REVIEWS


This is a collection of four conference papers to which have been added four others. Nearly all have something to say about the relation of soul to body in Plato’s *Timaeus* (cf. Chris Gill at 59), and most will be useful to students and scholars studying the dialogue’s scientific contents, while the final three take a broader perspective, relating Plato to Aristotle (Dean-Jones), Proclus (Opsomer) and the anti-teleological tradition in biology from Empedocles to Darwin (Campbell). Opsomer’s paper in particular is an odd man out, concerned with Proclus’ own theology, and how the *Timaeus* is used as authority for it.

After her summary of the dialogue’s plan, introducing the essays in relation to the part of the text each deals with, M.R. Wright contributes the first, on the general relation there between science and myth. This is followed by pieces on the world soul (Zedda), the human body (Burgess), moral pathology (Gill) and perception of music (Barker), before the three mentioned above. Wright seems mistaken in her introduction (xiv) to say that Proclus’ commentary was a cause of the *Timaeus*’ centrality in Neoplatonism: the dialogue was important since the time of Xenocrates and Aristotle (cf. Dean-Jones at 101, and see Gretchen Reydams-Schils, *Demiurge and Providence: Stoic and Platonist Readings of Plato’s Timaeus*, Turnhout, 1999). Proclus’ commentary is surely rather a result of this on-going centrality.

In her essay Wright asks why, given the limited educational value attributed to myth in other Platonic dialogues, where sophists and atheists are met with reasoned argument, the cosmology of the *Timaeus* is delivered mythically (5). Yet it seems implausible, if not anachronistic, here to characterise Plato’s alternative option as ‘critical enquiry, assessment of evidence, verification and demonstrable proof’ (*loc. cit.*). More plausible is her answer, that Plato in each case signals (eventually) that his set-piece myths are merely opinion, right opinion advanced where knowledge is unavailable, as erudite entertainment. (This ignores the question by what criteria such opinion is called right.) In *Timaeus*, the subject matter is unstable (the world of becoming), and so only opinable, but, Wright, argues, that is not so different, in effect, from modern
science, where recent advances in a field may always be overturned (12-19, cf. 9). This comparison, and the appeal to entertainment-value, leave out of account the moral (and perhaps political) use Plato makes of myth here, as elsewhere.

Sergio Zedda supplies the attention, missing above, to Plato’s literary strategies. Analysing the Demiurge’s construction of the world soul he distinguishes an abstract theoretical language, used in the mathematical account of its harmonic structure, from the concrete invocation of a metal-worker’s craft in the metaphorical account of how soul-stuff is produced, cut into strips and arranged in the form of an armillary sphere. Zedda makes the stimulating suggestion that where Timaeus avoids technical detail he signals that he himself lacks the Demiurge’s divine craft (28). The essay concludes by explaining the armillary sphere, appealed to as a visible model of the heavens (40d), as an epistemic intermediate between the world soul and our minds. But the way Zedda here invokes Timaeus’ proportion (as being stands to becoming, so truth to belief) leaves the impression that he (wrongly) associates the world soul with being and takes truth as the object of belief (38-39).

Scott Burgess is particularly concerned with the sinews in the human body, which, Timaeus teaches (74b), are composed as an intermediate product of bone (hard) and skin (soft). Burgess demonstrates the regularity in ancient thought of explanation in terms of relaxing and tightening (46-48), arguing that Plato simplifies the available repertoire of anatomical terminology (50) in order to provide a single cause of bodily unity and locomotive power (45-46). Burgess concludes by arguing for a ‘common triadic design’ (54: where an intermediate is blended from, and unifies two opposites) applicable to both world and human soul, and human body. But to me it seems unnecessary here to claim a precise proportionality among these three, where there is only a loose analogy of explanatory technique.

The contribution by Gill concerns the claims at Timaeus 86b-87b that the body is the cause of psychic failings, for the consequences of which people are not responsible. Following M.M. McKenzie (Plato on Punishment, Berkeley, 1981) he contrasts this view with Aristotle’s
account of moral responsibility (63-64). Gill then negotiates a middle course between comparisons with Galen's tendency to reduce psychic phenomena exclusively to physical causes, and with the Stoic view of the psyche as an entirely rational physical unity, both views influenced by Plato, in order to attribute to Timaeus a conception of the psychophysical unity of a person, as the reason for his surprising moral claims. Exactly how similar to Stoicism this leaves the position remains unclear, particularly because Gill seems inconsistent on whether that philosophy allows for people being blameworthy (see 76, contra 74-75).

Barker offers a speculative reconstruction of Timaeus' theory of musical perception. It seems according to 69a-c and 71a-b that although sound acts directly on the brain and blood in the head, it is not until the liver in response produces images for the perceptive soul, located below the diaphragm, that hearing occurs (85-87, 94). Then, to explain the claim that sumphonia (concordance, or else melody) delights the intelligent by imitating divine harmonia (80a), Barker suggests on the basis of the theory of 'circular replacement' that the movement of sound from brain to liver is matched by a movement back to the brain allowing the rational soul to appreciate the mathematical basis of musical harmony (97). Barker sticks to his last as a musicologist, but comparison here with the parallel case of watching the cycling heavens (47b-c) might help with the question whether the mathematical principles are meant to be intuitively present to reason during perception, or only recognised by a consequent act of reflection. Barker, somewhat darkly, claims that 'interpretation of the lower soul's intoxicated intuitions arises in their passage through the analytical prism of mathematical understanding' (loc. cit.). Do the wise enjoy music or science?

Dean-Jones fixes on the comparison of the receptacle of all becoming to a mother (50d), along with its similarity to Aristotle's conception (if he had one) of prime matter (102-3). According to Aristotle, in sexual reproduction the mother provides the matter, the father the form of the offspring, but this leaves the question, how can he account for children resembling their mothers? Rejecting other solutions Dean-Jones suggests that just as in the Timaeus the receptacle, as a womb, has characteristics of its own before the Demiurge's intervention to create the cosmos, so the female menses are associated for Aristotle with characteristics that can compete with the father's to individuate the
embryo, once species and sex are determined (109). Dean-Jones does not explain how, in contrast with the case in the *Timaeus*, such maternal characteristics could previously remain separated from the *menses*, as they would have to, to allow for the possibility that the father’s characteristics might be transmitted perfectly.

The essay by Opsomer canvasses Proclus’ theory of demiurgy, with regard to the question as to what the source of motion is. For Proclus a demiurge is a link between an immobile paradigm in the intellect and its moving image. Opsomer charts the developed Neoplatonic theory of four layers of demiurges with reference to the textual bases for these in Plato’s *Timaeus*, *Statesman*, *Gorgias* and *Republic* and the conception of causation which requires Proclus to propose an intermediate between any two levels of reality to separate and link them. While the resultant metaphysics is not recognisable to us today as Plato’s, the problem Opsomer pursues is one Plato himself considered, as to how, with a model of causation by imitation, it is possible to account for the transition from a motionless paradigm to a moving image. But the insoluble form the problem takes for Proclus arises because he understands Plato’s own solution (soul, as self-moving motion) as itself an imitation of a motionless paradigm. How is motion an imitation of its opposite? I note in passing that Aristotle seems to have had a solution to this particular problem, but only from within his own theology, which Proclus rejects: Aristotle’s prime mover is essentially perfect actuality, and for him motion (as such) is imperfect actuality, and so an image of its cause.

In the final contribution Campbell is concerned with the relations among the *Timaeus*, the presocratics (especially Empedocles), Lucretius and Darwinism. He proposes that all Plato’s philosophical predecessors were non-teleologists (153-4), a tradition recycled by the Epicurean Lucretius, and again (on a new basis) by Darwin. It was Plato, Campbell asserts, who initiated the controversy over teleology, by subverting earlier natural scientific explanations of the origins of species, including mankind, in the *Timaeus*. Campbell notes a significant difference between all ancient anti-teleologists and Darwin: natural selection is limited to the initial origination of species, which are thereafter fixed, and there is no mutation or further extinction.
By contrast the zoogony of the Timaeus involves a reversed order of creation (highest to lowest), mutation as the creative mechanism, and no initial spontaneous generation or extinctions at all (158). In addition to teleology Timaeus' theory displays a 'Lamarkian' feature (inheritance of acquired characteristics), since the lower animals evolve from people who become depraved in one way or another (161-62). Campbell seems quite right here to highlight Plato's deliberate confusion of metamorphosis and reincarnation (162), and to draw the poetic parallel of Ovid's Metamorphoses in describing the way Plato has re-mythologised presocratic cosmogonies in subverting their message, while simultaneously reclaiming for teleology the gloss of scientific respectability (164-5). In the light of Plato's sophisticated literary strategy revealed here, one wonders just how seriously to take the dialogue's zoology, as it emerges from Campbell's analysis. Here again, attention to Plato's political and moral agenda might do more for our understanding of the Timaeus than evaluation by scientific criteria alone (as Campbell might perhaps agree).

This is an interesting group of papers. Not all the Timaeus comes within its purview, and not all pieces are of equal quality or breadth of perspective, but each offers something worth thinking about. The volume is finished to a very high standard, as is to be expected from the Classical Press of Wales. One reviewer's complaint is that the format of endnotes and separate bibliographies requires the reader to keep fingers in three separate places at once. A couple of references in the notes are missing from bibliographies (Joubaud 1992 at 79 nn.41, 44, cf. Joubaud 1991 at 80 n.53; Hardie 1986 at 175 n.70).

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