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Plato's Question "Why?": An Analysis of *Resp.* 509 b–c through *Tim.* 29 d–30 a

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Abstract. In *Resp*. 509 b–c, Plato attributes to the Form of the Good an efficient causality, but he does not explain the matter in detail. This has led some scholars to interpret it in reference to the 'unwritten doctrines'. The aim of this paper is to link this passage to the cosmological myth narrated in the *Timaeus* and to make sense of it in the light of *Tim*. 29 d–30 a, where Plato asks why the world of becoming exists in addition to the world of Ideas, and he gives an allegorical answer by appealing to the goodness of the Demiurge.
Keywords: Plato, explanation of the existence of the universe, efficient causality of the Form of the Good, Demiurge, *Republic*, *Timaeus*.

Platono klausimas „Kodėl?": *Valstybės* 509 b–c bei *Timajo* 29 d–30 a analizė

Santrauka. *Valstybėje* (509 b–c) Platonas Gėrio Formai priskiria veikiančiąją priežastį, tačiau išsamiai šio klausimo jis nesvarsto. Dėl šios priežasties kai kurie mokslininkai šį klausimą interpretuoja, siedami jį su Platono „neužrašytomis doktrinomis". Šio straipsnio tikslas yra susieti šį fragmentą su kosmologiniu mitu, kuris pateikiamas *Timajuje*, bei išsiaiškinti, kaip šį mitą interpretuoti *Tim*. 29 d–30 a kontekste, kur Platonas klausia, kodėl tapsmo pasaulis egzistuoja greta Idėjų pasaulio. Platonas čia pateikia alegorišką atsakymą, nurodantį į Demiurgo gerumą.
Pagrindiniai žodžiai: Platonas, Visatos egzistencijos paaiškinimas, veikiantysis Gėrio Formos priežastingumas, Demiurgas, *Valstybė, Timajas*

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1. Introduction

In the *Republic*, the Form of the Good[1] fulfills both an ontological and an epistemological function. Indeed, Plato presents the Form of the Good (a) as the ultimate cause of the knowability of all Forms (in the simile of the Sun) and (b) as the ultimate founding principle of all knowledge, both theoretical and practical (in the simile of the line)[2]. In the second part of the simile of the Sun, Plato proposes the Form of the Good as the ultimate cause of the being of all things or essences:

> —You will say, I think, that the Sun not only provides visible things with the power to be seen, but also provides for their generation, growth, and nourishment, although it is not itself generation. —How could it be? —In like manner, then, you should say that the objects of knowledge not only owe to the presence of the Good their being known, but also their being and essence (τὸ εἶναί τε καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν), although the Good is not itself essence, but something still beyond essence, exceeding it in dignity and power (*Resp*. 509 b)[3].

This famous passage is followed by a dialogue motivated by the interruption of Glaucon, shocked by Socrates' words:

> Then Glaucon very comically said: —By Apollo, what a daimonic superiority! —It's your own fault—I said—because you forced me to express my opinion about it. —And don't stop

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[1] In relation to the status of the Good as an Idea or Form (ἰδέα, εἶδος), it is worth recalling that, in the *Republic*, Socrates takes as the starting point for the explanation of his conception of the Good the postulate of the existence and knowledge of Ideas (507 a–b). Once the interlocutors have shown their agreement on this central point, it is added that the Good is one of those beings or Ideas, namely, 'the Good itself' (αὐτὸ ἀγαθόν). Thus, Socrates speaks of τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα (505 a, 508 e, 517 b–c, 526 e, and 534 b–c); he also speaks of τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἕξιν (509 a); he states that ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα μέγιστον μάθημα (505 a; the same idea is also expressed in 504 d, 504 e, and 519 c). He celebrates it as τοῦ ὄντος τὸ φανότατον (518 c), as τὸ εὐδαιμονέστατον τοῦ ὄντος (526 e), and as τὸ ἄριστον ἐν τοῖς οὖσι (532 c); he explains that it is consequently object of knowledge: ὡς γιγνωσκομένης ... διανοοῦ (508 e); he makes it clear that, just as the Sun belongs to the sensible world, the Form of the Good belongs to the intelligible world, and that, just as it is very difficult to try to look at the Sun fixedly, it is equally difficult to try to know the Form of the Good, though not impossible; the Form of the Good is situated at the extreme limits of the intelligible world, but inside, not outside: ἐν τῷ γνωστῷ τελευταία ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα καὶ μόγις ὁρᾶσθαι (517 b–c); ὅταν τις τῷ διαλέγεσθαι ἐπιχειρῇ ἄνευ πασῶν τῶν αἰσθήσεων διὰ τοῦ λόγου ἐπ' αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν ἕκαστον ὁρμᾶν, καὶ μὴ ἀποστῇ πρὶν ἂν αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν ἀγαθὸν αὐτῇ νοήσει λάβῃ, ἐπ' αὐτῷ γίγνεται τῷ τοῦ νοητοῦ τέλει (532 a–b); the 'battle' of dialectics aims at the knowledge of the Form of the Good and is fought on the ground of the justification of this knowledge with argumentations and with the refutation of fallacious representations of the Good (534 b–c); finally, the Form of the Good is a paradigm or a guiding principle of praxis: καὶ ἰδόντας τὸ ἀγαθὸν αὐτό, παραδείγματι χρωμένους ἐκείνῳ (540 a). Based on this textual evidence, I think that T. Irwin's interpretation of the Form of the Good, according to which the good is not something "independent of the virtues and other specific goods, but … the appropriate combination and arrangement of them" (1995: 273), is not accurate.

[2] In relation to the epistemological dimension of the Good, an innovative book by S. Broadie, *Plato's Sun-like Good: Dialectic in the Republic*, has been recently published. It analyzes the way in which dialectic operates in the actual practice of the rulers of the ideal city. See especially pages 1–135. Its central proposal is what the author calls "the interrogative conception of the Good" (see p. 207, and p. 206, for the advantages that, in the author's view, this approach offers over traditional interpretations).

[3] For the Greek text, I use the standard edition of Plato's works by J. Burnet; the translation of all Greek quotations in this paper is mine.

Textual proofs as clear as this one show how fruitless the attempts are to deny any ontological function to Plato's Form of the Good. See, for example, that kind of attempts in H. F. Cherniss (1932: 237) and in M. Isnardi Parenti (1993: 88).

> at all doing it; continue to explain, at least, its similarity to the Sun, if there's anything that you have omitted. —Certainly—I said—I am omitting a great deal. —Well, —he said—don't omit even the smallest thing. —I think, —I replied—that I'll have to leave out a great deal. Nevertheless, as far as it is possible at the moment, I won't willingly leave out anything. —Don't—he said. (509 c).

These words have led to interpreting them as a 'concealing passage', as a reference to—in Aristotle's expression—'the so-called unwritten doctrines' (*Phys*. Δ 2, 209 b 14–15)[4]. Surely, the underlying problem that both passages present is that the shift from the exposition of the epistemological dimension of the Form of the Good to that of its ontological dimension is too brief and obscure to be understandable. Plato does not clarify what he means when he says that the Form of the Good is the cause of the being and the essence of the rest of the Forms.

As is well known, Aristotle and K. Popper regarded Plato's theory of the Good as 'useless' and 'an empty formalism'. In contrast to them, G. Santas, for example, sought to show that Plato's theory is a substantial theory of the Good, adopting an approach of Neoplatonic and Augustinian inspiration (2002: 360). I agree with him in the sense that it has a fourfold function, specifically, *ontological*, *epistemological*, *political*, and *ethical* (see *Resp*. 517 b–c for a synoptic presentation of the fourfold function of the Good). Let us consider the *ontological* function of the Good (I cannot discuss the other functions of the Good here, as this would go beyond the scope and limits of this paper). Santas' interpretation is that the Good is the formal cause of all the other Forms having their ideal attributes. According to the traditional interpretation of Forms as ideal paradigms of sensible things, Santas argues that the Forms are 'the best objects of their kind' and, according to the one-over-many principle, that 'there must be a single form by virtue of which they have this attribute in common; and in view of the fact that this attribute is bestness of kind, that form must be the Form of the Good' (2002: 373–374). The ideal attributes of Forms (their perfection, purity, and immutability) are what "'make' [i.e., formally cause] the forms to be the best objects of their kind. Therefore, they have their ideal attributes by participating in the form of the Good. The causation in question here is formal causation" (2002: 374). Interpreting the causality of Good as a formal causality is, in my opinion, highly problematic for two reasons: (a) because it overlooks the problem of final causality (the Socratic-Platonic idea that human actions and activities

[4] The bibliography on Plato's 'unwritten doctrines' is enormous, so I will just mention a few especially significant works. The founding works of the so-called 'Tübingen School' are those by H. J. Krämer (1967) and K. Gaiser (1962). They were followed by other relevant publications such as the papers collected in H. G. Gadamer and W. Schadewald (1968), the interpretation of the subject by J. N. Findlay (1974), and the study by M. D. Richard (1986), which includes a French translation of the testimonies relative to Plato's 'unwritten doctrines'. The first collection of testimonies and fragments was that by K. Gaiser, "Testimonia platonica…", included as an appendix in 1962: 441–557. Some other prominent works of that school are those by H. J. Krämer (1989 and 1986) and by G. Reale (2003). As works centered on the specific question of the relationship between orality and writing, the contributions by Th. A. Szlezák (1985, 1994: 93–126, and 1993) must be mentioned. An extensive bibliography about the different questions relative to this important interpretative current of Plato's philosophy can be consulted in D. Nikulin (2012: 183–203).

are oriented towards the Good; this final causal function is fulfilled by the ethical and political dimensions of the Form of the Good), and (b) because it overlooks the problem of participation. Forms are paradigms, formal and final causes, but they are not active principles, they cannot create anything by themselves. This function of creating life and construction of mathematical order is fulfilled, in my opinion, by the Form of the Good in its ontological dimension[5].

If we delve into the rest of the dialogue in search of an answer, or at least of a useful clue, the bewilderment is not mitigated; what we find is a series of generalities that do not make it clear which is Plato's conception of the ontological activity that he attributes to the Good: expressions such as being dispensed 'like an influx' (ὥσπερ ἐπίρρυτον, 508 b), used in reference to the Sun's generative power, or the statement that it is that star which 'provides the seasons and the years and governs all things in the visible region, and is in some way the cause of all those things that they (*the philosophers*) saw (516 b–c)'. In this same vein, we find the idea, of an 'almost theogonic resonance', to use M. Vegetti's words (1998–2007: 268), that the Good begot the Sun as analogous to itself (508 b). Lastly, in the context of the first part of Book X, an allusion is made to a god who is an artisan and maker of the Forms.

I myself consider that the clue to the passage of *Resp*. 509 c does not lie in a reference to the 'unwritten doctrines'; in it, Plato is rather warning that a work such as the *Republic*, whose subject and aim are political, is not the adequate framework in which to explain in detail the *ontological* activity of the Form of the Good, which is what is being introduced in the context of the previously quoted dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon. That is why Socrates says that he will not willingly leave out anything 'as far as it is possible at the moment'. My proposal is to interpret that the 'great deal' left out is the cosmological myth of the *Timaeus*. In the following pages, I will try to clarify the dimension of first efficient cause of the Form of the Good—hinted, but not explained, in *Resp*. 509 b and 517 b–c—in the light of *Tim*. 29 d–30 c.

2. Complementarity between the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*

The *Timaeus* prolongs the *Republic* as far as it expounds on and clears up the reasons and the meaning in Plato's mind of the mystifying insinuation launched in this dialogue that the Good is the source of the being and the essence of the Forms, and, by means of them, the dynamic source that produces and governs the order of the sensible world. It could be said that this point constitutes the decisive and distinctive contribution of the *Timaeus* to Plato's conception of the Form of the Good. As in other dialogues, the notion of the Good is used in the *Timaeus* with different significances, but one among them is emphasized with special care: that of the fecundity or productivity of the Good. Indeed, the most remarkable feature of the 'goodness' of the Demiurge—that is, of the eternal

[5] For Santas' account of the other three functions, see Santas (1983: 256–257). On the problem of participation in Plato's philosophy, see F. Fronterotta (2001).

self-diffusing Intellect that arranges the natural universe—is to be the ultimate reason of the existence of the sensible world.

This use of the notion of goodness rests on the principle of sufficient reason, if we can express it with a terminology that is not Platonic but that, however, summarizes what is substantial in respect to this point. This principle is the premise in the background of the cosmogonic stage that illuminates and guides every step in Plato's presentation of his theory of the cosmogenesis. He actually starts from the postulate that the sensible world *must* be the product, not of blind chance, but of an Intellect that, in its good craftsmanship, is motivated by, and devoted to, a series of exigencies of an ethical and aesthetic character. And he does so with the ultimate desire of persuading us of what is perhaps his most fundamental idea: that the general plan of things is based on a rational foundation and on an ethical and aesthetic order, according to which every political and moral order should be built, as was already defended in the *Republic*.

Moreover, Plato himself insinuates that the *Timaeus* has an essential connection with the *Republic* when he notes that his cosmological dialogue is a sort of an appendix to that dialogue (*Tim*. 20 b and 26 c–d). This remark can be explained by the fact that the myth about the origin and constitution of the cosmos narrated in the *Timaeus* is the natural foundation on which Plato wants the reader to lay down his political system. That is why the dialogue opens with a summary of the main political and economic measures defended in the *Republic*. Other than that, Plato remarks that Timaeus, who is going to lead the dialogue, is both an expert on the knowledge of nature and a perfect statesman; a citizen, as Plato takes care to specify, from Locri in Italy, 'a city governed by excellent laws' (20 a)—Pythagorean laws, we can presume.

3. The Ontological Function of the Form of the Good in the *Republic* and the Demiurge's Activity in the *Timaeus*

Before starting the analysis of *Tim*. 29 d–30 a, it is necessary to take a previous step dealing with the relation between the Form of the Good in the *Republic* and the figure of the Demiurge in the *Timaeus*. The position that I defend is that *the figure of the Demiurge is a poetic personification of the ontological or efficient function of the Form of the Good*, and that the essence of those two figures consists in being an Intellect that is the principle of order in the universe.

This is a subject that has given rise to a great deal of literature; I will mention the remarkable contributions of R. L. Nettleship (1922: 231–232), U. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1959: 478), and A. O. Lovejoy (2010: 47–48)[6]. According to S. Menn (1995), Plato postulates (a) the existence of a being whose essence is *nous*, which is distinct from the world and the ultimate source of order in the world. This *Nous* (b) acts immediately only on the world-soul (and perhaps also on other souls), and (c) through the mediation of the world-soul acts on other things and orders them. Finally, the action of *Nous* on things

[6] See also E. D. Perl (1998), who argues for the identity of the Demiurge with the Forms as a whole.

consists in (d) ensuring a *constant* eternal motion. See especially Chapter 7, where he argues that the special status of the *Nous* is able to solve the problem of a cosmological explanation by means of Forms (which are formal causes but not efficient causes). To this end, he resorts to a comparison between the causality of the *Nous* and the causality of the Form of fire and attempts to show that the objections against the explanation by means of the Form of fire (or of air, water, and so on) are not successful against the explanation by means of the *Nous*, insofar as the causality of the latter consists in creating order by seeking the best for the world *as a whole* (see pp. 58–59).

Among the readings that deny Plato's first principle to be a *Nous*, we can list, for example, those of F. L. Lisi (2007) and L. Gerson (2020, especially pp. 153–154). The main reason given by Gerson for denying that the Demiurge is identical with the Good is that while the Demiurge has an οὐσία, namely, the activity of thinking, the Good is said to be 'beyond οὐσία' in the *Republic* (2020: 153). In addition, he argues that, in the *Timaeus*, there are two passages, *Tim.* 48 c 2–6 and 53 d 4–7, in which Timaeus states that this dialogue will not consider the 'principle or principles of all things', and that 'this alone should be taken as conclusive proof that the Demiurge (or Demiurge and Forms) is not those principles' (2020: 153–154). Let us begin with the latter point. These sentences can simply be interpreted as references to the principles of the One and the indefinite Dyad of the unwritten doctrines (the Good and the Demiurge being two of the names of the principle of the One). In fact, the context of these sentences is that of the problem or difficulty involved in expressing in words an explanation of the origin and order of the world (see *Tim.* 48 c–d and 53 d–e). As for the first point, in the *Republic*, Socrates states exactly, let us remember, that 'the Good is not essence, but something that is even above essence in terms of dignity and power' (οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ' ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβείᾳ καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος, 509 b). Far from being like the rest of the Forms, the Good is a Form of 'an astonishing superiority' (δαιμονίας ὑπερβολῆς, 509 c) due to its greater dignity and power. The latter is, in my opinion, the key to the matter. It is not that the Good lacks essence, but that the kind of reality it is cannot be reduced or equated to any of the senses in which other things have reality. Far from lacking essence, the Good is substance in the highest possible degree. As J. Adam already said, 'the Good is not οὐσία in the sense that Ideas are οὐσίαι; but, in a higher sense, it is the only true οὐσία, since all οὐσίαι are only specific determinations of the Good' (1963: 62). Gerson's interpretation involves an overly crude reading of the words about the otherworldliness of the Good and fails to take into account the important nuance that Socrates introduces in the last part of the phrase, which clarifies the sense of the whole phrase.

In the *Timaeus*, the Demiurge is the maker of the universe: he is the personification of the idea of an Intellect (νοῦς) or causing power that gives birth to a determined universe from undetermined matter. This figure receives exactly the same honorific titles that, as we will see later, the Form of the Good receives in the *Republic*: the Demiurge is 'the best of causes' (ὁ … ἄριστος τῶν αἰτίων, *Tim*. 29 a), 'the most excellent' (τὸ ἄριστον, 30 a), and 'the most excellent of all the beings that are intelligible and eternal' (τῶν νοητῶν ἀεί τε ὄντων … τὸ ἄριστον, 37 a).

Plato also uses a whole variety of other expressions to refer to him: one of them is 'the begetting father' (ὁ γεννήσας πατήρ, 37 c) of the universe[7]; another is 'artisan' (δημιουργός) of the world[8]. He often refers to him as 'the god' (ὁ θεός), thus distinguishing him from, and placing him above, those 'young gods', his children, who lend him a hand in some embarrassing moments of the *Timaeus*[9]. This use is in correspondence with the expression 'the greatest divinity' (*Pol*. 272 e) of the myth of the Age of Chronos in the *Statesman*—a story that has a close affinity with the account of the *Timaeus* on many points[10]. The idea of the 'craftsman' is combined with that of the 'begetter' in the expression 'artisan and father' (δημιουργὸς πατήρ) used in the *Timaeus* (41 a) and in the *Statesman* (273 b). We must remember that, in the *Philebus*, Plato speaks of the cause that 'produces all this' (πάντα ταῦτα δημιουργοῦν, 27 b) in reference to the efficient cause of the mixture of the limit and the unlimited that originates the world of becoming. And that 'the Demiurge' is the term used in the *Republic* to allude to the god that is 'the artisan of the senses' (507 c) and 'the artisan of the heavens' who 'arranged them, and all that is in them, in the most beautiful way in which it is possible to arrange such productions' (530 a); that same god who is 'the real maker (ποιητής) of the truly real bed' and who 'produced it unique in nature' (597 d), and, more generally, the maker of all the Ideas. In the *Sophist*'s digression about creation, the god who makes nature is, again, an artisan-god (265 c); the idea reappears in the context of the *Statesman*'s myth to refer to the god who organizes and commands—for a certain period—the world's order (270 a).

There is another term to which less attention has been paid, but that is even more illuminating: the active participle of συνιστάναι, i.e., συνιστάς[11]. It conveys the idea of the organizer of a set of different elements into a harmonious unity. Thus, the Demiurge of the *Timaeus* assembles (συντιθήναι, 33 d) the universe, arranges in a unity (κοσμεῖσθαι, 53 b, and διακοσμεῖν, 69 c) the great synthesis (σύστασις, 48 a) that the universe is, or, as Plato also says, 'gave a good design to all that comes to be' (εὖ τεκταινόμενος ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς γιγνομένοις, 68 e).

It is worth recalling that this kind of ordering activity, and its conceptual association with the idea of excellence, is reminiscent of the artisan activity aiming to what is best in the *Gorgias* (503 e–504 d and 506 d–507 a), the power of what is best and right in the *Phaedo* (96 a–99 d), and the universal cause in the *Philebus* (26 e–27 b). In the *Gorgias*, Socrates makes a series of reflections on the notions of order or proper arrangement (τάξις) and of order or concert (κόσμος)[12] which are useful for a better understanding of this point

[7] He also calls him 'the maker and father of this universe' (ὁ … ποιητὴς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦδε τοῦ παντός, *Tim*. 28 c) and 'he who has begotten this universe' (ὁ τόδε τὸ πᾶν γεννήσας, 41 a).

[8] *Tim*. 42 e, 68 e, and 69 c. In this last passage, Plato uses the verb δημιουργεῖν, and in *Tim*. 31 a and 47 e, the philosopher employs the perfect participles δεδημιουργημένος and δεδημιουργημένα, respectively.

[9] *Tim*. 30 a, 30 b, 30 d, 31 b, 32 b, 34 a, 34 c, 38 c, 39 b, 46 e, 55 c, 56 c, 69 b, and 69 c.

[10] For the question of the formation of the cosmos in the myth of the Age of Cronus as presented by Plato in the *Statesman*, cf. R. Mohr (2006: 213–215).

[11] Used in *Tim*. 29 e, 30 c, and 32 c. Other forms of the verb appear in *Tim*. 29 e, 31 b, 32 c, and 69 c.

[12] On τάξις and κόσμος, see Liddell and Scott (1897: 1526, 836). On the notion of κόσμος, see, furthermore, W. Kranz (1938–1939: 430–448 and 1958: 3–282), and J. Puhvel (1976: 154–167).

of the *Timaeus*. Each of the craftsmen—Socrates begins his explanation—'pays attention to his own work and goes about adding what he adds without taking it at random (εἰκῇ), but seeing to it that it has a certain form (εἶδός τι) what he is executing' (503 e). 'For example, if you look', he continues, 'at painters, architects, shipbuilders, and all other craftsmen, whatever they may be, you will observe how each one places everything he places in a certain order and forces each part to fit and adapt itself to the others, until the whole work is well ordered and proportioned' (503 e–504 a). Gymnastics teachers and doctors also 'sort out the body in a certain way' (504 a). It is this presence of order and proportion (τάξις καὶ κόσμος) that distinguishes a well-made artefact from a useless one, a healthy body from a diseased one, and, if one is coherent, the same must be said of the soul: the soul is useful in a certain order and concert (504 a–b). From order and proportion in the body originate health, strength and all the excellences or conditions of general well-being; from order and proportion in the soul come rule and law, which result in justice and self-control (504 b–d). So, in the *Gorgias*, excellence, whether it is excellence in the work of craftsmen, in that of physicians or in that of true politicians, is produced by the establishment of a certain order and the creation of a harmonious arrangement between the parts of a whole (cf. also *Gorg.* 506 d–507 a). The excellence of something, i.e., the fulfilment of its end or the full development of its capacities and its proper function, depends on, or simply consists in, the respect of a certain order or unity. This is also the point of view in the *Timaeus*.

The ontological dimension of the Form of the Good in the *Republic* is equivalent to the notion of Good as Socrates expounds it in *Phaed*. 96 a–99 d, where he narrates his intellectual autobiography. In it, Good is conceived in terms of a power (δύναμις) with 'a divine force' (99 c), as the true Atlas who 'binds and governs' (συνδεῖ καὶ συνέχει, *ibid*.) the universe. This 'power' of the Good consists in organizing the order of the world in the best possible way (τὴν δὲ τοῦ ὡς οἷόν τε βέλτιστα αὐτὰ τεθῆναι δύναμιν οὕτω νῦν κεῖσθαι, 99 c). Thus, in Plato's philosophy, the Good assumes the function of the principle of world order that νοῦς has in Anaxagoras' philosophy, although Anaxagoras did not develop or apply this principle, as Socrates laments in that passage of the *Phaedo*. In my opinion, the *Timaeus* is, in Plato's eyes, the realization of what Anaxagoras wanted to do, but did not know how to do it.

To this, the fourth cosmic principle presented in the metaphysical framework of the *Philebus* can be added, as it fulfils the same function as the figure of the demiurge in the *Timaeus*. As Ch. H. Kahn recalls, 'the cosmic role that νοῦς plays in the *Philebus* made it possible for later Platonists to identify νοῦς and the Good. For example, Numenius, the major predecessor of Plotinus, posits as the highest of his three goods a divine principle characterized both as νοῦς and as the Good itself' (2004: 637).

In the *Republic*, Plato says that the Form of the Good is 'the happiest of the existing things' (526 e). This expression leads me to interpret that, for Plato, the Form of the Good included the notion of some sublimated form of intelligent, conscious, and blessed life. We can move from this expression in the *Republic* to that one in the *Theaetetus*, according to which, the model of the divine represents 'supreme happiness' (176 e), and then connect

both with the decisive prominence in the *Philebus* of the identification between the supreme Good and the intelligent cause that arranges the universe and that represents the notion of an eternal perfection that is self-sufficient to attain happiness. In fact, of the universe of the *Timaeus*, that the Demiurge made as similar to himself as was possible, Plato says that

> he made it circular and turning in a circle, a single solitary universe, but capable, thanks to its excellence, of keeping its own company without requiring anything else, for its knowledge and friendship with respect to itself are enough. For all these reasons, he begot it as a happy god (34 b).

In this way of conceiving the Form to which he gave the most honorable name that he knew, Plato follows Anaxagoras, with whose first principle—the νοῦς—he wanted to identify his own Form of the Good, which in the *Phaedo* carried the weight of the world on its shoulders. And this led to Aristotle, who, when conceiving the god who has no need of friends as self-thinking thought, culminated the line of interpretation of the divine in the Greek world that was awakened by the Presocratics' criticism of religious anthropomorphism and that Socrates finished clearing up by demanding self-knowledge more than anything.

In consequence, I think that the figure of 'the begetting father' (ὁ γεννήσας πατήρ, 37 c) of the universe in the *Timaeus* is simply a poetic personification of the efficient or demiurgic dimension of the Form of the Good in the *Republic*. In both cases, we find the idea of an Intelligence (νοῦς) that performs the function of generating the universe; but the *Republic* emphasizes its character of principle or condition of the existence of the world of the Ideas and of the sensible realities, and, given the predominantly political subject of the dialogue, it does not proceed to describe its begetting activity. In the *Timaeus*, instead, that descriptive task is assumed, talking about the begetting activity of the Good, covering it with a personal and mythological garment that helps to deal with a question that is so controversial, uncertain, and difficult to explain. In Book VI of the *Republic*, it would have been inappropriate to say that the Good is 'the Demiurge', since Plato's objective there is to persuade that a *single* Idea can perform *four different function*s, i.e., four functions of an ethical, political, epistemological, and ontological character, respectively; but the term 'demiurge' is only appropriate to carry the idea of the last of those functions. Nevertheless, this term is not absent from the *Republic*, as we have seen before.

I think therefore that W. K. C. Guthrie does not correctly interpret this point when he affirms that the Form of the Good, that in the *Republic* is said to give both existence and essence to the other Forms, and by means of them to the sensible beings, must not be compared with the activity of the Demiurge in the *Timaeus* 'as only another expression of the same thing' (1978: 260). According to him,

> the two accounts have nothing in common. *Rep.* 6 says nothing of a planning Mind, and has no concern with the creation of a cosmos. There is no hint, there or elsewhere, that the Form of the Good, or any Form, is or has *nous*, which is the whole being of the creative cause of the *Timaeus*. The centre of Plato's interest has shifted, and his metaphysical scheme is now that of the *Philebus*. (*Ibid*.)

It is true that, in Plato's philosophy, Forms and souls are beings of a different nature, although we should remember that both in the *Phaedo* (78 b–84 b) and the *Sophist* (248 e–249 a) he tries to bring them as close as possible, attempting to make it plausible that the souls are closely related to Forms. In any case, taking into account the considerations made before, it seems at least a reasonable conjecture that, in the particular case of the two highest members of those domains of being, i.e., in the case of the Good and the Demiurge, Plato could conceive them as in some way identical[13].

As for the shifting of 'the center of Plato's interest', it is difficult to see where the supposed change resides, since Plato always made the political themes compatible with the study of nature. Besides, considering the ontology proposed in the *Philebus*—which identifies the νοῦς or divine Intelligence with the fourth principle of being, that is, with the indefatigable creative cause that organizes the order of the universe—we have to conclude that the 'metaphysical scheme of the *Philebus*' is fully coherent with the metaphysics of the *Republic*, where the Form of the Good also exerts an efficient causality (509 b and 517 b–c). One of the most remarkable aspects of this proposal of Plato is precisely the emphasis that he lays on the vivifying power, so to say, of the first Idea.

The identification of the eternal geometrician of the *Timaeus* with the dimension of first efficient cause of the Form of the Good in the *Republic* has, in any case, the advantage of preserving the unity of Plato's trajectory—something that Plato himself underlines when he says, as we have seen, that the *Timaeus* is a supplement to that political dialogue—and tending a line of discussion between both dialogues. I cannot help believing that he would advise against a rupturist hermeneutic that would not take us far by converting his thought into a group of islands disconnected and isolated from each other.

To close this point, I will indicate a methodological consequence that follows from this identification between 'the best of the intelligible and eternal beings' (τῶν νοητῶν ἀεί τε ὄντων … τὸ ἄριστον) of the *Timaeus* (37 a) and 'the best of the beings' (τὸ ἄριστον ἐν τοῖς οὖσι) of the *Republic* (532 c): many of the details that describe the works of the Demiurge must not be taken in a literal sense; it is better not press too much Plato's imagery. The *Timaeus* is a poem dedicated to the splendor and essential rationality of nature, and not, as Plato warns us, an account that is a discourse 'totally coherent in every aspect and accurate' (*Tim*. 29 c).

4. Analysis of *Tim*. 29 d–30 a

The interpretation of the subject of the *Timaeus* properly begins at *Tim*. 29 d–e, when the question with respect to the motivation of the creative action of the Demiurge is asked: 'Let's say now why the framer framed becoming and this universe' (29 d–e). As in the exposition of his doctrine of the Form of the Good in the *Republic*, Plato offers an allegorical answer:

[13] I agree on this point with A. O. Lovejoy (2010: 48).

> He was good, and whoever is good can never house any jealousy about anything. Being free of jealousy, he wanted everything to become as similar to himself as possible. We would do well to accept what is accepted by wise men, that this is absolutely the most sovereign principle of becoming and of the world (29 e–30 a).

This 'most sovereign principle' is the ultimate reason for the existence of a world of becoming besides the eternal world of the Ideas, and this equates it with the function of first principle and condition of existence that is attributed to the Form of the Good in the *Republic*. In this last section, I will offer an interpretation of Plato's statement that the Good is free from any jealousy. I think that it can contribute to give sense to the efficient causality of the Form of the Good that is hinted, but not clarified, in *Resp*. 509 b and 517 b–c. This thought of the *Timaeus* can be interpreted as a religious embodiment of the Socratic moral ideal according to which self-sufficiency and generosity are indissolubly united in the free man. That moral ideal appears here hypostatized as 'the most sovereign principle of becoming and of the world'.

In Plato's ethics, the free man (ἐλεύθερος) is the man who is not a slave to anybody—that is, who exerts his *civil* freedom—and neither is subject to political rule, that is, who exerts his *political* freedom[14]. In his *Dialogues*, these two basic meanings of the concept of freedom are the foundation on which he builds an ideal of *moral* or inner freedom gravitating around Socrates' life and philosophy and whose main category is self-control. In this last sense, a free man is he who has freed himself from the bondage of the lowest part of his soul—from its appetites and passions—submitting it to a strict rational control. This feeling of moral or inner freedom is manifested in the attitudes, thoughts, language, etc., of a person. And so, the independence of a man who is his own master can be seen, among other things, in the fact that he cannot indulge himself in φθόνος, the malignant pain of the soul around which orbits the passage of the *Timaeus* that I am trying to clarify.

Φθόνος is the Greek term for malevolence and, more particularly, for jealousy or envy. It is often used for the jealousy of the gods. It is also used for a refusal or a reluctance, due to ill will, to give something, as, for example, in *Men*. 93 c–d and *Phaed*. 61 d. Its antonym is εὔνοια, benevolence, good-heartedness (*Leg*. 635 b). Plato defines the envious man as 'one who is unwilling to share in a friendly manner any good things with anyone' (730 e–731 a).

In the *Phaedrus*, we find a passage rather similar to the one in the *Timaeus* that we are considering. Unlike the love that might thrive amid sailors—says Socrates—the love of 'a noble and gentle man' (Phaedr. 243 c) is neither jealous nor harmful (φθονερός τε καὶ βλαβερός) for the beloved. The good-willed lovers try to make their pupils, by means of the education imparted to them, as similar as possible to the god whose path they follow. And they do so

> to the best of their abilities, not showing jealousy, nor a malevolence inappropriate for free men, toward the boy (οὐ φθόνῳ οὐδ' ἀνελευθέρῳ δυσμενείᾳ χρώμενοι πρὸς τὰ παιδικά), but trying as much as they can to draw him into being totally like themselves and like the god they revere (253 b–c).

[14] On this topic, see the first and fourth essays of A. J. Festugière (1947).

This same conjunction of ideas is exhibited in our passage of the *Timaeus*, where the free man's moral qualities of self-sufficiency and generosity are projected on the figure of the divine Demiurge. The Demiurge, indeed, is said to be 'good', and that means that he is self-sufficient, and, more precisely, that he is so in an absolute sense, since he is a god. Also, in the *Philebus*, the Good is a synonym of the idea of a being that is, or possesses, a perfect self-sufficiency for all eternity (Phil. 60 b–c). Such an absolute independence distinguishes it from and places it above (διαφέρειν) all the other beings (20 d).

But Plato does not stop at this thesis, for what he is trying to do—and here lies the contribution that distinguishes the *Timaeus* in comparison with the cosmogenesis that the *Republic* sketches—is to *deduce* from this divine property of independence another one opposite but essentially connected with it: *generosity*. Just because the Demiurge is self-sufficient, he is, and must also be, generous. And, in the *Timaeus*, this means that he must give birth in the sensible world to all the Ideas that populate the eternal world. If he would not do so, if he would capriciously disengage himself from the building of the universe, he would behave as a jealous and mean-spirited being that, instead of bestowing existence on all kinds of living beings, he would refuse to do so because of malevolent feelings. But an Intelligence that is the self-sufficient, an Intelligence that lives blessed and happy for all eternity, *could not*—to put it in the words of the *Phaedrus*—feel 'jealousy nor a malevolence inappropriate for free men' (253 b) against anything different from himself. Accordingly, Timaeus concludes that the Demiurge 'wanted everything to become as similar to himself as possible' (29 e), and this means that he decided that the universe would become the best and most beautiful work of art possible (29 a). He also concludes that the Demiurge must be considered as the principle that is 'above everything' (29 e–30 a), as is also the case with the Form of the Good in the *Republic* (509 b) and with the Good in the *Philebus* (20 d). According to Plato, the goodness of the universe is manifested in the rational order of nature and, more specifically, in its self-sufficiency and plenitude.

To conclude, we can ask ourselves about the ultimate meaning of Plato's dialectic between self-sufficiency and generosity, about Plato's interest in establishing that the goodness of the Demiurge makes it impossible that he could take a dim view of the reality of the universe—even of the reality of such a universe as ours, which gives birth to corporeal, imperfect, and mortal beings that are not totally good or self-sufficient in any sense. In my opinion, both the myth of the *Timaeus* and the Form of the Good in the *Republic* ultimately display confidence in the fact that the universe must be rational and that man must be able to know it and reach an ultimate reason of the world that is self-explicative and sufficient, or, as Plato says, something that is 'the unhypothetical …, the principle of everything' (*Resp*. 511 b). Although there is in the world an indelible trace of imperfection and whimsicality that can be attributed to its material condition, Plato is convinced that reality is fundamentally rational. Although it is true that disorderly phenomena do persist in the world, it is also true that those phenomena are exceptional when considered in the light of the order which, in global terms, predominates in nature.

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