to construct the orderly universe, it appears that intelligibility, a feature only allowed to objects distinct from the world of becoming, will need to somehow be included in a proper Demiurgic ontology.

But is there a way that we could allow for the Demiurge to be distinct from his creation without making him an intelligible proper? We could, as some interpreters like Andrew Mason (2010) have done, hold that the Demiurge is in fact distinct from his creation, the Cosmic-Soul and its body, as well as that intelligence is only a feature to be found only in souls. From there we could draw the implication, that, given we agree with these two claims, the Demiurge represents a kind of Over-Soul that stands over and above the totality of souls in the world of becoming. But, in concluding this, one is forced to reject the divinity of the World-Soul once again, something which seems extremely difficult given the non-ambiguous manner in which it is stated in the text itself when it is said that the World-Soul is not only blessed with divinity, but also that it is older than the cosmos itself (Tim. 34b-34c). In fact, the clarity in which the elder status

of the World-soul is presented in the text is also correlative with the total lack of any mention of a soul of any kind standing over and above the totality of souls in the world of becoming throughout the text or even in other Platonic dialogues.

There is an evolution in Plato's thought as to the ontological characteristics of the soul throughout the dialogues. Compare the *Phaedo's* conception of the soul as only responsible for a small set of mental states in 83d and 94d with the *Republic's* conceptions of the soul as responsible for all of a person's mental states in Book 4. Yet, what doesn't become altered in Plato's general theory of soul as he develops it is that souls of all kinds are involved in change and motion of some sort (*Laws* 896e-897a). In the ontological preliminaries of the *Timaeus*, Plato makes a decisive distinction between what is and what comes to be (Tim. 27d). It is clear that this distinction not only applies to totalities, i.e. the totality of all intelligible beings and the totality of all sensible things, but that it is metaphysically non-negotiable. When something is of the set of things which come to be, it is also, for Plato, excluded from ever being. Since the cosmos is, for Plato, an object of perception, it is something which comes to be, and anything that comes to be requires a cause distinct from itself.

The same goes for anything we would consider to be a soul. While not properly a perceptible, a soul is something which is in motion, thus being the animating source of life in the universe, whether it is the life of a mortal being (*Phaedo* 105c) or, generalized further, the entire body of the cosmos. But motion can only occur in what comes to be, and even if there was such an Over-Soul that was the cause of the world and created the

World-Soul as well as the divine and mortal souls, motion would still be a feature that we attributed to it, and so we would still need to posit a soul over and above it in order to account for at least the initial instance in which it's movement was caused. In doing so, we would fall into an infinite regress of positing intelligible souls, one above the other in the hierarchy of being. So, we also couldn't accept the Over-Soul interpretation as a valid interpretive path towards formulating a satisfactory ontological account of the Demiurge. The only remaining alternative, if we were to peg the Demiurge into a single ontological category, would be to interpret him as an intelligible of some sort.

The Demiurge is a Form

As implied in the previous section, the Demiurge appears to have a one-to-many relationship with the visible world, in many ways like a Form does. Furthermore, in thinking of the Demiurge as akin to his product, the World-Soul, we found that the emergence of intelligibility from within the world of becoming was made to appear arbitrary. So, we now find that we might be in a better position to interpret the Demiurgic ontology if we think of the divine craftsman as distinct from his product.

Stephen Menn (1995) argues that the Forms by themselves can't account for the instantiation of intelligible features which are apparent in sensible objects and follows this up with the further clarification that an appeal to Forms as the cause of the intelligibility of the sensible world can only be a partial explanation. The inclusion of an

agent that has intelligibility as its main feature, for Menn, Nous by itself, is what is truly able to provide a complete explanation of why the sensible even begins to instantiate orderliness at all.

A younger Plato had once given a general description of Nous as that which gives intelligibility to sensibles, both in a general sense and in a particular sense (*Phaedo* 96a). Nous was thought of as a single substantial unity, distinct and independent of the world. In being independent of the world, Nous would have acted as the principle of intentional orderly movement, as the medium between the transcendent and unchanging world of being and the world of action and effects, i.e. the world of becoming. When Socrates is made to object to his body's being the cause of his intentional orderly movement, it is in this particular sense that he is conceiving of Nous. But in the *Timaeus*, Nous, which we are now going to interpret as equivalent to the Demiurge, is now conceived of in the general sense, as the medium between items of being and the cosmos itself.

So, what we have on Menn's interpretation is a view that Nous is a generalization of what is instantiated in a particular soul's intelligence which, for the most part, imperfectly accesses the intelligible realm and gives rise to its own particular intentional orderly acts which are observed in the sensible world. The other Nous then, "the nous that is king of heaven and earth," (p. 16) also belongs to particular mortal souls who, when they utilize their own intelligence, are in actuality instantiating the Form of Nous. After all, it is possible for souls to exist without virtue and since Nous is a virtue, it is possible for souls to exist without it. But if that is the case, then Nous has to be taken to

be a universal term like justice or goodness, and if this is so, then Nous must have an ontological status like other universal terms (p. 24).

I admit that I find Menn's argument acceptable *prima facie*. However, this interpretation also brings with it a problem of its own. If Plato does mean for the Demiurge to be equivalent to the virtue of Nous, then it appears that Nous is the sort of entity that is exempt from change. Yet Nous itself is involved in change in a number of places in the *Timaeus* narrative, such as when the Demiurge 'decides' to form the World-Soul, or when he makes due with the elementary materials afforded to him by the pre-cosmic chaos (Tim. 30b-30c). Even more so, the constant mention that the Demiurge orders the world through means of persuasion (Tim. 56b), a feat reserved for an actively participating causal agent, further implies that the Demiurge is not just some passive intelligible item, like the other Forms which serve as the inert blueprints for the orderly cosmos.

So, we can draw out two criticisms. First, if Nous is nothing but a Form, then, it cannot be anything but a formal cause since there is very little evidence in the Platonic dialogues that Forms are anything but that. Yet Nous is treated by Plato as an active causal agent, working from a model on materials to create a product. And second, even if Nous is a special kind of Form that is not just a formal cause but also an efficient cause, there are still very poor grounds for thinking that Plato thinks that Forms of any sort can be responsive to reasons in the way that the Demiurge is when maneuvering between the material conditions provided by the pre-cosmic chaos and the ideal intelligible blueprint

in order to construct the orderly cosmos. In fact, if the Demiurge is able to achieve this feat, regardless of being a Form, then it would require us to ascribe to the Demiurge some sort of ability to change.

Menn considers these very same problems as well. After all, if an eternal substance is to intervene in the world of change, this certainly amounts to that eternal substance having ascribed to it the inclination to exercise its causality in whatever way it sees fit. However, Menn quickly rejects this objection due to it imposing an, “unduly restrictive view of what efficient causality must consist in.” (p. 55) Instead, Menn merely reiterates that an eternal substance like Nous must, in virtue of being an eternal substance, be constant in its efficient causality and that, if it does seem as if Nous varies in the exercise of its causal powers, it is because changeable things, in virtue of being changeable, are at different times disposed to be receptive to Nous’ causal activity and at other times not (p. 56). In short, it is not so much that Nous is participating in change, but rather, the mortal soul’s epistemic objectivity is undermined by being embodied. This picture that Menn presents does appear to align with Plato’s earlier description in various dialogues of the mortal soul’s constant battle with the influence of sense perception. Menn finds a correlating description for this epistemic problem in Plato’s Analogy of the Sun wherein the sun is the cause of vision and so appears to act as if it is intervening. Yet, the sun in the analogy is truly the efficient cause of vision while at the same time not actually being actively causal.

In the Analogy of the Sun, the eye, which represents the soul, is described as being most like the sun which represents the Form of the good. Vision, which is the power of knowing, is a product of the meeting of the eye and the sun. In this sense, the sun is the cause of vision, only imparting the power to see when the eye is fixed on the domain where reality shines. (*Republic* 508d) In contrast, if the eye just so happens to be in a region that is dark, then its vision is obscured, and it can only form opinions, and opining can also include the inability to properly evaluate the causes of observed phenomenon, such as when the prisoners in the cave mistake the cause of the sound of people talking within the cave with the shadows passing by. (*Republic* 515b) In that instance, the prisoners, because they are confined to a dark region and restricted in their movements, are in no position to objectively evaluate the true cause of the voices and shadows on the walls. Similarly, one finding himself suddenly in the region of the sun would also not immediately be in a position to properly evaluate the nature of the sun in its causal role with having given him his vision.

While I find Menn's defense initially plausible, by making Nous a Form, I think he effectively cements why even Plato only thought of the Forms as a second-best explanation for the appearance of intelligence in the universe. (*Phaedo* 99d) Menn defends the position that Nous, as an eternal substance, does not really negotiate between the various conditions of the physical elements as we would think an intelligent agent would. Rather, since Nous' essential trait is orderliness, it is constantly informing those elements' movements, viz. persuasion towards an orderly state.

We can interpret Menn's view of Demiurgic persuasion the following way: When Nous comes upon some state of affairs in part-a of the pre-cosmic chaos, Nous informs the movement of that part-a towards a state that achieves orderliness for the whole of the soon to be cosmos in keeping with whatever physical limitations might be in place at part-a due to its specific constituent elements. Another way to put this is like so: Part-a only has three possible states of affairs available to it. Nous comes in and persuades the movement of part-a towards state-3 which happens to be the most effective state to help the whole of the pre-cosmos achieve maximal orderliness. Whatever rational negotiation on behalf of Nous which appeared to be happening is attributable to our own perceptual limitations.

However, if Nous' efficient causality boils down to simply what I have described then there is no reason why part-a being moved towards state-3 is indicative of an intelligence decision being made. After all, the material elements seem to follow a similar principle irrespective of the persuasion of intelligence based solely on their physical composition. For example, an r-shaped element collides with an s-shaped element, and so both elements move towards state-n due to their respective physical compositions. That state-n is explainable purely on the necessary requirements imposed by the r-shaped element colliding with the s-shaped element. So, state-n will always happen, even if we, outside observers think otherwise. Similarly, Nous in its activity towards ordering the cosmos has come up against some state of affairs and cannot but

respond in the only way that will achieve maximum orderliness when that given state of affairs is encountered.

If we have accepted this, then there is no intelligence involved in the elemental movements as well as Nous' ordering activity. But the cosmos does exhibit orderliness and this orderliness is what imparts divinity to it. So, by accepting that the Demiurge, as Nous, is simply a Form, we implicitly problematize the cosmos' supposed divinity, something which is unacceptable to Plato. (Tim. 29d) So, ultimately, conceiving of the Demiurge as Nous, distinct from the realm of becoming, fails to account for the Demiurge's intelligent behavior and makes his activity merely necessary like that of the physical elements of the cosmos.

The Demiurge is a Form and a Soul

At this stage I have identified a variety of interpretive paths we can take towards understanding the ontology of the Demiurge. We can say that the Demiurge is either the intelligent World-Soul or the intelligence belonging to the World-Soul, or that the Demiurge is an Over-Soul distinct from and ontologically superior to the World-Soul and its body, or that the Demiurge is the Form of Nous distinct from the World-Soul and the cosmic body. All three of these interpretive paths have been found to be lacking in one way or another. The first implies that divinity and intelligence are arbitrary features of the cosmos, the second leads us to an infinite regress of cosmic-craftsmen. Finally, the

third doesn't fully account for the Demiurge's role as a reasoning causal agent and can even be taken to imply that intelligence is not needed in the work needed to construct the cosmos. The following interpretive route which I will analyze will appear to bypass the problems I have listed above by taking the Demiurge to be the Form of the Good simultaneously instantiating in the cosmic body.

In his analysis of the *Timaeus*, Jason Rheins (2010) argues that the Demiurge is to be identified with the Form of the Good which Plato had hypothesized, in the *Republic*, as the ultimate Form. While the Form of the Good is not explicitly mentioned in the text of the *Timaeus*, Rheins thinks that there is enough evidence in how the Demiurge is described to interpret him as a symbol for the Good. For example, the Demiurge is said to be the best of causes (Tim. 29a6) and the Form of the Good is considered by a younger Plato, to be the ultimate cause of things. (*Phaedo* 99c) In making this comparison, Rheins places great emphasis on the Demiurge's not only being good, but also wanting to make the world as much like himself as possible. (p. 215) It is this particular statement which is the basis for Rhein's unique attempt at a solution to the question concerning the Demiurge's ontology.

Plato says that the Demiurge, in forming the world, made it into a moving image of the eternal. (Tim. 37c-38c) The physical cosmos, aside from being in time, is also extended in space, and so this also means that it is three-dimensional. Since it is three-dimensional, as Rheins points out, and the Form of the Good wants to make the physical world as good (as much like itself) as possible, then the Form of the Good must find a

way to imbed itself in the world, which it does, by spatially schematizing itself into space. (p. 247) There is strong textual support, according to Rheins, for this interpretation if we interpret the Form of the Living Thing to be equivalent to the spatially schematized Form of the Good, and the Receptacle of Space as the three-dimensional material upon which the Form of the Good imbeds itself.

In following this interpretive route, we are taking it not only that this world is good and divinely ordered, as Plato insists in the *Timaeus*, but also that it is good and divinely ordered only insofar as it is “possible for a spatial world to be.” (p. 247) So, the World-Soul is still the eldest of the things which come to be, but it is not its own source of intelligence, rather it is the Good as a “pure intelligible unity” which uses itself as the model which is then “realized in the actual conditions of space, with real change,” so, “it yields an actual complete living thing, namely the [World-Soul].” (p. 248) On this reading, the cosmos retains its divinity in the qualified manner which Plato seems to intend when he calls it the best possible world, something which could not be said for the interpretation which made the Demiurge exclusively the World-Soul.

It also immediately seems that this interpretation is defensible against the objection found in interpreting the Demiurge as solely the Form of Nous. For, on Rhein’s account, since the Demiurge is both distinct from and imbedded in his product, we can attribute, without hesitation, decision making capacities to him as the World-Soul. Yet, while it is true that the Demiurge’s reasoning capabilities could be accounted for when under the guise of the World-Soul, it is still difficult to see how Rhein’s solution

accounts for the Demiurge's reasoning capabilities prior to imbedding himself in the cosmos. If the Demiurge, as the Form of the Good, was able to reason about the best state of affairs possible prior to incarnating as the World-Soul, then his incarnating in the cosmos as the World-Soul does not seem necessary for his decision making process. And if that is the case, then the Demiurge's status as a static intelligible which somehow undergoes the change necessary to reason about things must still be accounted for just as when we interpreted him as the Form of Nous.

Rheins deals with this problem by appealing to what he takes to be a mistaken literal reading of the Demiurge's activity within the text itself. The cosmology of the *Timaeus* is presented as a myth and so should not be taken so seriously. To think that the Demiurge is really making rational decisions amounts to, "...a bizarre case of selective application of allegorizing, to suppose that phrases such as 'the Demiurge reasoned' actually imply that he is going through a process of thought." (p. 254) But even if we allow for this, there must still be, at minimum, one moment in which the Form of the Good underwent some process of change, when it schematized itself in order to imbed itself in three-dimensional space. Even if this moment is not characterized as strictly intellectual in the sense of rational decision making, it must still grasp with the unchanging nature of the Form of the Good as a universal, albeit one of a far superior ontological status compared to other intelligibles. Rheins makes great effort to deal with objections of this sort by referring back to the mythological nature of the *Timaeus* narrative and how the literary embellishments are merely symbols meant to allow the

deeper philosophical ideas of the text to be easily digested by the philosophically uninitiated. But in deferring to the mythic aspects of the *Timaeus* narrative, Rheins also joins in with all of the other interpreters that we have investigated in making a mistake as to how the Demiurgic ontology should be interpreted.

A Triadic Ontology

What all of the views investigated in the previous sections share is an agreement that the Demiurge is a symbol for a force or principle that Plato has already explicitly established within his metaphysical framework and which simply needs to be picked out. So, interpreters like Carone, noting that Plato has much to say about the ontology of souls, and finding the Demiurge to have some capabilities similar to those of a soul, identifies him with the World-Soul. Similarly, an interpreter like Menn, finding that the Demiurge's activities have the range of a universal and are typified by intelligence, identifies him with the Form of Nous. In doing this, neither side seems to take the wholly distinct ontological nature of the Demiurge seriously as I am proposing. Rheins' interpretation comes the closest, because for Rheins, the Demiurge, under the guise of the Form of the Good is, "a hyper-ontic thing," (p. 236) having a slightly superior ontological status compared to the other intelligibles which reside in the realm of pure being. Yet, the Form of the Good must still ultimately be categorized as an intelligible because,

despite being more difficult to know or describe than the other intelligibles, it is still considered an object of knowledge.

Yet the idea that the Demiurge's ontology can be simply uncovered once we find out what he is a symbol for is so persistent that none of the interpretations proposed can admit that perhaps the Demiurge is simply a unique entity distinct from both intelligibles and souls. The reason for this mistake, in my view, originates in a misunderstanding of what Plato means when he states that his cosmology is an Eikos Mythos. Early modern interpreters of the *Timaeus*, like F.M. Cornford (1937) have interpreted the presentation of the *Timaeus* narrative as an Eikos Mythos to mean that the account that is to be presented is no more than a likely story. (p. 29) In being only likely, the account does not offer any guarantees that it is entirely self-consistent or even accurate. This implies that one should not take the account of creation as it is presented too literally, thus, one is forced to read beyond the words to uncover the true ontology of whatever character is presented, such as the Demiurge. Since, in interpreting the text, one only has Plato's previously established metaphysics to draw from, one finds themselves ultimately attempting to reduce the 'symbol' of the Demiurge to something already belonging to those previously established metaphysics.

I will begin by re-examining the ontological preliminaries of the *Timaeus* and how they have normally been interpreted to produce the metaphorical interpretation of the *Timaeus* cosmology that we are familiar with. Afterward I will argue that if a radical

re-interpretation of the ontological preliminaries of the *Timaeus* actually endorses a triadic ontology of a distinct model, product, and cause.

Initially, a general ontological division is made between the totality of everlasting beings which are devoid of change and apprehensible only by the understanding with the aid of Logos and the totality of visible things which are always in a state of becoming. (Tim. 27d6-28c4) Visible things are taken to be such that one can only ever have an opinion of them through the means of perception. Thus, the general ontological division at this time can be said to be between models (M-things) and their products (P-things).

The cosmos is established as being a perceptible, and so it is identified as a P-thing that is modeled on M-things. All P-things are taken to be caused by something distinct from themselves. Since the cosmos exhibits beauty and, it is assumed, its architect is good because of the goodness and beauty of the cosmos, then it must have been modeled on M-things. Immediately following this affirmation of the cosmos' status as a P-thing modeled on M-things, a division between different kinds of accounts is given. An account is taken to have the same characteristic as the object it is about, thus, the common interpretation takes it that the sorts of account types available are either Logos of M-things which are stable, unchanging, and certain, or Logos of P-things which are, alternatively, unstable, changing, and uncertain.

Interpreters from even opposing interpretive schools of thought have followed Cornford and taken this division between account types and the identification of the

cosmos as a P-thing to mean that, “there can be no exact science or knowledge of natural things [P-things] because they are always changing.” (p. 29) Thus, accounts of all P-things are bracketed into the category of Eikos Logos, and the cosmology of the text in particular is further bracketed into the category of an Eikos Mythos, since it is cast in the guise of a cosmogony.

But this leap is not completely warranted. Myles Burnyeat (2009) offers a reinterpretation of the ontological preliminaries of the *Timaeus* which seriously challenges this general two-fold division between account types from which I will soon derive a triadic ontological division from. As Burnyeat points out, it is not immediately clear that Plato means for all accounts of P-things to be devoid of certainty to the degree that has normally been interpreted. Prior to identifying the cosmos as a P-thing modeled on M-things, Plato had made a distinction between two kinds of P-things, those that were modeled after M-things, and those which were modeled after P-things. Of course, Plato goes on to identify the cosmos as a P-thing modeled on M-things, as I have outlined above, however, in the next section (Tim. 29b again), when making a division between successful account types, the Logos of P-things is not meant to encompass both of the kinds of P-things I have just referred to, but rather, only those which were copied after the likeness of intelligibles. In fact, no mention is explicitly made about accounts concerning P-things that were modeled on other P-things, at least at this junction of the text. So, really the interpretations of the kinds of possible accounts should be divided between Logos of M-things and Logos of P-things modeled on M-things.

Furthermore for Burnyeat, because Plato also includes, in his division of account types, the stipulation that an account type must be akin to the object which it provides an explanation, or exegesis of, then, a Logos of a P-thing modeled on M-things must contain some measure of truth. After all, M-things, being intelligible, are taken to be accessible by the understanding, through the use of Logos, not sense perception. Thus, Logos of P-things modeled on M-things should not be treated as unstable, unchanging or uncertain, but rather, as still relating to intelligibles but from the starting reference point of the sensible world as opposed to Logos of M-things, which treats of intelligibles, by themselves, i.e., in an a priori manner. In short, these account types do in fact have some measure of certainty to them. Thus, successful account types are further divided between either Logos of M-things which are stable, unchanging, and certain, or Logos of P-things modeled on M-things which are also certain but only insofar as they relate to M-things. Thus, logos of P-things modeled on M-things, while being certain in a qualified sense, are Eikos Logos.

But the story given in the *Timaeus* is not meant to simply be an Eikos Logos in the general sense, but also a more specific sense, it is meant to be an Eikos Mythos because of the theogonic features inherent in it. However, because the account given is a Mythos does not mean that it has some sort of inferior epistemic status. As Burnyeat points out, the two terms, Logos and Mythos are not treated by Plato, at least in the *Timaeus*, as mutually exclusive of and in opposition of one another. (p. 151) Instead, Plato is treating Logos as a general term which encompasses types of successful accounts

regardless of the ontological realm which the object of the account belongs to. After all, the speech about to be given about the universe is first referred to as a Logos, (Tim. 27c4-5) and it is only later narrowed down to a Mythos. So, using Burnyeat's treatment of Mythos, we can interpret the mythic character of the text not to mean that the dramatis personae are mere symbols, but rather, that the form in which the narrative will play out has characteristics in common with a theogony, especially in regards to the language used. And this has no bearing on the truth status of the account, since, for Plato, the account, and its parts, is truthful insofar as its subject matter is related to what is most truthful, the eternal.

So, the Logos of P-things modeled on M-things, and by implication, the sub-category of it, the Mythos of P-things modeled on M-things, which is the discourse of the *Timaeus*, is treated by Plato in a much less skeptical manner than modern interpretations have taken it to be. Given Burnyeat's analysis and reinterpretation of how we seriously we should read Plato's myths, I propose that the standard interpretation that any account of the cosmos is no more likely than any other is without warrant. Instead, while the descriptions of the particulars of the cosmogonic action presented in the *Timaeus* might be up for stylistic revision, the general facts of creation as Plato presents it are not up for debate. Thus, when Plato presents a distinct architect with distinct capabilities from either intelligibles or perceptibles to mediate the action between the two of them, there should be no question about whether or not the architect is simply a feature of a P-thing,

or of the same group as the M-things, or even a conjunction of the two. The architect, or the Demiurge, is a unique and distinct entity in his own right.

But what does it mean to say that the cosmology of the *Timaeus* is a Mythos and also that its constituent parts should be treated with seriousness though stylistic revision is possible? The name 'Demiurge' can itself be a symbol, having as its correlate 'the entity which is the efficient cause between the model and the product.' In this sense, 'Demiurge' is just a placeholder term, which is easily replaceable without its referent losing any of its significance as an ontologically distinct entity. Call it 'Craftsman,' or 'Zeus' or call it 'king of heaven and earth,' it does not change what the status or the function of this particular entity in the cosmological account is. Nor, does it imply that we can later identify him with some other entity that we had already spoken of in a sense as distinct from the divine craftsman. So, given that the function of this entity which is the efficient cause between the model and the product does not change, though how he is represented does, we can say that when we are listening to Plato's creation myth, which is what the *Timaeus* qualifiedly is, that its main players are meant to be treated seriously as their own distinct entities.

This is different from the way that the other interpretive routes we have analyzed treat the supposed symbolism of the Demiurge. They treat not only the name 'Demiurge' as a placeholder, but also, curiously, the treatment of him as a distinct entity as open for further qualification. So, on the standard metaphorical interpretation, the story of the *Timaeus* is a myth, and this implies that the main players are sketched out placeholders

for cosmological principles which have not yet been thoroughly worked out. Hence, 'Demiurge' is just a placeholder term for some such entity which is later revealed to be, say on Carone's interpretation, 'World-Soul' even though it appears that within the text of the *Timaeus*, a very explicit ontology of the World-Soul has been established.

It seems strange to say that Plato has already explicitly outlined the ontology of the World-Soul within the *Timaeus* and has also spoken of the Demiurge as a distinct entity but in actuality means for the Demiurge to be the same as the World-Soul on the final analysis. It seems as if Plato could have easily said something to the effect of, 'and the Demiurge I have spoken about earlier is in fact the World-Soul.' Similarly, on the reading of the Demiurge as the Form of Nous, Plato could also have easily said, 'and of the objects of true being which the craftsman used as a model, he is also one of them.' On this basis it seems more likely that when Plato speaks about the Forms, the Demiurge, and the World-Soul as separate, he means it without qualification.

The upshot of the interpretation I am proposing is that the Demiurge can be distinct from his model, the Forms, as well as his productions, the Cosmic-Soul and the cosmic body, while at the same time not being confined to being some inert intelligible object. It also fits in neatly to what sort of entity Plato needs in order to explain the origin of the cosmos. Both the items of the intelligible realm and of the physical realm have already had limitations placed on them in terms of what they can do. Intelligibles have true being but only have causal powers insofar as they are formal causes. Similarly, physical things have the power of movement, but it is disorderly and not reason led.

Furthermore, as we saw earlier, trying to simply make reason an emergent feature of the physical cosmos simply entailed that the divinity which is tied with intelligence that the World-Soul has ascribed to it was made into an arbitrary feature. While a soul could act as the rational and orderly principle of movement for physical bodies, some other distinct principle would still need to be present in order to begin the entire affair of the meeting between being and becoming. It seems simple to say that it is the Demiurge that is this principle that is required in order to bring the orderly cosmos into being, but it is more difficult to say that the Demiurge is *Sui Generis*, of his own kind, because this entails that there is such an entity that does not neatly fit into any explicitly established ontological category of Plato's. Yet, as I have argued, the Demiurge must be treated in such a way.

Conclusion

To sum up, the *Sui Generis* problem is inescapable for Plato as well as for his interpreters. It is clear that Plato needs an entity such as the Demiurge to make sense of his cosmology, however, Plato does not make any obvious attempt in the *Timaeus* to articulate the ontology of the Demiurge to the degree that an adequate interpretation can be formulated that avoids the *Sui Generis* problem.

As I have pointed out, despite the interpretive ambiguity presented by a misreading of the ontological preliminaries of the *Timaeus*, Plato does mean for the underlying ontology of his cosmology to be triadic, composed of a distinct model,

product, and cause. Any attempt to construct an interpretive model which relies on lumping two distinct ontologies together never fully captures Plato's intention that the Demiurge be both an intelligible as well as an intelligent agent. If the Demiurge is simply an intelligent agent, or the intellect belonging to an agent, then there is no reason to attribute divinity to intelligence, and if that is so, then there also isn't any reason to attribute any sort of divinity to the world that comes to be through the works of intelligence.

On the other hand, if the Demiurge is just the Form of Nous, then we are still left wondering how it is that the Demiurge can rationally negotiate the metaphysical difficulties involved in creating the World-soul and persuading the material elements of the pre-cosmos since to be a Form is simply to be a formal, i.e. unthinking, cause. While interpreters like Menn have attempted to argue that it is simply the epistemological constraints of being embodied that limit the cosmologist from seeing the Demiurge as an intelligible only, I have also argued that even if we were to grant this, our account of the Demiurge's ontology would ultimately assign to the Demiurge a causality far too similar to that belonging to the elements of the visible world and, if that were the case, then it would be difficult to explain how the Demiurge could have any sort of divine status, much less impart it on the Cosmic-Soul or the cosmic body.

Given this, that it seems that the Demiurge must be both intelligent and intelligible, not the sort of entity that can easily be confined to the dualistic ontology which is the foundation of Platonic metaphysics. Since the Demiurge seems to need to be

both a reasoning causal agent and an intelligible being distinct from his product, two capacities that require differing ontologies, the best possible solution seems to just make him both, which Rheins does with some explanatory success. However, I have argued that even this possible solution must confront head on the problem of talking about some sort of change occurring in the realm of being. Furthermore, recent interpretive work concerning how Plato thinks about the use of myth appears to support a vastly stronger literal reading of the *Timaeus* than has previously been thought, and on this newer reading, it seems like the Demiurge is meant to be taken as a distinct and unique entity within the cosmological narrative despite what is entailed.

But Whether Plato himself is aware of the Sui Generis problem at all is ultimately a question for a different time and beyond the scope of this work. However, in showing how interpretations of all types still fail to account for the ontological status of the Demiurge in a manner that coincides with the function that Plato assigns to him in the *Timaeus*, I hope to have shed some light on the limitations of the triadic ontology that informs Plato's cosmology. In doing so, I also hope to have made a strong contribution not only to an understanding of the explanatory limitations of Plato's cosmological account, but, more importantly also to the underlying general assumptions which interpretations of the Demiurgic ontology take on.

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