

# Plato's Theodicy and the Platonic Cause of Evil

by

Viktor Ilievski

Submitted to

Central European University  
Department of Philosophy

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

Supervisor:

Professor István Bodnár

Co-Supervisor:

Professor Gábor Betegh

External Supervisors:

Professor George Karamanolis,

Professor Jakub Jirsa

Budapest, Hungary

2014

I hereby declare that this dissertation contains no materials accepted for any other degrees in any other institution or materials previously written and/or published by another person, unless otherwise noted

Budapest, 26.08.2014

.....

Viktor Ilievski

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My greatest debt and deepest gratitude are owed to my supervisor, Professor István Bodnár and my co-supervisor Professor Gábor Betegh. Without their invaluable advice, extensive comments on the text and corrections of even some minute details, this thesis would never have seen the light of day. It was indeed shaped by their kind intervention out of the chaos of thoughts and information in my head. On a more personal note, I would like to acknowledge that the help I received from István and Gábor often transcended the expected boundaries of a regular teacher-student relationship.

I have derived great benefit from the discussions with Professor George Kramanolis at the University of Crete, and I feel privileged that he accepted the duty to be my external supervisor. His comments and suggestions made me acquire a different, better perspective on some important issues. My heartfelt thanks go to him. Of great help were also the meetings with Professor Chloe Balla from the University of Crete and Professor Jakub Jirsa from the Charles University. They were very kind to me during my stay in Rethymno and in Prague respectively, and provided valuable philosophical input, for which I am deeply grateful. Besides that, Professor Jakub Jirsa also very kindly accepted to act as my external supervisor, and thus showed me a great favor.

On this occasion, the contribution of my other teachers at the Philosophy Department of Central European University, as well as at the Department of Medieval Studies, must not remain unnoticed. I attended the courses of and learned a lot from the discussions and the written correspondence with Hanoch Ben-Yami, Gábor Buzási, Cristian-Nikolae Gaşpar, Mike Griffin, Ferenc Houranszki, Janos Kis, Nenad Mišćević, István Perczel, Howard Robinson and David Weberman. My deep gratitude goes to them as well. I am also indebted to Kriszta Biber, who was always very helpful and tolerant, even when she had to introduce me over and over again to the intricate art of copying books on the nearby copy machine.

Last but not least, let me express my gratitude to the administrative staff of CEU. Coming from where I come, it is still hard for me to believe that somebody can be, for no special reason, so efficient, kind and ready to help as everybody I met here was. It goes without saying that I will never forget the generosity of CEU, which provided funding for four and a half long years during my MA and PhD studies at the University.

## ABSTRACT

The problem of evil, or the seeming contradiction involved in simultaneously holding the beliefs in the existence of an omnibenevolent Deity and the reality of evil present in the world he created, has been engaging the minds of philosophers and theologians for centuries. Many theists have tried to face this problem by defending God's cause, or by justifying the presence of badness in the world created and managed by a supremely good Being. These attempts are called theodicies. Coupled with and inseparable from the theodicean efforts are the investigations of the philosophers and the theologians aimed at isolating the original cause of all evil, so that the responsibility for it could be transferred from God to that entity or phenomenon. Exactly these are the issues with which I occupy myself in this dissertation, although from a specific viewpoint. More precisely, my research interest lies in the theodicy and the theory of evil as conceived and presented by Plato.

However, no statement concerning the content of the phrases 'Platonic theodicy' and 'Platonic theory of evil,' would be readily acceptable to anyone, or totally divorced from the aura of contentiousness and controversy. Some critics will find the first more-or-less elaborate theodicy in the fragments of the Early Stoics, while others will credit Plotinus or St. Augustine with the introduction of the main theodician strategies, prevalent and popular even today. Many others will hold that Plato's theory of evil, if he had one at all, was rather impromptu and inconsistent. Therefore, the overarching aim of this work is to demonstrate that none of the above beliefs fully corresponds to the truth.

My dissertation consists of two parts. In Part One I focus on specific sections and passages of the *Republic*, the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*, in order to demonstrate that Plato was indeed seriously engaging with the problem of evil, and that he devised a much wider variety of theodicean strategies than it is usually thought. Among them are the Freedom of choice solution, the Principle of plenitude, the Rival substance solution, the Aesthetic theme. In Part Two I explore passages from a group of Latter Middle and Late dialogues, namely the *Theaetetus*, the *Timaeus*, the *Politicus* and the *Laws*, from which most of Plato's mature theory of evil may be

extracted. There I argue for the so-called ‘material theory’ of the origin of evil, and try to demonstrate that Plato never wavered between a corporeal and psychic cause of evil.

Thus the two basic theses which I wish to put forward in this dissertation are: a) that Plato did his best to provide a relatively comprehensive theodicy; b) that despite appearances to the contrary, he had a consistent theory of evil, and that he identified the corporeal constituent of the universe as the cause of its existence. My hopes are that this dissertation will offer at least a small contribution to the investigation of Plato’s theory of evil, and especially to the question of Plato’s theodicy, which is one of the rare underdeveloped areas in the field of Platonic studies.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>PART I</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>PLATO’S THEODICY</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>CHAPTER I: THEODICY IN THE REPUBLIC</b> .....	<b>15</b>
I.1 The first profanation of traditional religion – the gods as dispensers of both good and evil.....	15
I.2 Plato’s answer to the first profanation .....	20
I.2.1 Some principles of Platonic theology .....	21
I.2.2 The Problem of Evil in the Republic II.....	25
I.2.3 Theodicy in the Republic? .....	31
I.3 Theodicy in the Myth of Er .....	34
I.3.1 The Platonic myth.....	34
I.3.2 The Myth of Er: an overview.....	38
I.3.3. The theos anaitios dictum .....	46
I.3.3.1 The lottery episode in the Myth of Er.....	48
I.3.4 Aitia helomenou: the problem of free agency and individual moral responsibility.....	55
I.3.4.1 Does Plato operate with the notion of the will?.....	56
I.3.4.2 Reincarnation, determinism and persistence of personal identity in the Myth of Er.....	64
I.4 Summary.....	73
<b>Chapter II. Theodicy in the <i>Timaeus</i></b> .....	<b>75</b>
II.1 The second profanation of traditional religion: divine envy .....	75
II.2 Plato’s answer to the second profanation .....	81
II.2.1 The concept of phthonos and the meaning of divine goodness in the <i>Timaeus</i> .....	83
II.3 Implicit and explicit theodicean strategies in the <i>Timaeus</i> .....	91
II.3.1 The principle of plenitude .....	91
II.3.2 Personal responsibility .....	96
II.3.3 A factor beyond god’s control: the Timaeian Necessity .....	98
II.4 Personal responsibility abandoned? .....	103
II.5 Summary .....	107

Chapter III. Theodicy in the <i>Laws X</i> .....	109
III.1 The Natural Theology of the <i>Laws</i> .....	109
III.2 Plato and the Aesthetic Theme.....	114
III.3 Inescapability of divine justice and personal responsibility.....	122
III. 4 Summary and some further remarks .....	127
<b>PART II.....</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>THE ORIGIN OF EVIL .....</b>	<b>131</b>
Chapter I Traces of the Platonic Theory of Evil in the <i>Theaetetus</i> .....	132
I.1 Setting the Scene: the <i>Theaetetus</i> Digression.....	133
I.2 Is Plato’s theory of Forms present in the <i>Theaetetus</i> ?.....	137
I.3 Evil in the <i>Theaetetus</i> 176a.....	143
I.3.1 The status of to agathon in 176a6 .....	144
I.3.2 The status of the hypenantion in 176a5 .....	146
I.3.3 The status of ta kaka and their relation to the hypenantion .....	148
I.3.4 The status of anankē in 176a6 and its relation to the hypenantion .....	150
I.3.5 ‘Mortal nature’ and the evils.....	154
I.3.6 Excursus: Phaedo 60b-c and the necessary coupling of pleasure and pain .....	157
I.3.7 Back to the <i>Theaetetus</i> : alternative view on anankē in 176a8 .....	161
I.4 Summary.....	165
<b>CHAPTER II The Platonic Theory of Evil in the <i>Timaeus</i> and the <i>Politicus</i> .....</b>	<b>166</b>
II.1 The origin of Evil in the <i>Timaeus</i> .....	166
II.1.1 Necessity and the Errant Cause .....	166
II.1.2 The Receptacle and the primordial chaos.....	174
II.1.3 Necessity as the origin of evil .....	178
II.2 The origin of evil in the <i>Politicus</i> .....	182
II.2.1 The myth of the <i>Politicus</i> .....	182
II.2.2 To sōmatoeides in the <i>Politicus</i> myth.....	187
II.3 Does Plato propose a conflicting theory of the origin of evil in the <i>Laws X</i> ?.....	193
II.4 Summary .....	203
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>205</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>210</b>

## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Ag.</i>	Aechilus, <i>Agamemnon</i>
<i>Cat.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Categories</i>
<i>CG.</i>	St. Augustine, <i>City of God</i>
<i>Const. Ath.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Athenian Constitution</i>
<i>Crat.</i>	Plato, <i>Cratylus</i>
<i>De. An. Procr.</i>	Plutarch, <i>De Anima Procreatione in Timaeo</i>
<i>DK.</i>	Diels, H. and Kranz, W. (eds.), <i>Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker.</i>
<i>DL.</i>	Diogenes Laertius, <i>Vitae Philosophorum</i>
<i>Enn.</i>	Plotinus, <i>Enneads</i>
<i>Epin.</i>	Plato, <i>Epinomis</i>
<i>Euthyph.</i>	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i>
<i>Gorg.</i>	Plato, <i>Gorgias</i>
<i>Hdt.</i>	Herodotus, <i>Histories</i>
<i>Il.</i>	Homer, <i>Iliad</i>
<i>Leg.</i>	Plato, <i>Laws</i>
<i>LSJ.</i>	Liddell, H.G., Scott, R. and Jones, H.S. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i>
<i>Mem.</i>	Xenophon, <i>Memorabilia</i>
<i>Met.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Metaphysics</i>
<i>ND.</i>	Cicero, <i>De Natura Deorum</i>
<i>Od.</i>	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i>
<i>Phd.</i>	Plato, <i>Phaedo</i>
<i>Phdr.</i>	Plato, <i>Phaedrus</i>
<i>Phil.</i>	Plato, <i>Philebus</i>
<i>Phys.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Physics</i>
<i>Plt.</i>	Plato, <i>Politicus</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i>
<i>Princ.</i>	Origen, <i>De Principiis</i>

<i>Prot.</i>	Plato, <i>Protagoras</i>
<i>Rep.</i>	Plato, <i>Republic</i>
<i>Soph.</i>	Plato, <i>Sophist</i>
<i>SVF.</i>	von Arnim, H. F. A. (ed.). <i>Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta</i>
<i>Sym.</i>	Plato, <i>Symposium</i>
<i>Th.</i>	Hesiod, <i>Theogony</i>
<i>Tht.</i>	Plato, <i>Theaetetus</i>
<i>Tim.</i>	Plato, <i>Timaeus</i>
<i>WD.</i>	Hesiod, <i>Works and Days</i>

# INTRODUCTION

*alla de myria lygra kat'anthropous alalētai  
pleiē men gar gaia kakōn, pleiē de thalassa*

*Yet countless miseries wander among humans;  
for full is the earth with evils and full is the sea*  
(Hesiod, *WD* 100-101)

The veracity of Hesiod's observation has not been denied often, except by those who embrace the strongly counter-intuitive thesis that all harm done and experienced by human agents and forced on them by nature is somehow illusory.<sup>1</sup> Even today, in the era of free distribution of information, scientific and technological advancement and material prosperity, right there in front of everybody's eyes, nations are waging bloody wars against each other, women are being raped and brutally slain, children suffer terribly at the hands of their own parents, and unspeakable atrocities of all kinds are being committed. Nasty diseases, extreme temperature, earthquakes claim their victims all over the world; innocent animals die in agony enveloped by flames of raging forest fires. We are usually appalled by the pain and injustice men inflict upon one another, shaken at the sight of the unbounded power of the elements to wreak havoc and destruction among the living entities inhabiting this earth. And not seldom we problematize these phenomena, which may be all together subsumed under the name 'evil'. The evil that the living entities experience and do poses before us not only the practical problem of survival in hostile environment, but also the existential problem of "whether and how a life laced with suffering and punctuated by death can have any positive meaning".<sup>2</sup> Still, the *philosophical problem of evil*, in its acute form, does not arise until God is introduced into the equation.

---

<sup>1</sup> For a brief statement and comment on this understanding of evil, see Davis 1993, p. 33 and p. 36. Herman (1993, Ch. I) calls it 'the Illusion Solution' to the problem of evil, and discusses it together with twenty other solutions which he finds in the writings of a representative group of thinkers, from Plotinus and St. Augustine to John Hick. For the Illusion Solution, see especially pp. 24, 37-41, 62-64.

<sup>2</sup> Adams & Adams 1990, p. 1

Nowadays, the philosophical problem of evil is usually explored within the context of traditional monotheism and the attempts of its rebuttal. This is only reasonable, because the existence of a Deity endowed with attributes of omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence squares badly with the obvious omnipresence of miseries in the world. In a situation like this, the question ‘why does God permit the presence of evils?’ naturally imposes itself. As Hume puts it, paraphrasing Epicurus: “Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?”<sup>3</sup>

Hume’s worry is legitimate. Because, if an all-knowing God indeed existed, he would be conscious of every instance of injustice and pain that is being inflicted or suffered; if he were all-good, he would not will for evils to reside among his creatures, and if he were all-powerful, he would be able to prevent or abolish them. The propositions which affirm a) God’s existence; a’) his possession of the above three divine attributes, and b) the existence of evil, simply do not fit very well together. Now, some people will claim that the theist (who believes that evil is real) is here caught up in a contradiction, which is entailed by the conjunction of the above propositions: “In its simplest form, the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that any two of them were true the third would be false.”<sup>4</sup> In this way is generated the so-called logical argument from evil, which attempts to show “not merely that traditional theism lacks rational support, but rather that it is positively irrational,”<sup>5</sup> i.e. to disprove the existence of the traditionally understood God. A slightly less binding variant is the evidential argument from evil, which is supposed to show only that the presence of evil constitutes strong evidence against the existence of God, or makes the existence of God highly improbable.<sup>6</sup>

But what in fact is evil? Although without a doubt a notoriously difficult concept, in modern debates the term which stands for it is often taken as self-explanatory. For example, Vardy (1992) does not attempt any definition of the concept he is going to write about. Peterson (1992, p. 2) simply notes that evil is recognized in its variants of natural and moral evil and lists

---

<sup>3</sup> Hume 2007 (1799), p. 74

<sup>4</sup> Mackie 1990, p. 25. Of the same opinion is McCloskey (1960, p. 97): “Evil is a problem for the theist in that a contradiction is involved in the fact of evil on the one hand, and the belief in the omnipotence and perfection of God on the other. God cannot be both all-powerful and perfectly good if evil is real.” For criticism of the ‘contradiction thesis’ see Plantinga 1974, pp. 12-24

<sup>5</sup> Mackie 1982, p. 149

<sup>6</sup> See Plantinga 1974a, pp. 59-64; Adams & Adams 1990, p. 16, and cf. van Inwagen 2006, p. 8

a few examples. Plantinga asserts that “the world does indeed contain a great deal of evil”<sup>7</sup>, and then illustrates his claim with some quotations which describe various kinds of suffering imposed on human beings by nature and by maleficent acts of other humans, as well as with one example of utter moral decadence. A much more extensive – although by no means exhaustive – list of the “misery and wickedness of men”<sup>8</sup> is given by Hume, in Part 10 of his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. And the catalogue of authors who ‘define’ evil extensionally or by ostensive means, i.e. by enumerating instances of moral and natural evil<sup>9</sup> could go on. An obvious feature of their characterization of evil is that they all see it mostly, if not exclusively, as connected with the mental and physical anguish that sentient beings, predominantly human, experience. Herman’s ‘definition’ of evil, although also extensional, is nevertheless more comprehensive, both in scope and in reference, since it includes the feeling of disappointment with the workings of Providence and extends over non-human animals and angels. This author identifies multifarious forms of evil, which “range from unfulfilled ritual requests and unanswered prayers, to the tragic loss of loved ones and friends, to pain, anxiety and death for oneself and others, and to the suffering of sentient creatures in general and the sub-human, and, possibly, super-human levels.”<sup>10</sup> Van Inwagen is most concise and least precise: “The word ‘evil’ when it occurs in phrases like ‘the argument from evil’ or ‘the problem of evil’ means ‘bad things’.”<sup>11</sup> Singer’s account, on the other hand, is very rich and detailed, but confined to the psychological understanding of evil which explains this phenomenon as a mental property of somewhat deranged human beings. It is defined as “[d]oing or willing of what is bad for its own sake. *This is what evil, in its most extreme or malignant form, consists in.*”<sup>12</sup> However, ‘the bad’ he has in mind is beyond ordinary badness; it refers to acts “horrendously wrong, that cause immense suffering and are done with an evil intention or from an evil motive, the intention or motive to do something horrendously wrong causing immense unwarranted suffering.”<sup>13</sup> It is exactly this psychological understanding of evil as wicked maliciousness that makes some

---

<sup>7</sup> Plantinga 1974a, p. 7

<sup>8</sup> Hume 2007 (1799), p. 68

<sup>9</sup> Plantinga in turn defines moral and natural evil as follows: “The former is evil that results from some human being’s going wrong with respect to an action that is morally significant for him; any other evil is natural evil.” (1974b, p. 166)

<sup>10</sup> Herman 1993, pp. viii f.

<sup>11</sup> van Inwagen 2006, p. 4

<sup>12</sup> Singer 2004, p. 204

<sup>13</sup> *op. cit.* p. 205

philosophers desist or shy away from using the very term, and replace it instead with ‘badness’. In this text I shall retain the term ‘evil’ to refer both to moral failings and natural calamities, but also to the inherent imperfection of the physical world, and only occasionally employ the term ‘badness’ and the phrase ‘bad things’. They will be used as synonymous with ‘evil’, as warranted by van Inwagen. I shall do so because the term has become a matter of convention: after all, people are troubled by ‘the problem of evil’, not ‘the problem of badness’. Besides, ‘evil’ may be given a broader scope than the one allowed by Singer. With this I do not mean the colloquial usages like in ‘necessary evil’, ‘lesser of two evils’ and ‘evil woman’, which are obviously inaccurate and have merely dramatic force, but something like the following: “Ordinary English reserves the term ‘evil’ for what is *morally* sinister, but philosophers and theologians have for centuries lumped all of life’s ‘minuses’ together under that rubric, giving ‘evil’ a very wide significance.”<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, I shall take ‘evil’ to refer to every phenomenon, including actions of living beings, which, by its intensity, seriously obstructs the individual’s attempt to obtain happiness. Under this rubric falls all the harm done by wicked humans, then person’s own vices; natural disasters, devastating illnesses – physical and mental, harm done by non-human animals and insects; and finally, the very facts of transitoriness, imperfections and inability to be everything we could or would like to be.<sup>15</sup>

Faced with the challenge that the problem of evil presents, the theists may invest their efforts in “the defending of God’s cause,”<sup>16</sup> which is often called *theodicy*.<sup>17</sup> A theodicy – in the

---

<sup>14</sup> Adams & Adams 1990, p. 1. A similar position is taken also by Hick (2010, p. 12): “In English ‘evil’ is usually, although not always, used in a comprehensive sense, and we then distinguish under it the moral evil of wickedness and such non-moral evils as disease and natural disaster.” Cf. Swinburne 1998, p. 10, who chooses to replace ‘evil’ with ‘bad’, probably because he believes that the word ‘evil’ should be most appropriately used as a predicative ascribed to a moral agent, since only an agent can be evil, in the sense of having evil intentions; an earthquake, flood, famine, bear attack are thus bad, but not evil. However, although they obviously cannot be evil as an agent can be, still they can be understood as evils in the broader sense, as pointed out by Adams & Adams and Hick. The ordinary language also distinguishes between badness and evil on account of severity. Upon experiencing an unpleasantly rainy day, we may complain of the ‘bad weather’, but if the rain persists and causes inundation which threatens lives and properties, we may report that ‘a great evil has befallen us’. Besides, Swinburne himself has no qualms about using the term ‘evil’ as part of the phrases ‘moral evils’ and ‘natural evils’.

<sup>15</sup> These are the already known kinds of evil – moral and natural, plus the so called metaphysical evil. For a short but satisfactory description of these three kinds of evil, see Hick 2010, pp. 12ff.

<sup>16</sup> Kant 1996 (1791)

<sup>17</sup> The term, composed of the Greek words *theos* – ‘god’ and *dikē* – ‘justice’, and meaning ‘justification of God’, was introduced by Leibniz, in his 1710 work *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*.

narrower sense of the word, as it is commonly used<sup>18</sup> – presupposes God’s existence and counteracts the argument from evil by *explaining* why God permits evil. Of course, as far as the challenge of the argument from evil is concerned, no additional proof of God’s existence is needed – provided a satisfactory answer to the question ‘whence evil?’ is offered, the problem ceases to jeopardize the theist’s belief. Besides, in relation to the problem of evil contemporary philosophers of religion usually distinguish *theodicy* from *defense*. Within the frames of this distinction, theodicy is taken to refer to the attempt to offer a rather plausible explanation of the compatibility of a world full of evils with the existence of an omnibenevolent creator, while defense is not meant to reasonably justify the world’s saturatedness with evil, but simply to show that the argument from evil is a non-starter, or that the presence of evil is not logically incompatible with the existence of God.<sup>19</sup>

Now, some authors claim that the philosophical problem of evil has no serious bearing not only on the atheists, but also on the theists who do not accept some basic tenets of traditional monotheism. Such are the assumptions that a perfectly good God has created the world from nothing and that he is omnipotent.<sup>20</sup> Should these criteria, however, be taken as a standard with respect to a philosopher’s interest or disinterest in the issue? To accept it as such would mean excluding Plato – and, for that matter, all ancient Greek and Roman philosophers – from the circle of thinkers intrigued by the problem of evil, considering that the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* was totally foreign to the Greek mind, and that Plato’s creator god is not omnipotent in at least that specific sense – he is fashioning the world out of already given material.<sup>21</sup> To accept the claim that the problem of evil does not arise and therefore no theodicy is needed, or even

---

<sup>18</sup> In its broader sense, ‘theodicy’ may refer both to the defense of God’s goodness, and to the philosophical treatment of issues related to the proofs for God’s existence and his possession of divine attributes. Understood in this way, it becomes coextensive with natural theology. It seems that Ritter (1933, pp. 380-382) uses the term in this broader sense when he speaks of Plato’s theodicy in the *Laws*.

<sup>19</sup> See Plantinga 1974a pp. 27-29; Adams & Adams 1990, p. 3; Peterson 1992, pp. 7f; van Inwagen 2006 pp. 5ff. Cf. Tooley 2012, who, besides theodicy and defense, also recognizes *refutation*. Refutation is the strongest possible answer to the problem of evil, and attempts to establish that “there are no facts about evil in the world that make it even prima facie unreasonable to believe in the existence of God.”

<sup>20</sup> See Vardy 1992, pp. 18f. The other three basic assumptions he lists are: a) God remains interested in the world even after it has been created; b) God is good; c) God does not wish suffering to take place. Most of the other authors insist only on the omnipotence and omnibenevolence theses (see, e.g., Hick 2010, p. 4, Mackie 1990, p. 25, etc.), but I guess that, for a Christian thinker, omnipotence includes the ability to create something from nothing.

<sup>21</sup> This material, uncreated and independent as it is, offers some resistance and partly thwarts the creator’s noble intentions; he therefore produces not the best possible world *simpliciter*, but only our world, which is as good as it is possible for a world to be *in the given circumstances*.

possible, unless *creatio ex nihilo* and divine omnipotence is presupposed,<sup>22</sup> would also mean that the writing of this thesis, dedicated to Plato's theodicy and his inquiry into the root-cause of evil, is an extravagant and meaningless enterprise. Fortunately, the answer to the above question is negative. As a matter of fact, Plato never wrote a dialogue or treatise on the problem of evil – as, e.g., Plotinus did. Moreover, nowhere in his writings did he engage in a systematic discussion on the issue, and the remarks scattered throughout the Platonic corpus cannot be easily organized into a transparently univocal position. This is, however, more of a symptom of Plato's dialectic method and his readiness to constantly re-examine even some crucial doctrines and conclusions, than a sign of lack of interest in the problem of evil. Because, “[n]o system of philosophy which proposes to explain the mysteries of existence can leave untouched the undeniable and perplexing fact of wraps and imperfections in the fabric of our life, seemingly inherent in the very tissue of which it is woven.”<sup>23</sup> Plato was intrigued and disquieted by the presence, even predominance of evil in our world and keen to keep it as far away as possible from the gods, as it is obvious from at least three explicit statements in his dialogues.<sup>24</sup> Of course, the above distinction between theodicy and defense is hardly applicable to Plato, who was obviously not aware of the intricacies of the modern debate. Nevertheless, if we must categorize him, I believe that his efforts should be placed under the heading of theodicy, since he is trying to offer some plausible reasons why the presence of evil is not at odds with god's property of omnibenevolence. Plato starts with postulating god's goodness, and next tries to explain how he is such despite the world's insufficiencies and the positive failings. To my mind, this is a sufficient condition for having a theodicy. As for the omnipotence thesis and its relation with the theodicean efforts, the problem probably never arose for Plato, due to his pre-Judeo-Christian understanding of the divinity. Besides, the very concept of divine omnipotence is even nowadays rather obscure and puzzling and it is hard to say what it really means.<sup>25</sup> As a matter of fact, provided we endorse the simple understanding of omnipotence as ‘the capability to do

---

<sup>22</sup> Dobs (1931, pp. 554f) believes that no adequate solution to the problem of evil may give up the postulates of the reality of evil, God's moral character, and his omnipotence.

<sup>23</sup> Chilcott 1923, p. 27

<sup>24</sup> *Rep.* 379c, *Tht.* 176a, *Leg.* 900e and 906a. Plato in these passages observes that evils are unavoidable, more numerous in our lives than the goods, and that the gods do not have them and are not responsible for them. Cf. Leibniz's *Theodicy* I.8-12, where evil is said to be a necessary ingredient in the best possible world, and I.13-15, where he claims that nevertheless it is erroneous to consider that evils outweigh the goods.

<sup>25</sup> For an attempt to provide a coherent account of what an enlightened theist really tries to say with the assertion that God is omnipotent, see Swinburne 1973. For additional complications and the claim that essential omnipotence is logically impossible, see Sobel 2009, pp. 345-368 (especially 359ff).

everything that is logically possible', those eager to do so could probably try to defend divinity's omnipotence in Plato on the basis of the fact that the Receptacle is coeval with the Demiurge, and therefore the latter could not logically re-create it in order to better serve his purposes. But that is not needed. Firstly, because, as it was said, Plato was not constricted by the Christian concept of omnipotence, and secondly, because even today theodicy is possible for theist who swerve from the traditional understanding of God.<sup>26</sup>

Besides in theodicy, Plato was also interested in determining the underlying cause, or the 'why' of the evils.<sup>27</sup> Thus the two basic theses which I wish to put forward in the pages that follow are a) that Plato indeed offered a relatively comprehensive theodicy<sup>28</sup> and b) that he had a consistent theory of evil,<sup>29</sup> as well as that he blamed its existence on the corporeal constituent of the universe.<sup>30</sup>

At this point, a short note on the methodological approach is in place. The nature of the investigations in the field of history of philosophy is specific; it demands that the researcher rely primarily on interpretation of the primary sources, in this case the preserved ancient texts, and only secondarily on independent argument. Hence, I shall try to present my case by careful analysis of the relevant textual passages and statements, which are sometimes very short and almost cryptic, but nevertheless full of meaning and significance. Whenever this principle is applicable, I shall aim at establishing doctrinal consistency of the passages under scrutiny with the rest of the dialogue where it appears, as well as with the other dialogues that are going to be discussed in my dissertation. This does not mean that I accept the Unitarian view on Plato; it is only a reflection of my conviction that he, at least in the late period, formed a congruous theory of evil. The secondary literature will also receive the due attention, and I shall attempt a critical assessment of some of the key arguments related to our subject. Still, although I shall certainly try to engage in a debate on various issues with some of the previous critics, I hope to establish my major points mainly by emphatic interpretation of Plato's texts, i.e. by letting, so to say, the dialogues speak for themselves. In this dissertation only several dialogues will be discussed,

---

<sup>26</sup> Such are the so-called process theodicies, since a process theist normally contests the classical notions of some of God's attributes, omnipotence included. For an account and defense of process theodicy, see Ford 1992.

<sup>27</sup> Most notably in the *Timaeus*, the *Politicus* myth and in the *Laws X* (896d-e).

<sup>28</sup> Pace Bledsoe 1854, pp. 11-15, Steel 1995, and to some extent Broadie 2001, among others.

<sup>29</sup> Pace Lewis 1845, Green 1948, Meldrum 1950, Mohr 1981, Nightingale 1996 and Parry 2002, among others.

<sup>30</sup> Pace Chilcott 1923, Taylor 1928, Cornford 1937, Cherniss 1954, Morrow 1950, Clegg 1976 and Wood 2009, among others.

since the inclusion of all passages on evil or divinity would make the text unnecessarily bulky. In the part on theodicy, I shall utilize the *Republic*, the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*. This seems like a natural choice, because Plato's theodicean inquires commence with the *Republic* and conclude with the *Laws* X. In these three dialogues also the major statements of the Platonic theology are to be found. In the part dedicated to the problem of the origin of evil, I shall mostly focus on the *Theaetetus*, the *Timaeus*, the *Politicus* and the *Laws*, with occasional references to some other dialogues, like the *Phaedrus* and the *Philebus*. According to the interpretation offered in this dissertation, the *Theaetetus* passage on evil marks the starting point of the theory I am trying to establish as *the Platonic theory of evil*; in its mature form, it is given in the *Timaeus* and the *Politicus*, while some statements in the *Laws* X present the most serious challenge to the ideas I am trying to defend.

This work is divided into two parts. Part One is dedicated to the Platonic theodicy. Plato, on the one hand, accepts as true the following propositions: a) god exists;<sup>31</sup> b) god is good;<sup>32</sup> c) god is interested in the proper management of cosmic and human affairs;<sup>33</sup> d) god is capable of performing every task a divine being can perform;<sup>34</sup> on the other he is clear that e) evils exist, even predominate in the created universe.<sup>35</sup> Hence, the philosophical problem of evil arises for Plato. The fact that he was lacking the traditional monotheistic notion of omnipotence did not prevent him from trying to defend god's goodness in the face of evil. Plato's theodicy is separate from the attempts to prove god's existence and explain his majesty, i.e. it is to be understood in the narrower sense, as stated above. My contention is that the Platonic theodicy is much more elaborate than usually acknowledged and that it had strong formative influence on the Stoic and Plotinian theodicies. It is, however, not my intention to write a comparative study of the theodicies of Plato, the Stoics and Plotinus, but only to present the major features of the first one. The affinities among them are only briefly mentioned in the Conclusion.

Part One of this dissertation is divided into three chapters. Chapter I is dedicated to the analysis and interpretation of the relevant passages of the *Republic* II and X. It consists of three

---

<sup>31</sup> An account of the Platonic arguments for the existence of god in the *Republic*, the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* is given in Dombrowski 2005, Ch. V. In the *Republic* bit, however, he equates the Form of the Good with Plato's god, which need not be what Plato actually had in mind. Mayhew (2008) provides a detailed analysis of the arguments in the *Laws* X (pp. 61-63, and 104ff).

<sup>32</sup> See, e.g. *Tim.* 29e-30a; *Leg.* 897c-898c

<sup>33</sup> See *Rep.* 365d-e; *Leg.* 885b, 899d-905d

<sup>34</sup> See *Leg.* 901d

<sup>35</sup> See *supra*, fn. 24

main sections and a summary. In the first section the Homeric ‘heresy’ according to which the gods are bestowers of both good and bad to human kind is presented. Plato’s refutation of this misconception marks the starting point of the *Republic*’s theodicy, as much as his protest against the notion that god is envious marks the beginning of the Timaeian theodicy, and the argument against the deistic concept of uninterested god serves the same purpose for Plato’s theodicy in the *Laws X*. The second section of Chapter I is dedicated to the analysis of Plato’s answer to the above challenge, and also contains a brief digression on the Platonic ‘reformed theology’. Plato’s argument is presented in book II of the *Republic*, and it is based on the logically derived proposition that an essentially good being, as god is, cannot produce or cause anything evil. I argue that the conclusion of Plato’s argument, i.e. the passage 379c, does not only represent the first formulation of the problem of evil, but also has significant theodicean import and actually marks the historical beginning of the inquiry in this discipline. Section three of Chapter I deals with the theodicy of the *Republic X*, more precisely with the famous Myth of Er. It contains some reflections on Platonic myth in general, and an overview of the Myth of Er. It also contains a digression on the concept of the will in Plato and his philosophy of action, wherein I conclude that in order to explain how action, or more precisely, the act of making choice, transpires in the Myth of Er, we need not resort to the notion of the will, but may remain content with the desire-belief pair. Still, the main point I attempt to argue for in section three is that the *theos anaitios’ aitia helomenou* dictum (617e4-5) and its corollaries represent a relatively successful theodicean strategy of transferring the responsibility for the evils that infest human lives from god to the individual agent. This is so despite the objections of some scholars who charge Plato with inconsistency, thinking that his insistence on personal responsibility is marred by the copious references to the workings of chance and determinism, as well as by the problems of infinite regress of moral responsibility and discontinuity of personal identity, engendered through the doctrine of metempsychosis. I attempt to show that none of these objections are really detrimental to Plato’s cause, and that he satisfactorily absolves god from responsibility, with the help of what might be called ‘the freedom of choice defense’.

Chapter II, dealing with the theodicy of the *Timaeus*, consists of four main sections and a summary. In section one the ‘heresy’ of divine *phthonos* is presented, mainly through some reflections on its utilization in Herodotus’ *Histories*. I argue that the term *phthonos* refers to a complex emotion that might be defined as a feeling of envy at the goods the others possess, and

grudgingness in the bestowal of one's own goods, as well as that it should not be translated as 'jealousy', a term which refers to a different emotion. The second section is dedicated to Plato's answer to the challenge of divine *phthonos*, and his understanding of divine goodness. Section three of Chapter II deals with the Timaeian theodicean strategies, and is itself divided in three subsections. In the first one I argue that Plato justifies the existence of diversity and the consequent inequality and injustice in the universe by implicitly having recourse to what Lovejoy called the Principle of Plenitude. I try to defend the concept's applicability to the *Timaeus* against Broadie's criticism, but also to expose some of the mistakes in Lovejoy's own account. The second subsection is dedicated to the issue of personal responsibility and the freedom of choice defense, which is being analyzed in greater detail in section three of Chapter I. The final subsection of section three touches upon the recalcitrant factor of Necessity as another candidate upon which the responsibility for the existence of badness in the universe may be transferred. Nevertheless, the ontology and the nature of Necessity will not be discussed there; that task is to be met in Part Two of this dissertation. Section four of Chapter II is yet another digression in which I turn my attention to two curious passages from the *Timaeus* (86d-e, 87b), which seemingly contradict the previous statements concerning the individual responsibility of the agent. Here I align with Cornford, who holds that there is a way to interpret these passages in a way which is not damaging to the notion of personal responsibility.

Chapter III focuses on the theodicy of the *Laws X* and consists of three sections and a summary. In the first section an overview of Plato's natural theology in the *Laws X* is given, including summaries of his answers to the challenges of atheism, deism and corruptibility of the gods. In section two I argue that the concluding part of Plato's argument against deism (903b-905d) is not an eschatological myth, as it is often referred to, but a ground-breaking theodicean account. Plato here introduces the Aesthetic theme. The Aesthetic theme aims at affirming the overall beauty and perfection of the universe, to which the seeming blemishes of the parts actually contribute. It is a strategy embraced and further developed by the Stoics, Plotinus, St. Augustine, and a great favorite of a long line of theodacists, up to the present day. Section three focuses once again on the strategy of choice of the Myth of Er, also quite prominent in the *Timaeus* – the free choice defense. The motif of personal responsibility for the evils we experience is present in all three dialogues analyzed in Part One of my dissertation. This, however, does not mean that Plato is intent upon defending god's goodness by ascribing all evil

to the individual soul, or upon locating the source of evil in the soul. The inquiry into the origin of evil, as conceived by Plato, is undertaken in Part Two of this dissertation.

Part Two deals with the ontology of evil, or with the inquiry into its nature and cause. Now, ever since Leibniz's *Theodicy* was published, it has become customary to analyze evil as falling into three kinds: metaphysical, physical (or natural), and moral. With the words of the author himself: "Evil may be taken metaphysically, physically and morally. *Metaphysical evil* consists in mere imperfection, *physical evil* in suffering, and *moral evil* in sin."<sup>36</sup> But is this taxonomy of evil applicable to Plato? The answer to this question is no and yes, with stronger emphasis on the latter. Plato's outlook on evil is not simple, and shares in the complexity of his philosophy in general. So, Plato as transcendentalist, as soteriologist, as the one who recommends that "the entire soul must be turned away from the world of becoming until its eye is able to keep up contemplating reality, and at the brightest of all realities, that is, the one we call the Good" (*Rep.* 518c), probably does not see anything concerning the petty human affairs as either good or bad. For the departing Socrates of the *Crito* and the *Phaedo* even death is not something one should be disturbed about. The perfect philosopher of the *Theaetetus* Digression and those in the *Republic*'s simile of the Cave who after having contemplated true reality return into the cave, are well acquainted with the difference between substance and shadow, and therefore would not recognize suffering as true evil; only personal moral depravity would be so, because it prevents the soul from establishing union with the divine. However, Plato is not only a transcendentalist, but also a moral philosopher, a philosopher of religion, etc., who addresses the common man. As such, he is more than aware of the "evils of human life" (*ta anthrōpeia kaka*, *Rep.* 517d5), and the need to defend god's goodness against them. In this capacity, he recognizes both moral failings and suffering brought about by human agents and non-human causes as evils (*kaka*), as it will be shown later in this dissertation. He also recognizes *to kakon*, the origin of *ta kaka*. It is equivalent with *to sōmatoeides*, which in the *Politicus* replaces the somewhat abstract *anankē*. I take *to kakon* to stand for the first item in Leibniz's taxonomy, i.e. the metaphysical evil, although not as something evil in itself, but simply as the origin of all imperfection. Now, somebody may object that arguing against the existence of evil principle in Plato and his dualism in this regard, implies that for him there is no metaphysical evil. However, the concept of metaphysical evil does not necessarily imply the existence of an evil entity, or of evil *per se*, as

---

<sup>36</sup> Leibniz 2007 (1710), p. 139

obvious from Leibniz's brief characterization above. Therefore, I believe that the tripartite division of evil may be to some extent applicable to Plato, for reasons of convenience and clarity of exposition. So, somewhat differently from Leibniz, I understand metaphysical evil in the Platonic context to stand for the *cause* of the very fact that the sensible world is lesser than the Intelligible, and therefore divided, corruptible, finite and permeated with numerous other imperfections. Obviously enough, the world is such due to the bodily nature and the imperfect realization of the Forms in the corporeal substratum. Under the heading of physical evil may be subsumed every variety of suffering, bodily and mental, which living beings experience due to their own actions and attitudes, due to the interference of other living beings, and due to natural causes. Moral evil refers to injustice and other vices that contaminate the soul, and can be in principle experienced only by human beings. I take the latter two to be symptoms, or rather progressive stages of the metaphysical evil; when the innate imperfection of the sensible realm is projected on the animated individual bodies, physical evil is born, while when the same imperfection is, through the body, transferred to the individual soul, moral evil arises. Plato, of course, nowhere explicitly utilizes this taxonomy, but he does recognize physical suffering as something unwanted (if only to discard it as real evil), certainly ponders over the badness of moral failure,<sup>37</sup> and asks himself how are the various instances of badness possible, i.e. what is the cause behind this phenomenon. Here I shall limit my investigation to the problem of metaphysical evil, more precisely to the search for the cause of all evil. Physical evil and evil in the soul, or vice, will not be discussed, except for some occasional remarks. This is partly due to limitations of space, but also due to my conviction that the origin of evil should be sought on a more basic level than those of the embodied soul and the individual body. The badness of the latter two, so to say, supervenes upon the factor which makes all badness possible.

Part Two of my dissertation is divided in two chapters. Chapter I deals with a very significant passage on evil from the *Theaetetus* (176a), and consists of three major sections and a summary. In the first section an overview of the *Theaetetus* Digression is given, so that the context in which our passage appears may be clearer. In the second section I argue for the thesis

---

<sup>37</sup> For the thesis that moral evil is, in Plato's eyes, the only truly bad thing, see Chilcott 1923, Broadie 2001, Wood 2009. Plato's calm and unperturbed attitude towards the natural catastrophes in the introductory part of the *Timaeus*, his refusal to acknowledge death as an evil in the *Apology* and the *Crito*, his explanation of distress and misery as effects of wrong choices, i.e. as just retribution for past mistakes, all speak in favor of that proposal. However, the evil in the soul is not some kind of a free-floating property. In my opinion, it is there due to ignorance, which is, on its side, born from the contact with the body.

that the Theory of Forms is present in the *Theaetetus* and utilized by Plato. Section three is the largest and is dedicated to the analysis of the passage on evil. There are several points that I try to establish there: a) that *tagathon* of 176a6 stands for *auto agathon*, Plato's highest entity; b) that *ta kaka* of 176a5 represent the individual instances of badness and should not be identified with the opposite (*hypoantion*) of the Good of 176a6; c) that the *hypoantion* of 176a6 and the *anankē* of 176a8 could denote the same entity – and in this way the whole passage could be read as an anticipation of the Timaeian theory of evil. Chapter II is dedicated to the investigation of the Platonic theory of evil in the *Timaeus* and the *Politicus*, and in it I defend the so-called 'material theory'. The chapter consists of three major sections. In the first one I turn to the concepts of Necessity, the Receptacle and the primordial chaos, and argue that Plato in the *Timaeus* identifies *anankē* as the prime cause of all badness. Section two is dedicated to the analysis of the *Politicus* myth. My conclusion is that, despite the various incongruencies with regard to the *Timaeus* story, the *Politicus* theory of evil is in full agreement with the Timaeian one; the only difference is one of terminology. In the third section, I turn once again to the *Laws* X, and argue that, despite appearances to the contrary, Plato there does not contradict himself by advancing a rival theory of evil, i.e. a theory which would locate the evil's origin in a psychic source.

# **PART I**

## **PLATO'S THEODICY**

# CHAPTER I: THEODICY IN THE REPUBLIC

## I.1 The first profanation of traditional religion – the gods as dispensers of both good and evil

Plato's theodicean efforts start with his determination to face and subvert "the biggest lie about the biggest things."<sup>38</sup> This is the notion that the gods act whimsically, that they are selfish, cruel, and unjust. He leaves their mutual dealings aside, by declining to interpret the episodes like the *Theomachia* of the *Iliad*<sup>39</sup> and the many instances of morally reprehensible acts perpetuated among the gods themselves, and simply bans such stories from his Kallipolis.<sup>40</sup> Even if tales as those depicting Uranus' behavior and Cronos' retaliation,<sup>41</sup> as well as the latter's perdition brought about through Zeus' hands<sup>42</sup> were true, which is highly unlikely, they should be kept secret and related only to the selected few.<sup>43</sup> Their demeanor toward the world and the creatures inhabiting it, however, had to be taken into account, since the work of the early poets gave rise to two theologically ruinous, but popular misconceptions, which ultimately lean on 'the biggest lie'. These were the idea that everything, both good and evil, comes from god, and the notion of divine envy or grudgingness. Despite the philosophers'<sup>44</sup> and the dramatists'<sup>45</sup> occasional revolt against them, by Plato's times they had already been deeply rooted in the Greek mind. He deals with the first one<sup>46</sup> in the *Republic* II (especially at 379a-380c), and with the second, very concisely, in the *Timaeus* 29d-30a. Plato's opposition to these ideas marks the starting point of his pioneering efforts on the field of theodicy. The present chapter will be

---

<sup>38</sup> *Rep.* 377e. Cf. *Leg.* 888b

<sup>39</sup> Book XX and XXI

<sup>40</sup> *Rep.* 378c-e

<sup>41</sup> *Th.* 154-210

<sup>42</sup> *Th.* 453-506

<sup>43</sup> *Rep.* 378a

<sup>44</sup> Most notably Heraclites, DK B42, and Xenophanes, DK B12.

<sup>45</sup> See Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 750-762.

<sup>46</sup> Which is earlier both according to the order of presentation in this work, and according to the chronological order of examination in which Plato took them up.

dedicated to the theodicy of the *Republic*, and will start with the first challenge posed by the traditional Homeric religion, namely the assertion that the gods are dispensers of both good and evil. In the beginning, we shall present the misconception, as conceived by Homer and Hesiod, and then the reply which Plato gives to it in book II of the *Republic*. Finally, an analysis of the Myth of Er and its relevant theodicean ideas will be attempted. The theodicy of the Myth of Er may be viewed as a natural continuation and development of the rudimentary reflections on the issue given in the *Republic* II.

As far as divine regulation of human affairs is concerned, Plato, of course, has no qualms about acknowledging the gods as givers of good and beneficent things to humanity; the problem lies in the understanding that they are also the causes of badness and dispensers of bad things. That concept is present from the beginning of the recorded literary efforts, i.e. already in Homer's *Iliad*. It is copiously confirmed in the *Odyssey*<sup>47</sup> and in Hesiod's poems.<sup>48</sup>

Probably the most conspicuous lesson that the reader of the Homeric and Hesiodic epics learns is the theory that the human sphere is a playground of the gods, a playground on which they, most specifically their leader and master, Zeus, exercise their unlimited and inexplicable powers. What follows are several references from the texts themselves.

At the very beginning of the *Iliad* (I.1-5), Homer, invoking the Muse Calliope, declares that the crowding of the warriors' souls in the underworld, whose apparent cause had been Achilles' wrath, was in reality fulfillment of Zeus' will or plan (*dios boulē eteleieto*).<sup>49</sup> This

---

<sup>47</sup> Despite the nowadays still present understanding that the gods of the *Odyssey* are morally more advanced than those of the *Iliad*, in fact "[t]he same morality and theology underline both epics" (Allan, 2006, p. 26).

<sup>48</sup> "[O]ne should resist attempts to interpret the gods of Hesiod as if they were different from those of Homer" (*op. cit.*, p. 27). Even though in the *Works and Days* there are some obvious improvement of the understanding of morality in comparison with the *Iliad* (see, e.g. *WD*. 213-292; 320-335. Cf. Nelson, 1997; Beal 2005/2006), the task of proper theologizing was left to Plato, the sporadic efforts of some Pre-Socratics notwithstanding. Homer's and Hesiod's gods were divinities of a poet, not a theologian (Cf. Grube, 1951, pp. 65f). For a different view, according to which Homer envisioned a dual role for the gods – sometimes they were representing the dramatic personae of the ancient myths and the popular folk lore, when they were depicted as whimsical, unrestrained, often comic characters, but at other times they would stand for the majestic rulers of the universe, when their personalities were depicted as dignified guardians of truth and justice – see Calhoun 1939, esp. pp. 25ff.

<sup>49</sup> Discussing the import of the *Epic Cycle* for the problem of good and evil, Green (1948, p. 63) calls attention to the comment of an unknown Homeric scholiast to this passage. Among other interpretations of the *dios boulē* phrase, the scholiast offers a claim that "Zeus deliberately caused the war in order to relieve the encumbered earth from an excess of population," and then supports it by a quotation which used to form a part of the lost *Cypria* (see *Cypria* 3, in Evelyn-White, 1943, p. 496). It is interesting to note that the same motif of relieving the

conception is a natural expression of the post-naturalistic, but still early, non-reflexive concept of the world and the distribution of justice within it. Everything a human being experiences – good, evil and their mixture – is given to him by the almighty powers that control both the workings of nature and humans’ destiny. The governance of human destiny is in particular ascribed to Zeus, the supreme deity of the Greek Pantheon: in Homer, he is *tamias agathōn te kakōn te*<sup>50</sup> – the one who directs the distribution of good and evil. Zeus thus assumes a dual function as a dispenser of both good and bad things, since the poet does not recognize a positively evil force akin to the devil, unless it is Ate.<sup>51</sup> Her role is, however, not very prominent, and being Zeus’ daughter, she is ultimately under his control. Ate is strong and swift and often strives to injure mortal man, but her influence can be counteracted by taking shelter of the Prayers, who are also Zeus’ progeny.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, she does not act independently. On the occasion of coming to terms with Achilles, Agamemnon washes his hands clean from the disastrous consequences of his decision to take Bryseis away from Achilles by saying that it was the savage Ate who beguiled him in performing such a despicable act.<sup>53</sup> He, however, also adds that Ate (as well as Moira and Fury) was sent to cloud his mind *by Zeus*. Following in Agamemnon's wake, Achilles also identifies Zeus as the one who sends prodigious follies (*atas*) upon mankind.<sup>54</sup> In this way Ate remains just an immediate cause, fostered and controlled by higher powers.

There are many other passages throughout the *Iliad* where the turn of events, somebody’s ruin or exaltation is depicted as directly depending on the ill or good will of Zeus. At the

---

earth’s burden is mentioned as one of the reasons that made Krishna allow the bloody fratricidal war depicted in the great Indian epic *Mahābhārata* (approximately 4<sup>th</sup> century BC) to happen.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Adam 1911, p. 193. The phrase is an adaptation of a line of unknown origin, found in Plato’s *Rep.* 379e1.

<sup>51</sup> The Greek word *ate* means ‘folly’, ‘infatuation’, ‘delusion’, ‘guilt’, ‘transgression’, etc.

<sup>52</sup> *Il.* IX.504ff.

<sup>53</sup> *Il.* XIX.85ff. Finkelberg (1995, p. 16) calls this passage “a *locus classicus* illustrating how Homeric man would account for behavior derived from *ate*.” She goes on to explain that “the characteristic features of this kind of behavior are a temporary lack of understanding; attribution of the act to some external factor, usually the gods; and the fact that the agent is not recognized either by himself or by others as an autonomous causer of what he has done.” The conjunction of these features is supposed to exculpate the agent from the responsibility for his action, unlike the one who is acting under the influence of his own *atasthalie* (‘wickedness’, ‘recklessness’, ‘arrogance’, ‘folly’). A *locus classicus* for the latter is *Od.* I.33-35, where Zeus comments on the senseless crime of Aegisthus: “Look you now, how ready mortals are to blame the gods. It is from us, they say, that evils come, but they even of themselves, through their own blind folly, have sorrows beyond that which is ordained.” Siding with the speaker of these words, Plato will later on also strongly deny that there is any possibility to ascribe human error and wrongdoing to divine intervention.

<sup>54</sup> *Il.* XIX.270.

commencement of one of the great battles between the Achaeans and the Trojans, Zeus sprinkles bloody dew from the heavens, proclaiming thus his resolve to send many brave warriors to Hades on that day.<sup>55</sup> At XIV.64ff Agamemnon speculates that the defeat of his army is pre-arranged by Zeus and that they, instead of fighting, should sail back to their respective hometowns. In response, Odysseus says that Zeus has already ordained for them hardships and bloodshed till the day they die, implying that sailing away would not rescue them from danger, but would instead only bring embarrassment and contempt of the enemy.<sup>56</sup> Zeus is, however, not an exception; the other gods are also capable of tailoring the destiny of the mortals – Apollo, for example, is responsible for the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon.<sup>57</sup> In the course of the ferocious duel between Aeneas and Achilles, Hera urges Poseidon to act according to his own bidding and either spare Aeneas' life or let him die.<sup>58</sup> At IV.14ff Zeus proposes that maybe the Olympians should bring the war to its end, give Helen back to Menelaus and spare Priam and his city. Hera and Athena react with outrage and fury, and the former makes it clear that she will not desist from her resolve and will not rest until she sees Troy in ruins. This last instance especially vividly depicts the world as a playground of the gods, and the mortals as insignificant pieces in their often utterly whimsical and cruel games – the citizens of Troy, all but one, did nothing to incite Hera's deadly rage and hatred. It is simply at her disposal to destroy the population of an entire city, and she would not waver from her resolve even if petitioned by her husband and lord.

In the *Odyssey* III.153, Nestor complains that Zeus prepared ruinous doom for the Achaeans, and during the celebrated episode of Odysseus' journey to the underworld, while trying to come to terms with Ajax,<sup>59</sup> Odysseus claims that Zeus' is the sole responsibility both for his perdition and the sufferings of the Achaeans.

Next, Hesiod is also adamant that it is impossible to divert Zeus' will,<sup>60</sup> be that for the worse or for the better. This is also the natural conclusion of the story of Prometheus and his impetuous brother. Although the former is guilty of treachery towards the gods and the latter is

---

<sup>55</sup> // XIII.53-55.

<sup>56</sup> // XIV.83ff.

<sup>57</sup> // I.8-9.

<sup>58</sup> // XX.310ff.

<sup>59</sup> *Od.* XI.552-560.

<sup>60</sup> *Th.* 613.

the instrumental cause of the calamities that befall mankind, the true architect of human misery is actually Zeus, who simply out of feeling of hurt pride sends Pandora to distribute the evils throughout the earth.<sup>61</sup> In his *Works and Days*, Hesiod repeatedly proclaims that the will of the gods is supreme: at the very beginning, during his address to the Muses, he unambiguously credits Zeus for the happiness and distress of the human race; at *WD* 474 the peasant's harvest depends on Zeus' good or ill will, while the sailor's ruin or salvation is in the same way in the hands of the gods, because "from them comes the power over good and evil."<sup>62</sup>

Still, as the most emblematic illustration of the thesis that the gods' will is the origin of evil, stands Achilles' parable of the urns.<sup>63</sup> Addressing Priam not as a mortal enemy but as a consoler, Achilles first ascribes the responsibility for the terrible afflictions of men to the immortal gods, "for on this wise have the gods spun the thread for wretched mortals, that they should live in pain,"<sup>64</sup> and then continues with the tale of Zeus' urns. There are two of them in his mansion, one of good and the other of evil gifts, and he, according to his free choice and apparently without tangible reason, apportions to the mortals lots of happiness, distress, or mixture of both. There is thus no remedy for the ailments of life, there is no point in protesting – they are brought upon the mortals by the supreme will of Zeus, to which even the other gods bow in reverence. Achilles concludes his council to the broken-hearted king with an advice imbued with strong quietist spirit: *anskheo mē de odireo* – do not grieve but endure; incessant mourning will not bring your son back.

Plato in the *Republic* II undertakes the task to expose the notion that the gods are responsible for the bad things which happen to humans as a flagrant error on the part of the early poets. His primary example of that 'foolish blunder Homer or any other poet commit in relation to the gods' (370c9-d2), is exactly the story of the two jars.<sup>65</sup> But before focusing on Plato's argument, we should pay some attention to the context in which it is imbedded, and offer some preliminary remarks on his understanding of theology.

---

<sup>61</sup> *Th.* 570. The story of Prometheus and Zeus as the tailor of sad and maleficent destiny for the humans is also related in *WD*, 48-109

<sup>62</sup> *WD*, 699

<sup>63</sup> *Il.* XXIV.518ff.

<sup>64</sup> *Il.* XXIV.525-526.

<sup>65</sup> Plato quotes fragments of the story (with emendations) at 379d-380a, illustrating thus the conception of the gods he stands up against.

## I.2 Plato's answer to the first profanation

*Republic* 376e marks the beginning of the discussion crucial for the proper physical, psychological and moral development of the prospective guardians of Plato's perfect state: the one related to the didactic tactics to be applied in their education. Socrates, at first, takes a conservative stance on education, and proposes that the long-established system of strengthening the body by gymnastics and enriching the soul by music should be preserved. Of these, music comes first. Music<sup>66</sup> includes *logoi* – literature or tales – and tales are of dual character: true and false (*logōn de ditton eidos, to men alēthes, pseudos d' heteron*). The false ones should be imparted before the former; and as it is clear from 377a5-8, that is the only, indeed very limited, aspect of music that precedes education in gymnastics. These are the fables (*mythoi*), which are in general false, but also contain some grain of truth (*hōs to holon eipein pseudos, eni de kai alēthē*).<sup>67</sup> Socrates' conservatism, however, goes only that far. Now he advocates radical alteration of the accepted curriculum and strong censorship of both the old and the new material. Since the fables which are being related to the children during their early years are sure to have strong impact on the molding the youngsters' characters,<sup>68</sup> Adeimantus wholeheartedly agrees with Socrates that their content should be supervised and, if needed, censored.<sup>69</sup> That would, however, imply thorough revision of the great epics composed by Homer and Hesiod, claims Socrates.<sup>70</sup> The rationale for this move provided by him is that falsehood, especially harmful

---

<sup>66</sup> Shorey (1937, p. 175) writes: "*mousikē* is plying the lyre, music, poetry, letters, culture, philosophy, according to the context."

<sup>67</sup> In the light of what follows, this is a curious assertion. A while later, at 379a6-7, Socrates says that the god should always be represented as he in fact happens to be (*hoios tynchanei ho theos ōn, aei dēpou apodoteon*) – that is, good. How is, then, that the fables meant to be taught to the children are for the most part false? Adam's statement that 'Plato's object in this preliminary discipline is to train the character rather than the intellect' (1902, 376e) relieves the tension to some degree, but does not solve the contradiction. Plato might have wanted to point out that such was the character of the *mythoi* theretofore related, but after the constitution of the perfect state was drawn, they would be of a different type. Like the concluding myth of the *Republic*, they would contain elements of fable, but would, in general, convey ideas that are true.

<sup>68</sup> For the forceful character-molding impact of the ideas conveyed by the society's educators, see Bloom 1991, p. 351.

<sup>69</sup> See 377b3-c2.

<sup>70</sup> Plato is, however, not at odds with making use and reworking the material presented in their epics. For his varied and masterful employment of Homeric and Hesiodic themes in the *Republic* to suit his own purposes, see O' Connor 2007.

falsehood, shouldn't be taught to the children. The myths of the popular religion are manifestly false, since they depict the gods in an ill-suited way: as envious and violent beings, often plotting against each other and against those humans who have fallen from their grace – and the gods are simply not such. This kind of stories, which represent the greatest lie about the most important things, and are, moreover, related in an ugly way by their speaker (*to megiston kai peri tōn megistōn pseudo ho eipōn ou kalōs epseusato*), are most damaging to the soul of the young.<sup>71</sup> They shouldn't even be presented as allegories or stories with hidden purport (*hyponoiai*), since young boys are seldom unable to distinguish the deeper meaning from the letter of the text. Therefore, Socrates proposes new, reformed standards of understanding and depicting the gods.<sup>72</sup> These are Plato's own *typoi peri theologias*, a phrase which both William Green and McPherran render as 'Outlines of Theology.'<sup>73</sup> Their basis is the commitment to present the gods *exactly as they are*. At this point it seems useful to devote some space to a bit more general overview of Plato's 'theology in the making,' and a sketchy examination of its main theses.

## I.2.1 Some principles of Platonic theology

As it is obvious, Plato's critique of the popular religion of his days has nothing in common with Nietzsche's or Feuerbach's and Marx's criticism of Judeo-Christianity and

---

<sup>71</sup> Adam (1902, 377d) comments: "A distinction is drawn between a mere lie and a lie which is in itself *ou kalon*, unbeautiful and immoral in tendency... Such legends not merely misrepresent gods, but also corrupt mankind." The most palpable example of such a lie for Plato is Hesiod's account of the mutual dealings between Uranus and Cronos, and Cronos and Zeus. For the devastating effects of such stories on humanity, see *Euthyph.* 5e-6a, where the eponymous character of the dialogue uses precisely Cronos' punishment effected by Zeus to justify his intention to persecute his own father.

<sup>72</sup> "The reform of poetry is most immediately directed to Adeimantus and the teaching he drew from poetry in his speech in favor of injustice. On the basis of the 'reformed' poetry, Adeimantus could not have come to his conclusions." (Bloom 1991, p. 351-352). It could be so, but not necessarily. While Adeimantus, in 363a-367e, asks to be persuaded that being just is worthier and more advantageous than being unjust, Socrates' point here, at least for the time being, is different. He strives to establish that the gods are omnibenevolent and free from falsehood, as well as that death is not to be feared (386a ff). These are the things that the young guardians should learn first, and thus imbibe the virtues of piety and courage. Besides, Adeimantus in his critique of justice mostly relies on the writings of the elegiasts and the dramatists, while Plato specifically targets 'the greatest of the poets,' namely Homer and Hesiod. In his complaint that the poets extol injustice over justice, Adeimantus does indeed mention Hesiod, but quotes him out of context (see 364c6-d2); Hesiod never promoted such a view. Exactly the opposite is true, and most of the *Works and Days* can be interpreted as an invitation to mankind to change its evil ways and start honoring *dikē*.

<sup>73</sup> See Green 1948, p. 294 and McPherran 2006, p. 89. The only difference is that McPherran, unlike Green, does not use capital letters.

religion in general, respectively. Plato was a genuinely religious thinker,<sup>74</sup> and that fact does not need much elaboration or proof. However, penetrating the complexity of his religious views and determining the nature of the deities whose worship he recommended are arduous tasks. Here to this important subject only few sentences can be devoted.

Plato was not a polytheist in the ‘vulgar’ sense of the word,<sup>75</sup> but he was not a monotheist of a Christian kind either. Who or what were, then, these gods that Plato wanted to present to the attention of the populace in general, and to the attention of his guardians in particular? Clearly, they are not Cephalus’ gods from the beginning of the *Republic* (330d-331d). He, a *bona fide* representative of conventional religiosity, believes them to be favorably inclined to their propitiators and vindictive to the others, and hurries himself to a sacrifice at the first sight of a philosophical debate meant to examine his deep-rooted views on virtue and piety. Still, Bloom goes a step too far with his claim that “there is no assurance that these [i.e. ‘Plato’s gods’] are the Olympian gods or that they have anything in common with what Adeimantus understands a god to be.”<sup>76</sup> Plato always believed that public worship of the main deities of the Greek Pantheon,<sup>77</sup> but also of the chthonic gods, heroes, *daimones* and ancestral gods,<sup>78</sup> would bring benefit to the *polis*.<sup>79</sup> He was even favorably inclined to the newly introduced cults of some minor deities.<sup>80</sup> What is true of Plato in general, is also true of Plato of the *Republic*. From the criticism of Homer and Hesiod in the *Republic* II and III it is rather clear that his outcry is not directed against Zeus and Hera and the rest, but against the way they are depicted.<sup>81</sup> The ritual and the

---

<sup>74</sup> For the thesis that much of Plato’s metaphysics and epistemology is derived from the ecstatic model of the mystery religions, purified of their emotional character through rigorous intellectualism and rational inquiry, see Morgan 1992.

<sup>75</sup> See Taylor 1938, pp. 182 ff.

<sup>76</sup> Bloom 1991, p. 352

<sup>77</sup> See *Phdr.* 246d-247a, where the pure soul is said to abide close to the ‘race of gods,’ consisting of the twelve Olympians and an army of *daimones*; *Phdr.* 252c-253c gives a shortened list of the Olympians; see also *Leg.* 828a, where the feasts of the twelve gods distributed over the twelve months of the year are prescribed by law.

<sup>78</sup> See *Leg.* 717a-b

<sup>79</sup> See also *Tim.* 40d-41a, where the traditional gods are said to have been introduced by the ‘children of gods,’ who should not be distrusted with regard to the accounts that pertain to their family, although they speak without likelihood and necessary demonstration (*aneu te eikotōn kai anankaiōn apodeixeōn legousin*). At other places, gods for Plato are also the stars and the planets (*Tim.* 40d), the cosmos (*Tim.* 34b, 92c), and, of course, the Demiurge. He is, in fact, a mythical representation of *Nous*, which seem to be the supreme deity of Plato (*Tim.* 48a, *Phil.* 28e, *Leg.* 966e).

<sup>80</sup> See Socrates’ enthusiasm to visit the festival of Bendis at the beginning of the *Republic*, and his famous last wish at *Phd.* 118a. These passages, however, are also allegoric.

<sup>81</sup> Speaking of Plato’s ‘Reformation’ in general, Mueller (1936, p. 462) says: “This reform is directed against the poets and artists, against the confusion of human, anthropomorphic stories and pictures with the deities

gods of Kallipolis will be almost the same as those of 4<sup>th</sup> century Athens.<sup>82</sup> What are, then, the novelties introduced by Plato's reform? They are varied and indeed significant, although some of them cannot be directly discerned from the *Republic*. The following is but a brief sketch of them.

a) The gods become epitomes of virtue.<sup>83</sup> They are just (*Rep.* 352b) and cannot be turned to favor the unjust. They are perfectly wise, and therefore good.<sup>84</sup> Being good, the gods cannot produce anything but goodness (*Rep.* 379c).

b) Since the gods are such, they are practically unable to 'depart from their own form' (*Rep.* 380d). Ordinarily, a perfect being can change only for the worse, and thus any alteration of a god's being would involve deterioration, which is an unacceptable consequence. Therefore, the gods do not change.

c) Contrary to the above said, the citizen's perception of religion is supposed to be radically altered:

c`) The most easily accessible aspect of religion, namely the myth, must be heavily censored, and the citizens should hear stories of concord instead of quarrel (*Rep.* 378c-d), and in general "we should do our utmost that the first stories that they hear should be so composed as to bring the fairest lessons of virtue to their ears" (*Rep.* 378e1-3). Plato personally offers examples of 'successful myths' with his compositions in the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, the *Republic* etc.

c``) The sacred acts of prayer and sacrifice must be purified of the foul meaning and purpose they have acquired through centuries of misuse. Adeimantus is right when he points out that many people hope that they will expiate their wrongdoings by prayer and sacrifice (*Rep.* 364b-365a), but in fact the gods cannot be influenced by the prayers of the unjust, nor bribed by their sacrifices (*Leg.* 905d-907b). Nevertheless, the institution of worship should be carefully

---

themselves. Plato here stands in line with the Presocratic criticism of Herakleitos and the Eleatics; but it seems to me that his criticism is less radical, because he loves the gods and their festivals and does not attempt to replace them by reason or by a naturalistic being-in-general."

<sup>82</sup> See McPherran 2006, p. 91. The same is true for the city of Magnesia, for which regular worship was prescribed with such scrutiny in the *Laws*. Also see Morrow 1965, p. 124 ff.

<sup>83</sup> In this aspect of theirs, they should serve as a paradigm to be emulated by the lover of virtue: "Virtues corresponding to the ... Gods are brought to birth among mortals, both in thought and in action, as a product of mortals' yearning for the virtues' original, divine bearers. Nor does each God represent but a single virtue; each one must rather exhibit a mixture of many virtues, just as would any virtuous human." (Butler 2011, p. 82). Cf. *Phdr.* 252c-253c

<sup>84</sup> For a brief argument for this deduction, see McPherran 2006, p. 85, n. 7

maintained, as a means of securing social harmony and providing good example for the young (*Leg.* 887d). In fact, organized religion shall have a pivotal role in Plato's social system,<sup>85</sup> and through it, the majority of the population, those who are not philosophers, will be educated in virtue.<sup>86</sup> That is not, however, all there is to worship, for the adoration of the gods is also practiced by the enlightened class, the philosophers. In their case the acts of piety acquire much deeper purport: a model prayer becomes the petition for inner harmony of the soul and wealth of wisdom, addressed to the god Pan.<sup>87</sup> As for the sacrifices, festivals and other forms of ritual adoration, they assume the role of bringing one of the most important Platonic motifs and injunctions down from theoretical to practical level. That is achieving *homoiōsis theōi kata to dynaton* – becoming like god, so far as possible (*Theat.* 176b-c. Cf. *Rep.* 613a-b, *Leg.* 716c-d).<sup>88</sup> The *Phaedrus* teaches us that the ultimate goal of life is becoming a genuine follower of god; however, only those who are dear to god may be accepted among his flock. In accordance with the ancient principle, dear to god are those who are, to a degree, like him. So, the pious philosopher focuses on striving for godlikeness by emulating god. His goal can be achieved through exclusive cultivation of wisdom and practice of the purely rational art of dialectics; but also through practice of religious adoration: “Through worship a man recalls [the gods] to his mind and reinforces his sentiments of reverence; in worship he is actually assimilated, for a time at least, to the god whom he worships.”<sup>89</sup> The method of exclusive dedication to philosophy, however, may turn the practitioner into a being totally inapt for social interaction, like the top-class philosopher of the *Theaetetus*' Digression. Plato the reformer needs more than that, he needs enlightened men who will also be sufficiently down-to-earth to be able to stand at the helm

---

<sup>85</sup> In the city of Magnesia “a sacred acropolis is to be set aside as a central precinct for worship of Hestia, Zeus, and Athena (745d), and each of the city's twelve tribes, with its own festivals and temples, will occupy a plot dedicated to its particular god (738d; cf. 77ic-d). The law courts, marriage, childrearing, and much else are to be conducted under divine auspices, and the polis has a full sacred calendar, filled with festivals, competitions, processions, and all their accoutrements.” (Morgan, 1992, p. 242)

<sup>86</sup> Cf. McPherran 2006, p. 92.

<sup>87</sup> For the reasons behind this curious choice, see Morrow 1965, pp. 121-122.

<sup>88</sup> For the vitality of this concept in Plato's thought, see Sedley 1999.

<sup>89</sup> Morrow 1965, p. 129.

of the city to everyone's benefit. The Guardian is therefore both a seer of the Forms and a religious zealot.<sup>90</sup>

d) These relatively novel principles pave the way for the most revolutionary undertaking of Plato's revisionary theology: introducing 'the cult' of the Forms. The nature of Plato's gods, with their fixedness in uniformity, immunity to any kind of failing, independence and eternity, makes credible the statement that they "[a]re a prefiguration of the *ideas* which are known to the philosophers."<sup>91</sup> This is not to say that the gods are just some 'allegorical decorations around the Forms.' No, they are ontological realities, but also something more than cosmic governors, guarantors of justice, and shepherds of men. Their transcendent properties make them beams of light from a different Sun, heralds of the Kingdom Beyond. Glancing at them with the right eye opens the way of approximation to the Forms.<sup>92</sup>

## I.2.2 The Problem of Evil in the *Republic* II

Now, after this somewhat lengthy excursus, let us go back to our discussion of Plato's reformatory work in the *Republic*, with the eye on the rebuttal of the thesis that the gods are causes of both good and bad. We can see that, since the gods are certainly not vindictive, jealous or in any way malevolent, the first and most important *typos peri theologias* is that they are good.<sup>93</sup> So, god is good in reality and should be spoken as such (*agathos ho ge theos tōi onti te kai lekton houtos*).<sup>94</sup> At this point Plato has Socrates argue that since god is good, he is, by his

---

<sup>90</sup> "Plato's Kallipolis, then, accommodates the virtue of piety and religious myth and ritual by harnessing them to its central project of producing rulers who will be 'as god-fearing and godlike as human beings can be.'" (McPherran, *ibid.*).

<sup>91</sup> Bloom 1991, p. 352. Although Bloom does not capitalize the word, it is clear that by '*ideas*' he means the Forms.

<sup>92</sup> For the thesis that Plato's gods are the necessary *loci* where the Forms are instantiated, see Butler 2011.

<sup>93</sup> *Rep.* 379b1. The second *typos* of speeches or investigations concerning divine matters (*theologia*) brought up in the *Republic* II is that the gods are beyond change or alteration and are free of falsehood or propensity to cheat (380d-383c). The third, with which book III opens, is that Hades should not be presented as a dreadful place, and death as an end of dignified existence, lest the guardians may have difficulties in cultivating courage (386a-387c). The fourth, that the great men, heroes and gods should not be represented as pitifully lamenting their inevitable losses, as well as acting in other unbecoming ways (387c-392a). Finally, the fifth is that the poets must not relate stories of unjust people being happy and just ones wretched (392a-c).

<sup>94</sup> 379a9-b1. Shorey (1937, p. 182) adds a note: "The *ge* implies that God is good *ex vi termini*."

very nature, unable to do harmful or bad things.<sup>95</sup> In more general terms, nothing good can produce anything bad. Just the opposite is true, namely what is good is beneficial, and also the cause of welfare.<sup>96</sup> But if this is so, then what follows is that: “The good is not the cause of all things, but only of those which are good, while it is not the cause of the bad ones.”<sup>97</sup>

The logic of this argument may seem to be gone a bit astray. It is liable to at least one obvious objection:<sup>98</sup> Couldn't a good person produce some bad consequences inadvertently or accidentally, like when sharing food with somebody who is, unbeknownst to both, allergic to it? In this respect, it could be urged that Plato's implicit syllogism here<sup>99</sup> applies to a special case only (that of god), and needs to contain a hidden premise, which would make the reasoning valid. This could be the proposition 'god is omniscient', and therefore good to the absolute degree – which would be in accord with the famous Socratic tenet that 'no one errs knowingly'.<sup>100</sup> Thus, if the possibility of causing badness through ignorance is precluded, no other source of evil doing remains available. However, this strategy doesn't answer the possible follow-up question, i.e. even if we accept that a perfectly benevolent god, or God, stands in charge of the cosmic affairs, isn't he still causing certain badness when, even though only for the purpose of education and rectification, imposes suffering on an unwilling subject? One way to elude this difficulty is to deny a) that purposeful suffering is evil,<sup>101</sup> and b) that there is

---

<sup>95</sup> *ouden ge tōn agathōn blaberon / ho mē blaberon (ou) blapte / ho de mē blapte, kakon (ou) poiei.* (379b2-4)

<sup>96</sup> *ōphelimon to agathon, aition ara eupragias* (379b6-7).

<sup>97</sup> *ouk ara pantōn ge aition to agathon, alla tōn men eu echōnton aition, tōn de kakōn anaition* (379b7-8).

<sup>98</sup> For a neat delineation of the entire argument that aims to establish that the gods cannot be causes of evil (379b1 – 379c2), and a challenge to its first premise (All gods are [entirely] good beings) see McPherran 2006, p. 89.

<sup>99</sup> The good cannot produce anything bad; god is (the) good; therefore, god cannot be the cause of badness.

<sup>100</sup> See Socrates' suggestion that knowledge is a sufficient reason for avoidance of any misbehavior, and Protagoras' ready acceptance of the same, in *Protagoras* 352c2-d2; see also 358b7-c3

<sup>101</sup> Indeed, only a Stephanus page later Plato calls this strategy to his aid. In reference to the dreadful and savage story of Niobes' punishment and other similar tales (*Rep.* 380a1-b2), he writes that their makers have to be made to declare that: “these are either not works of god, or if they are ... god acted in a way righteous and good, and the punished were benefited (*ho men theos dikaia kai agatha eirgazeto, hoi de ōninanto kolazomenoi*).” Plato undoubtedly takes remedial punishment in general as beneficent – that is obvious from the *Gorgias* (478a-480b, 505b-c). It is even more so when the punishment is administered by some divine force, as we learn from a passage in the concluding myth of the *Gorgias* (524e-525d), where the redeemable are said to learn a lesson themselves from the punishment they receive, while the unredeemable serve as example for the others. Another relevant illustration of the idea is provided in the *Republic* 615a-b and 619d. In the first passage the punishment of the wrong-doers in the afterlife is described, while in the second it is stated that those who go through suffering during their 'bardo phase' act less rashly and more wisely while choosing their next life. And Plato is certainly not the only thinker who was not shying away from the idea that suffering imposed by God is not in any way evil. Shorey (1937, p. 184, note a), quotes St. Thomas: *Deus est auctor mali quod est poena, non autem mali quod est culpa*. Evidently, he does not find God culpable for that.

something like purposeless suffering.<sup>102</sup> Another, taken up in this passage of the *Republic*, is to somehow delegate all badness to a different source.

As it is clear from the aforesaid, the task to defend the thesis that only a non-good thing can be responsible for badness remains complex and challenging. The most vocal protest against the notion that only evil could cause evil is St. Thomas' famous dictum *bonum est causa mali*, clarified in his *Summa Theologiae*: “*esse causam non potest convenire nisi bono, quia nihil potest esse causa, nisi in quantum est ens; omne autem ens, in quantum huiusmodi, bonum est.*”<sup>103</sup> So it seems that, at least for the time being, Plato is neglectful of the details and the difficult issues, and simply keen on urging his thesis of exclusive divine benevolence by any means.

These difficulties notwithstanding, the above ‘principle’ of “good causing the good only” is actually in perfect tune with Plato’s theory of causation, according to which like is caused by like, or ‘F things are F because of F,’ and ‘No F thing is F because of un-F.’<sup>104</sup> A paradigmatic example of the first principle is to be found in *Phaedo* 100c4: *tōi kallōi ta kala kala* – the beautiful things are beautiful because of the Beautiful. Thus, Socrates can be charged neither with logical inconsistency, nor with theological heresy when he concludes:

Therefore, said I, since god is good, he could not be the cause of everything, as the multitude claims,<sup>105</sup> but would be responsible for a few things that pertain to the humans, while free of responsibility for many others. For, much lesser are the goods in our lives than the evils.<sup>106</sup> And nobody else but god should be counted as responsible for the good things, but as far as the bad ones are concerned, some other causes must be sought, and not god. (*Rep.* 379c1-7)

Still, this remains a startling utterance, both for the ancient lovers of Homer and for modern scholars. It forces upon the former the conclusion that the numerous statements in the epics concerning the gods’ mastery over human happiness and distress, and most notably the

---

<sup>102</sup> A decisive step in this direction is taken at 613a: “This, then, must be our conviction about the just man, that whether he falls into poverty or disease or any other of the supposed evils (*tōn dokountōn kakōn*), for him all this things will finally prove good, both in life and in death (*toutōi tauta eis agathon ti teleutēsei zōnti ē kai apothentōti*).”

<sup>103</sup> Quoted in Steel 1995, p. 258

<sup>104</sup> See Sedley 1998.

<sup>105</sup> The poets, of course, are among the *hoi polloi*: “Zeus, the all-effecting, the cause of all” (Aeschylus, *Ag.* 1485, etc., quoted in Adam 1902, 379c).

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Met.* 984b33-985a2

aforementioned parable of Zeus' urns, are plainly false. In a word, no god is in charge of the distribution of both the good and the bad.<sup>107</sup>

As for the modern mind, there are four points in this paragraph that may catch its attention.

1) Explicit statement of god's unmixed benevolence, the first and crucial step in Plato's reformatory work on theology.<sup>108</sup> Someone who is determined by his own will to always do good things only, can rightly be praised as a benevolent person, while a being who is not wholly good cannot be called a god.

2) An implicit dualistic turn. This is probably the most striking feature of the passage. Plato seems to recognize here only two classes of objects and events, one of them having the property of goodness, the other its contrary. The first one has a clearly defined source, which is god. The cause of the second, however, at least for the time being, is left obscure. All we get to know is that: *tōn de kakōn all' atta dei zetein ta aitia, ou ton theon*. The use of the plural (*ta aitia*) makes the obscurity even deeper. Did Plato have something specific in his mind while he was writing these lines? Does his statement imply plurality of causes of badness? Namely, could we take the verbal number used here as an indication that, e.g., Maximus of Tyre<sup>109</sup> and Cherniss<sup>110</sup> were on the right track with their suggestion that the sources of evil in Plato are both soul and Necessity? Again, was his intention to delegate the responsibility for badness to the plurality of souls, as it appears to be the case in the Myth of Er? Or was he himself at that stage still uncertain to what cause(s) should the existence of evil in a universe governed by a good god

---

<sup>107</sup> This idea could be Plato's development of the similar themes found in his predecessors. For example, Democritus (DK 175) clearly states: "But the gods are the givers of all good things, both in the past and now. They are not, however, the givers of things which are bad, harmful or non-beneficial, either in the past or now..." He, unlike Plato here, also identifies the cause behind these occurrences: "... but men themselves fall into these through blindness of mind and lack of sense."

<sup>108</sup> Green finds the first explicit statement of god's exclusive goodness in the description of the "benevolent, outgoing character of the divine Demiurge" in the *Timaeus*. Prior to that, he writes, "The expurgation of the popular mythology, by Xenophanes, by Euripides, and by Plato himself, has removed from the gods a good deal of what was unsavory, but has not suggested, by way of compensation, any positive content" (Green 1948, p. 293). Adam, in his commentary on the *Republic* (1902), writes: "The moral goodness of the Deity himself was proclaimed before Socrates and Plato by Xenophanes, Pindar, and the dramatist, but the inference that God, because he is good, is never the cause of evil, is probably due to Plato." However, although it is undisputable that there are suggestions of god's goodness before Plato, none of them seems to be fully fleshed out. All that, e.g. Xenophanes said in this regard was that: "Homer and Hesiod attributed to the gods all the things which among men are shameful and blameworthy – theft and adultery and mutual deception" [B12]. So it seems reasonable to ascribe the full formulation of this idea to Plato.

<sup>109</sup> His opinion is quoted in Green 1948, p. 301, fn. 164

<sup>110</sup> See Cherniss 1954.

be ascribed? This is a difficult issue to decide, especially in the light of the fact that our passage contains the first mention of a specific cluster of problems in the Platonic corpus.<sup>111</sup> A recognized virtue of Plato as a philosopher is his ability to confront similar questions at different times, re-examine the answers he himself has given, and seek new ones. In the case of the problem of evil as well, one can suppose that he only gradually developed the outlines of a theory which was maturing and being scrutinized through the successive stages of the *Theaetetus*, *Timaeus* and *Politicus* and finally the *Laws*.<sup>112</sup> Or, one may say that Plato used to employ alternative ways of tackling problems as they come up in the dialogues. This would not mean that he had no convictions – he did preclude some options, and precluding certain paths is due to some convictions, in this case that the gods cannot be bad or cause badness. Such convictions, however, do not commit one to any particular thesis, but only to various preclusions. In this way Plato could, possibly, both hold important beliefs and remain, to a certain degree, skeptical.

Be that as it may, one thing seems certain – in this passage Plato is postulating a factor or factors operational in the world of humans, to which the responsibility for the existence of badness should be relegated. This factor or factors are obviously something or someone other than god, possibly to a certain degree independent from him,<sup>113</sup> and besides that, they are to be held responsible for the *greater part* of the events in our world, since *polly gar elattō tagatha tōn kakōn hemin*. Now, what could be a *possible* implication of these statements? Generally speaking, those who are responsible for a state of affairs obtaining, are also considered to be the causes of it obtaining – either contiguous (e.g., a soldier carrying out an order to burn down a house), or distant (e.g., his superior giving him that order). So, if god is not responsible for a set of events or states of affairs (*oude ... ho theos ... pantōn an eiē aitios*), in this case those which are characterized by badness, he is also not their cause. But since they do exist, and since *nihil fit sine causa*,<sup>114</sup> there has to be some entity or power in our world that causes the instances of badness. This line of reasoning *could* open the route for the conclusions that Plato was a dualist,

---

<sup>111</sup> Issues of theology, including defining piety and the divinities' goodness, have already been discussed in the *Euthyphro*; the existence of evils, their cause(s) and their relation to the gods, however, is for the first time brought up here.

<sup>112</sup> The ordering given here is provisional, although fairly accepted nowadays. Still, Owen's rare objection to the dating of the *Timaeus* (in Owen 1953), as well as certain skepticism as to the relative dates of the *Timaeus* and the *Politicus* have to be mentioned.

<sup>113</sup> Weren't it so, the benevolent god would make them produce beneficent things only, since all he does is good.

<sup>114</sup> Or, in Plato's own words, *panti gar adynaton chōris aitiou genesin schein* (*Tim.* 28a6)

as later confirmed both in his *Timaeus*,<sup>115</sup> and by Aristotle's testimony about Plato.<sup>116</sup> The dualism thesis is upheld, e.g. by Hick,<sup>117</sup> while resolutely dismissed by Adam.<sup>118</sup> Steel is also not in favor of it.<sup>119</sup> Because Plato himself here gives no further clues as to the validity the dualism thesis, it will be examined later, when we face the relevant passages of the *Theaetetus* and the *Timaeus*.

3) Yet another novelty brought up by the *Republic* 379c is, allegedly, the first articulation of the problem of evil. According to Green there we find "[t]he first distinct statement in Greek literature of the problem of evil, which hitherto has been only implicit."<sup>120</sup> Now, the problem of evil is one that is fairly easy to state: If a good Deity – or equally benevolent overarching Providence – is in charge of the cosmos, how come that in it there is badness of overwhelming quantity? This or any similar formula is not to be found in our passage. Its first truly distinct, or explicit, articulation in Antiquity is actually due to Epicurus, provided that the Christian apologist Lactantius (ca. 240-320) was right in attributing to him the now famous quotation found in his *De Ira Dei*.<sup>121</sup> Is, then, Green justified in his claim that it was Plato who should be credited with this development as well? In a sense he is, since the two main elements of the formula, namely the facts of the existence of a benevolent Deity on the one hand, and of numerous evils on the other, are both present. What is required on the side of the reader is a slight further effort by which he or she will bring these two facts together and thus generate the paradox.

<sup>115</sup> Where *nous* and *anankē* unite together in order to create the manifest cosmos (*Tim.* 48a).

<sup>116</sup> It is also in accord with Aristotle's account in *Met.* 988a8-16. In the course of his critique of Plato's theory of causation, *Met.* 988a8-16, Aristotle informs us that Plato made the One and the Dyad the respective causes of good and evil.

<sup>117</sup> See Hick 2010, p. 25ff

<sup>118</sup> In his note on the "some other causes must be sought" clause of the *Republic* passage (379c5), he writes: "The dualism should not be taken too seriously, in spite of the good and evil souls in *Laws* 896 E. Plato is not now constructing a philosophy, but casting moulds for theology and poetry."

<sup>119</sup> See Steel 1995, p. 251ff. He argues that a) the quoted passage deals only with evils that humans do and experience; b) the cause of this kind of evil, as obvious from the Myth of Er, is the soul's own wrong choice. This is all fine as far as it goes. The only problem with both Adam's and Steel's interpretation is that they transpose it to Plato's philosophy in general, while their remarks and arguments allow them to reject the dualism thesis only within the context of the *Republic*. They are hardly applicable to the *Theaetetus*, *Timaeus* and the *Laws*.

<sup>120</sup> Green 1948, p. 298

<sup>121</sup> "God, [Epicurus] says, either wishes to take away evils, and is unable; or He is able, and is unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able, or He is both willing and able. If He is willing and unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God; if He is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God. If He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if he is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? or why does He not remove them?" (*On the Anger of God*, p. 28, in Roberts & Donaldson, 1871).

4) The passage under discussion also presents the first defense of god's goodness against the fact of evil, since it aims at reliving god from the responsibility for the badness spread through the marrow of our world. If it indeed contains the first distinct statement of the problem of evil, as claimed by Green and reiterated by some other scholars,<sup>122</sup> it even more so contains the first recorded theodicy in the history of Western thought, however crude and rudimentary it may be. Let me reiterate, this passage is, in its essence, meant to absolve god from the responsibility for the ills and tribulations experienced by humans. Since, as it was determined, god is good (*ho theos agathos*), and it is impossible for him to be a cause of any kind of badness, he therefore must be responsible for a few things only (*oligōn men tois anthrōpois aitios*), while free from responsibility for many other things that happen to humans (*pollōn de anaitios*). The 'many things' are the evils, which prevail in life.

### **I.2.3 Theodicy in the *Republic*?**

The preceding section was meant to give an outline of Plato's protest against what, up to his times, used to be a common notion: that the gods are dispensers of both good and evil. This protest was voiced in the *Republic*, within the context of the discussion on what the children of Kallipolis should and should not be thought regarding the gods (376e-383c). Besides that, a claim was advanced, almost as a corollary of the exposition, that the *Republic* passage 379c marks the starting point of all theodician efforts. However, not everybody will agree with the last assertion, and there will be scholars who will doubt that Plato presented any theodicy at all. Carlos Steel, for example, in an otherwise very instructive article, states: "After all, [Plato] was not primarily interested in the problem of theodicy (which first presented itself in Stoicism)."<sup>123</sup> As a way to substantiate his claim, Steel next writes the following:

For in this passage in the *Republic*, he is not concerned with the problem of evil in the universe as a whole, which is really the theodicy question, but with evil in "human life," that is, evil insofar as human beings experience it and suffer from it: the fact that we are not at all living well but are instead miserable and unhappy.<sup>124</sup>

---

<sup>122</sup> See e.g. Hick 2010, p. 26, fn. 1, and Herman 1993, p. 10

<sup>123</sup> Steel 1995, p. 252

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*

Three main ideas may be identified in these quotations: a) Plato, in general, was not deeply concerned with theodicy (from the first quotation); b) Plato was not concerned with theodicy in the specific passage under discussion (from the second quotation); c) Plato never presented a theodicy (from the bracketed clause of the first quotation). In what follows I will argue that even if Plato's contribution to the subject of theodicy offered in the *Timaeus* and *Laws X* were neglected, and Steel's claims were examined on the basis of the *Republic's* passage under discussion alone, his second and third abovementioned points will still prove not viable.

Now, Steel is perfectly justified in claiming a): it is undoubtedly true that Plato was no St. Augustine or Leibniz, in the sense that producing a comprehensive theodicy was not among his primary interests. This fact, however, does not in any way imply neither b) nor c), i.e. that he was not concerned with theodicy in the *Republic* passage, and that he had no theodicy whatsoever.

As for b), Steel holds that since the passage deals only with a certain aspect of the problem of evil, whatever Plato is doing there, cannot be called theodicy proper. This is an unusual maneuver. First, as it was submitted in points 3) and 4) above, in the *Republic* 379c we find the first implicit statement of the problem of evil in the history of Western thought, and the earliest, however faint, theodicy. And if this passage indeed contains the first endeavor in the direction of the vindication of god's goodness it shouldn't be utterly surprising that Plato's position here is not developed, comprehensive and systematic. This is even less surprising when we take in consideration that it was not brought up for its own sake, but as a supporting tool for a different goal that the author wished to accomplish.

Second, in the focus of Socrates' philosophical queries were ethical and political concepts, which are of central importance to human beings only. In other words, his entire philosophizing was human-related. Is it a great wonder, then, that Plato, following his master, is presenting the problem of evil from anthropocentric point of view?

Third, contemplating the problem of evil through the viewpoint of humanity needn't be seen as imposing a very limiting view on the issue. This approach includes both the physical aspect and the moral aspect of the problem, i.e. both pain and moral depravity. What we are left with is the pain that non-human animals experience, as a sub-category of the physical aspect, and the metaphysical aspect of the problem of evil. Animal suffering, however, hasn't been featured even in many of the much more developed theodicies, like in many of the Christian ones. And

those theodicyists who ascribe all evil, including natural catastrophes, to soul,<sup>125</sup> have no need to postulate any separate metaphysical cause of evil, i.e. a separate basic fact or entity other than soul to which all other kinds of evil permeating the universe are traceable. In other words, everything that such a theodicy needs to ‘solve’ the problem of evil is a free agent who wills independently of God.

Fourth, the very word ‘theodicy’ refers simply to justification of God’s ways in the face of evil. Nothing prevents a theodicy, at least as defined above, to be offered with the aim to justify God’s ways in the face of human suffering alone, which is a very significant segment of the overall problem of evil. Why should it necessarily be concerned with the evil in the universe as a whole? If somebody wishes to try and absolve God from responsibility for the bad things that human beings experience, couldn’t that attempt of his or hers be labeled as theodicy? That would probably be an incomplete one, but theodicy nevertheless.

If these points have any bearing on the truth of the matter, Steel’s claim c), namely that the first theodicy was presented by the Stoics – which naturally implies that there was no such thing in Plato – may also be considered as disproven. As it was already mentioned, the bulk of Plato’s theodicy is contained in the texts that expose his mature views on natural theology: *Timaeus* and *Laws X*.<sup>126</sup> Nevertheless, the *Republic* itself has some further contribution to offer, and not a minor one. In order to explore it, we are going to pay close attention to the last book of the *Republic*, more precisely to its concluding pages – the controversial, sometimes neglected, but nevertheless famous Myth of Er. Before embracing that task, it could be appropriate to dedicate a few words to Plato’s general understanding of mythical narratives and their utilization for philosophical purposes.

---

<sup>125</sup> By relying on the Free Will Defense, as in modern times does Plantinga in 1974a and 1974b.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Carone 1994, p. 275.

## I.3 Theodicy in the Myth of Er

### I.3.1 The Platonic myth

Plato's novel and peculiar understanding of myth and its application had left his disciples and immediate successors, as well as the later heirs of the Academy's helm quite indifferent: Aristotle was not very fond of mythologizing,<sup>127</sup> and the rest seemed to follow.<sup>128</sup> The attitude of the Platonist changed with the advent of the period known today as Middle Platonic (roughly 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. – 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.). An important contribution was Plutarch's emulation of Plato's masterful employment of myths to explicate philosophical or quasi-scientific ideas and Numenius' allegoric interpretations of the Homeric and Platonic myths. These practices were taken up by the Neo-Platonist, who developed a system of very detailed interpretations and allegorizations of Plato's myths.<sup>129</sup> Since then, Plato the myth-maker has been attracting the attention of scholars through the centuries, and continues to do so, as witnessed by the numerous monographs and compendiums on the subject published in the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>130</sup> Entering that wide field of research is far beyond the scope of this work; still, some important findings of the modern scholarship need to be reiterated here, so that the ensuing discussion of the *Republic*'s closing myth, and some other to follow, may be better appreciated.

Besides as being incorporated in quotations from earlier authors (most notably Homer), when it retains its original meaning of 'anything delivered by word of mouth,' 'word,' 'speech,'<sup>131</sup> Plato uses the word *mythos* as pertaining to three different referents. Those are: a) Traditional Greek tales in general,<sup>132</sup> or a particular such a tale;<sup>133</sup> b) Plato's own myths, put into

---

<sup>127</sup> "Into the subtleties of the mythologist it is not worth our while to inquire seriously" (*Met.* 1000a18).

<sup>128</sup> See Dillon 2004, p. xxvi, fn. 11.

<sup>129</sup> *op. cit.*, pp. xxviii-ix. On interpretation and application of myths by Platonic thinkers, starting with Philo of Alexandria, to Porphyry by way of Plutarch, Numenius, Cronius and Plotinus, see Brisson 2004, ch. 5. For a modern approach to Plato's myths through the perspective of some prominent later Neo-Platonists, see Tarrant 2012.

<sup>130</sup> For a short selection of some important works on Plato and myth see Partenie 2009, p. 239. The most recent, and rather comprehensive, collection of studies devoted to Plato's treatment of myth I am aware of is Collobert et al. 2012.

<sup>131</sup> See, e.g., *Rep.* 389e (=II. IV.412, Diomedes addressing Sthenelos): *tetta, siōpēi ēso, emōi de epipeitho mithōi* – "Friend, stay quiet and be persuaded by my word." But Plato sometimes uses the word in this sense on his own as well, when he wants to express the meaning 'speech,' 'advice.' See, e.g. *Laws* 790c: *tōn peri ta sōmata mythōn ...* – "the speeches concerning the bodies ..."

<sup>132</sup> See, e.g., *Rep.* 376d (Socrates to Adeimantus): *ithi oun, hōsper en mythōi mythologuntes* – "Come on, then, as if we were relating a mythic tale..."

the mouth of Socrates and other characters of the dialogues, starting with the *Gorgias*;<sup>134</sup> c) Timaeus's cosmological account,<sup>135</sup> and certain philosophical doctrines belonging to other thinkers,<sup>136</sup> as well as a couple of very specific occurrences, probably reducible to some of the aforementioned.<sup>137</sup>

Plato uses mythical discourse copiously in his writings. There is probably not a single dialogue, starting with the *Apology* and all the way to the *Laws*, where there is no mention of mythical heroes or motifs. Sometimes, a myth plays a prominent part in the dialogue. Plato is a myth-teller, because he recounts well known tales, sometimes as they are, sometimes modified, and also a myth-maker, because he introduces tales of his own invention. His application of myth has, however, raised many brows, and interpreters have made repeated attempts to explain why Plato, the great partisan of rational inquiry, makes use of such a device, as well as to clear up some obscurities related to his understanding of the term and the concept of myth. Here only two central problems will be mentioned.

It seems that, when the meaning which Plato used to attach to the word *mythos* is concerned, he was prone to allow for some occasional inconsistency. This inconsistency arises mainly due to the interchangeable use of the terms *mythos* and *logos*, which was a commonplace at least until the times of Pindar.<sup>138</sup> Plato has been credited for being the first thinker to make a clear-cut distinction between the terms *mythos* and *logos*.<sup>139</sup> In the *Protagoras* he draws a more-or-less explicit contrast, in the following way: After Protagoras had related and interpreted the myth of Prometheus to suit his purpose, and was about to explain a more difficult point,<sup>140</sup> he chose to proceed using reasoned argumentation (*logos*), instead of a tale (*mythos*) – *toutou dē*

---

<sup>133</sup> See, e.g., *Tim.* 22c (The Egyptian priest to Solon): *touto mythou men schēma echon* – “This [story] has the form of a myth.”

<sup>134</sup> See, e.g., *Rep.* 621b (Socrates to Glaucon): *kai houtōs ō Glaukōn, mythos esōthē kai ouk apōleto* – “And thus Glaucon, the tale was saved and it was not lost.”

<sup>135</sup> The famous *eikos mythos* (*Tim.* 29d, 59c, 68d).

<sup>136</sup> As to the Heracleitans, or Protagoras. For a doctrine attributed to both, but also to Homer and ‘every philosopher except Parmenides,’ see *Tht.* 156c: *ti dē oun hēmin bouletai houtos ho mythos, ō Theaitēte, pros ta protera*; – “Now, Theaetetus, what does this tale mean to us, in relation to what was said before?”

<sup>137</sup> For an elaboration on Plato's application of the word *mythos*, see Partenie 2009, p. 1ff.

<sup>138</sup> For a brief historical survey of the usage of the terms *mythos* and *logos* from Homer to Plato, see Naddaf 1998, pp. vii-x. His conclusion is that “[t]he famous mythos/logos dichotomy is not clearly attested prior to Plato, although the germs may be discerned in some authors” (*op.cit.* p. x).

<sup>139</sup> See Naddaf 1998, pp. vii ff, and Brisson 1998, Chs. 8,9,10.

<sup>140</sup> *Prot.* 320b-324c

*peri, ō Sōkrates, ouketi mython soi erō, alla logon.*<sup>141</sup> But how would Plato define the terms *mythos* and *logos* more precisely? Brisson (1998) distinguishes between a primary and a broad sense of *mythos* in Plato. In the former, it is “[a] story that a poet constructs by reorganizing the content of a message which a community wants to keep in its memory, and by giving this content a particular form” (p. 7). In the later, “[a] discourse ... that transmits unfalsifiable information and that gives rise not to certainty but to a belief, which nonetheless may be particularly strong” (pp. 10f). *Logos*, on the other hand, is a discourse based on a process of reasoning, liable to refutation, and thus potentially falsifiable. It is supposed to lead to certitude, and discover universal truths. However, unlike in the *Protagoras*, at various other places “[t]he two terms are used without a strong contrast.”<sup>142</sup> Timaeus’ cosmological account in the eponymous dialogue is, for example, seemingly frivolously labeled both as *eikos mythos* and *eikos logos*.<sup>143</sup> Plato’s purpose behind first drawing, and then occasionally blurring the *mythos/logos* distinction could lie in the attempt to integrate myth into philosophical discourse proper, to give it a fresh identity, so that the new, Platonic myth may become an important factor in installing true values in the souls of the young, as well as an effective instrument in persuading the non-philosophic majority of adult citizens to follow the path of virtue.<sup>144</sup>

Yet another prominent ambiguity pertaining to Plato’s usage and interpretation of myth is his application of truth-value to it, which appears contradictory: he qualifies myth as both false and true discourse. In the *Republic*, close to the opening of the discussion on good pedagogical strategies, Socrates says to Adeimantus that speeches, or discourses, are of two kinds – false and true,<sup>145</sup> and both need to be taught to the children, but the false ones first.<sup>146</sup> Soon enough it becomes clear that the ‘false speeches’ are the myths, which are “taken as a whole false, but contain some truth as well.”<sup>147</sup> The statement that myths are false is reiterated, this time with specific reference to the Homero-Hesiodic myths, at 377d and 386c.<sup>148</sup> Elsewhere Plato seems to endorse a different view, namely that something very much akin to myth may sometimes be characterized as a true discourse, i.e. that myth need not be false by its very form. In the *Gorgias*,

---

<sup>141</sup> *Prot.* 324d

<sup>142</sup> Partenie 2009, p. 5

<sup>143</sup> For further examples, see *ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Cf. Collobert et al. 2012, pp. 1f.

<sup>145</sup> *logōn de ditton eidos, to men alēthes, pseudo d’ heteron* (376e8).

<sup>146</sup> *paideuteon d’ en amphoterōis, proteron d’ en tois pseudēsīn* (377a1).

<sup>147</sup> *to holon eipein pseudo, eni de kai alēthē* (377a4).

<sup>148</sup> For further references, see Brisson 1998, pp. 106ff.

Socrates introduces his closing tale with the words: “Listen now to a very fine speech, which you will, as I believe, consider a tale (*mythos*), while I as reasoned account (*logos*), for I shall relate to you the things I intend to speak about as being true (*hōs alēthē lexō*).”<sup>149</sup> What Socrates is going to relate is, however, obviously a *mythos* (i.e. the first in the series of Plato’s eschatological myths), and not *logos*. Thus it appears that myth for Plato is sometimes true, and sometimes false.

Yet, this ambiguity is only apparent. As the above example suggests, Plato wants to propose a revisionist application of the term ‘*mythos*.’ He is intent upon making a clear distinction between the traditional myths, which are mostly false and contain only a grain of truth, and his own reformed myths, which could be fantastic and shouldn’t be always taken at face value,<sup>150</sup> but convey a message true and pure.<sup>151</sup> The Platonic myth, similarly as the traditional ones, is an essentially unverifiable (and consequently unfalsifiable) narrative, because it recounts events beyond human experience – aetiological accounts of certain phenomena, the creation of the universe, transmigration of the soul, etc.<sup>152</sup> It deals with five types of entities: gods, daimones, heroes, the world of Hades, and men.<sup>153</sup> Since it evokes characters and incidents long preserved in the community’s memory, myth acts on its members’ emotions and, through evoking pleasure and fear, gives rise not to certainty, but to persuasion, which is nevertheless, due to the involvement of the emotions, rather powerful.<sup>154</sup> Thus, Plato’s concept of myth seems to retain most of the characteristics of the traditional myths, but also adds some peculiar to him – most notably the exclusion of all unfavorable representation of the divinities, the altered purpose of the tale-telling and its transformed truth-value.<sup>155</sup>

---

<sup>149</sup> *Gorg.* 523a

<sup>150</sup> See, e.g. *Phd.* 114d1-2

<sup>151</sup> I believe that, despite the different wording, the conclusion of Brisson’s analysis of the ambiguity is essentially the same. He writes: “[The] explanation can be found in a change of perspective. Truth and error no longer reside in the correspondence of a discourse with the referent to which it is supposed to refer, but in the agreement of a discourse – in the present case, myth – with another discourse raised to the level of a norm” (1998, p. 109).

<sup>152</sup> Cf. Partenie 2004, p. xvi.

<sup>153</sup> See Brisson 1998, p. 97. Human beings are included among these transmudane subjects because they are vessels for the imperceptible immortal soul.

<sup>154</sup> See *op. cit.*, pp. 9f

<sup>155</sup> Much of this is accomplished with the introduction of the *typoi peri theologias* of *Rep.* II&III (see *supra*, pp. 17ff and fn. 82). For their relation to the construction of Platonic myths, with particular emphasis on the first *typos*, see Betegh 2009, pp. 87ff.

In the light of the aforesaid, this fact is easy to understand. Plato was, after all, not only a philosopher, but also a religious reformer and a literary man. In the attempt to reach out to his fellowmen he relied, to some degree, on the stories of the gods and the heroes, so conspicuously woven into the fabric of their mental set-up. The ordinary men could easily identify themselves with those stories and appropriate them as their own. This pleasurable ‘sugar-coating’ of the often bitter or simply difficult nature of Plato’s teachings made them much easier to embrace, even for those less philosophically inclined. Plato’s zeal to improve the human condition and his artistic talent combined in the “marvelous instrument of persuasion: myth.”<sup>156</sup> Through its appeal to the emotions, the myth acts on the appetitive part of the soul, which, in the majority of the population, has sway over the rational one. The enlightened philosopher is “able to use speech artfully (*technēi*), to the extent that its nature allows it to be used that way, either in order to teach (*pros to didaxai*) or in order to persuade (*pros to peisai*).”<sup>157</sup> Thus it seems that the two main functions of the Platonic myth are a) to instruct the less philosophical in abstract matters by providing images and examples,<sup>158</sup> and b) to persuade a person in adopting certain beneficial beliefs.<sup>159</sup>

### I.3.2 The Myth of Er: an overview

These cursory preliminary remarks were meant to ease the access to the concluding myth of the *Republic*, some parts of which are obviously directed against the archaic intuition that the divinity is responsible for the badness that human beings experience.

The Myth of Er has been leading the commentators to varied conclusions, and arousing disparate feelings in them, ranging from deep admiration to strong depreciation. Stewart (1905, p. 132) introduces his discussion of the myth with the following sentence: “We come now to the Myth of Er (*Rep.* 614Aff.), the greatest of Plato's Eschatological Myths, whether the fullness of its matter or the splendour of its form be considered.” This stands in stark contrast to Annas

---

<sup>156</sup> *op. cit.* p. 11

<sup>157</sup> *Phdr.* 277b-c, quoted in Partenie 2009, p. 5

<sup>158</sup> See *op. cit.*, pp 8ff.

<sup>159</sup> See the ‘noble lie’ of the *Republic* 414b-c, also *Rep.* 621b, *Phd.* 114d2-6. For further references on this matter in the dialogues, see Partenie 2004, p. xviii.

(1981, p. 349), who finds it to be “a painful shock;” she is dumbfounded by its “childishness” and its “vulgarity [which] seems to pull us right down to the level of Cephalus, where you take justice seriously only when you start thinking about hell-fire.”<sup>160</sup> Still, most of the scholars dealing with the closing pages of the *Republic* remain more moderate and balanced in their judgment of the Myth’s philosophic value, emphasizing both its merits, and the seemingly insoluble difficulties that it gives rise to.

The Myth of Er, probably the most puzzling of Plato’s four great eschatological myths,<sup>161</sup> commences after Socrates already presented to Glaucon some this-worldly advantages that a just person rightly enjoys, and is meant to illustrate those much greater, albeit unobservable, rewards he is going to receive in the afterlife. In it, the reader is introduced to a brave soldier of the name of Er, the son of Armenius, of Pamphylia,<sup>162</sup> who was killed in an unspecified war. His lifeless body, left on the battlefield, had resisted decomposition for ten days, and after being collected and placed on a funeral pyre by his relatives, on the twelfth day was miraculously revived. Immediately after coming back to life, he related to the mourners the astounding story of his experience in the netherworld. This wonderful report consists of four sections – with two elucidating comments interjected into the third one – and a closing advice which winds up not only Er’s tale, but also the dialogue as a whole.<sup>163</sup>

---

<sup>160</sup> She takes a more positive turn on the Myth in Annas 1982. Her interpretation of the Myth from (1981) to (1982) also changes, even radically. While in the former she finds the Myth, unless thoroughly demythologized, “to offer us an entirely consequentialist reason for being just” (p. 349), in the latter she sees it as fitting, though awkwardly, in the *Republic*’s main moral argument, and, despite its immediate context, as excluding the consequentialist reasons for being just, unlike the *Gorgias* and *Phaedo* myths (see p. 137). For a well-founded critique of Anna’s views, and the thesis that the Myth of Er not only perfectly fits with, but also adds to the overall argument of the *Republic*, see Johnson 1999. Another highly recommendable interpretation of the Myth and its place in the dialogue is Ferrari 2009.

<sup>161</sup> The other three being those related in the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*. The eschatological account of the *Laws X* misses most of the scenery and picturesqueness of both traditional and Platonic myths, and should be viewed separately from them.

<sup>162</sup> An ancient maritime region in southern Asia Minor, inhabited by a mixture of tribes, including Greek colonists. Therefrom the name. Adam (1902, 614B) cites several fanciful ancient opinions on Er’s identity. Platt (1911) holds that *Ēros tou Armeniou* means ‘Er, the Armenian,’ and that ‘the Pamphylian’ is a playfully used epithet. He believes to have identified both the historical person behind Plato’s character, and the exact battle in which he was killed.

<sup>163</sup> Johnson (1999, pp. 7ff) also discerns four ‘scenes’ and ‘a final speech,’ roughly corresponding to those that will shortly be outlined here, while Halliwell (2007, p. 536) recognizes only three sections, merging the fourth one into the third. These, in the order of their appearance, enact “the three great ideas of eschatological judgment, cosmological necessity, and reincarnation or metempsychosis” (*ibid.*).

*Section one (614c-616b)*: Upon leaving his body, Er's soul journeys with a big company of other souls and arrives at a mysterious place where the departed are being judged. There, he beholds two openings in the earth, and two openings in the sky, into and from which souls are entering and exiting. Between these two pairs of openings, the judges are sitting and directing the movements of the damned and the blessed. Er is then and there instructed that he is to observe carefully everything that is happening at that place,<sup>164</sup> and act as a messenger to mankind.<sup>165</sup> So he does not follow along the others' downward or upward<sup>166</sup> trail, but remains at the meadow where the souls whose sojourn is over are gathering, both those coming from one of the openings of Tartarus, and those coming from one of the openings in Heaven. By listening to their conversations, he learns that each of them was either suffering punishment for his misdeeds over the equivalent of ten lifetimes, i.e. thousand years,<sup>167</sup> or enjoying the rewards of virtuous life over the same time period. He also learns that among those punished, there are some incurably wicked souls who were not and will never be allowed out of the underworld,<sup>168</sup> and hears a brief description of the torments that the unjust undergo in the Tartarus.<sup>169</sup>

---

<sup>164</sup> 614d3 – *ekei*. Shorey renders it “the other world,” and supports his rendition with references from the *Republic* and other dialogues (1937, p. 494, n. b). The occasion, the scenery and the events of the Myth are undoubtedly otherworldly. Adam (614c) locates the *daimonios topos* where Er was situated at the time, which is the same as the meadow (*ho leimōn*) of judgment, somewhere on the *Phaedo's* ‘real earth’ (*ē hōs alethōs gē*), “as opposed to the misty hollows where we live.” Stewart (1905, p. 166ff) has the entire voyage of the souls, after they are assembled at the meadow, take place somewhere on the surface of planet Earth as we know it.

<sup>165</sup> In the character of Er, Baracchi sees an allegory of Socrates of the *Republic* and the philosopher in general, who, among other things, are supposed to act like messengers for the rest of humanity, “hovering between worlds and weaving them together in their irreducibility” (2002, p. 180).

<sup>166</sup> Adam (614c), Morrison (1955, p.66) Halliwell (2007, pp. 451f) express little doubt that the route *anō dia tou ouranou* leads to the top of the vault of heaven, where the just souls join the procession of the gods, and contemplate the Forms. I don't believe that Plato here had the *Phaedrus* 247b in mind, for otherwise how could a returnee from a place of such beatific vision *immediately* make the worst choice possible, as was the case with the one who, *prompted by folly and greediness*, indiscriminately grabbed the life of a lowly tyrant? Folly and greed are much more likely to arise due to indulgence in sensual pleasures somehow transposed to the heavenly realm, than by even imperfect contemplation of the Forms. For a straightforward denial of the possibility that an unenlightened (non-philosophic) soul may join the gods, see *Phd.* 82b; also *Phdr.* 248e-249b, where judgment, a correction place under the earth, and a heavenly place of rewards, clearly distinct from ‘the top of the heaven,’ are explicitly mentioned.

<sup>167</sup> Shorey comments (1937, p. 495, n. i) that hundred years is the ideal life span for the Hindus, which is, of course, true (see, e.g., *Bhāgavata Purāna* IV.25.43). Solon on the other hand (*fr.* 27), followed by Herodotus (*Hdt.* 1.32), set the limit of human life to seventy years. There are, however, no strong indications that Plato borrowed anything from the Indians; so Adam (615a-b) is probably right in claiming that Plato choose the hundred year life span under Pythagorean influences.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. *Gorg.* 525c-e. Both in the *Gorgias* and in the *Republic*, Socrates ascribes this dreadful fate mostly, though not exclusively, to tyrants and kings. There are other resemblances between the concluding myths of these two dialogues, but also some major differences. The most prominent one is that in the *Gorgias* myth we have an

*Section two (616b-617d)*: After seven days in the meadow, everybody raises up and journeys on for five additional days, when they reach a wonderful pillar-like beam of light, extending from the heaven above and piercing the earth.<sup>170</sup> Within that rainbow-colored pillar, an even more wonderful sight is presenting itself: therein are joined the extremities of the light-chain that is girdling the heavens, and on that joint the spindle of Necessity hangs suspended. It is made of adamantine hook and shaft, and a hollow whorl into which seven other whorls,<sup>171</sup> forged out of a mixture of adamant and other materials, are fitted. The rims of all but the second and the fifth whorl are of different colours,<sup>172</sup> and every one of them has a Siren mounted on it, each producing a single note, jointly blending into a beautiful melody.<sup>173</sup> This cosmic spindle revolves upon the lap of the goddess Necessity,<sup>174</sup> propelled by the hands of her three daughters,

---

afterlife which seems to bear some affinity with what will become the Christian concept of Hell, Purgatory and Heaven. For a comparative study of the judgment myths in the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, see Annas 1982.<sup>169</sup> With this the first part of Er's story is completed. It seemingly justifies Annas' (1981) worries, since here a thoroughly consequentialist reason for being just is given. In this section of the Myth we are shown that the just receive tenfold reward for their goodness, and the same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for the wicked as well. Therefore, it is much more prudent to be just than unjust. Nevertheless, the later parts of the story will offer no support to this simplistic view which flies in the face of the *Republic's* overall argument. In fact, the purpose of this section is foreshadowed at 612c-613b – it is meant to illustrate the second part of the claim that god is not neglectful of the just neither during their life, nor after it. This does not mean that Plato in any way encourages pursuing justice only for the benefits it delivers.

<sup>170</sup> For discussion on the nature, shape and function of the central light in the Myth of Er, see Richardson 1926 (relying significantly on Adam 1902) and Morrison 1966. Although they both consider the Pythagorean doctrine of central fire, and some hints from the Parmenides' Way of Opinion, as possible sources of the concept, the conclusions they reach are rather different.

<sup>171</sup> Representing, starting from the outermost whorl, the orbits of the fixed stars, the five known planets, the sun and the moon. Halliwell (2007, p. 456) writes: "The methodically itemized list of the spindle's immediate properties – the order and size of its rims, their varying luminosity – makes it coherently intelligible as a mathematical model of celestial bodies in a spherical, geocentric cosmos..." Furthermore, the whorl of the fixed star's motion from east to west, and the contrary revolution of the seven inner whorls, remind the reader of the motions of the *Timaeus's* circles of the Same and the Different.

<sup>172</sup> Possibly the seventh and the eighth (i.e. the sun and the moon) are of the same colour as well, since the latter shines by the light of the former. For a compressed, but rather complex interpretation of the principle of order and the functions of the rims' colours, as associated with the physical composition of the whorls, see Braumbaugh 1951.

<sup>173</sup> Obviously the Pythagorean 'harmony of the spheres.' For Aristotle's statement and critique of the theory, see *De Caelo* 290b12-291a25.

<sup>174</sup> This is remindful of Parmenides' goddess Anankē (DK B10&12), who is situated in the centre of the universe and steers everything. She is probably not, as Braumbaugh (1951, p. 173) contends, "personification of the concept of 'necessity' in *Timaeus* 68e ff". On the contrary, the goddess is a personification of the providential governance of the cosmos, which is unalterable, but also essentially rational and teleological. It seems that Johnson intends to convey a similar idea in (1999, p. 8): "Throughout the *Republic* ... Plato has used the word *necessity* in a logical rather than deterministic sense. Things are the way they are because they *must* be that way in the rational order." Cf. also Halliwell 2007, p. 457.

the *Moirai*: Lachesis, Clotho and Atropos.<sup>175</sup> They are seated around the throne of their mother, and sing in unison with the Sirens, of things that were, are, and will be, respectively.<sup>176</sup>

*Section three (617d-621a)*: As soon as the souls arrive at the scene, they are bidden to approach Lachesis. While they are gathering around her throne, a prophet<sup>177</sup> of the goddess steps out, takes from the lap of Lachesis lots and patterns of life, and, ascending a high-raised tribune, addresses the assembly on behalf of his mistress. Then the souls, qualified by the prophet as ephemeral,<sup>178</sup> learn that they are about to embark on another course of earthly life; that their

---

<sup>175</sup> From the *Theogony* (901-905), we learn that the *Moirai* were progeny of Zeus and Themis, and that they were given the duty to distribute good and evil and to preside over the fates of men. At 211-222 the picture is different and much more dreadful. They are daughters of Night, described as ruthless punishers (*nēleopoinous*), who virulently pursue the transgressors both among gods and men, and never cease from their anger until the sinner is sorely punished. Traditionally, Lachesis was charged with assigning happiness, distress and duration of life to mortals (from *lachos* – lot, allotted portion, one’s due), and she measured the thread of life. Clotho was the spinner of the life’s thread (from *klōthō* – to spin), and Atropos, she ‘who cannot be turned away’ (from *atropos* – unalterable, unturned) was charged with cutting the life’s thread. Plato’s *Moirai* bear the same names as Hesiod’s, and, in accord with the ancient tradition, preside over the past, present and future, respectively. In the Myth of Er, however, they have yet another lineage, and also perform a specific duty each – Lachesis assigns the guardian *daemon* to the souls about to take birth, Clotho confirms the choice and the fate of the soul, and Atropos makes it irreversible.

<sup>176</sup> The geography and the cosmography of this section present a curious blend of Plato’s own input and “traditional-cum-Homeric mythology (including the Sirens and Lachesis), mathematical astronomy, Pythagorean motifs (the harmony of the spheres), and the esotericism of Bacchic-Orphic mystery religion (as affinities with funerary gold lamellae confirm)” (Halliwell 2007, pp. 457f). Both this and the preceding section open ways for numerous interpretative problems, to which due attention cannot be paid here. Nevertheless, it should be noted that, although it is generally true that a Platonic myth “*should* have some rational interpretation” (Annas 1982, p. 120), we must not overlook the simple fact that Plato is, after all, purposefully guising his message in the robe of a tale; and within the confines of a tale, no serious discrepancy may arise, e.g., between the notion of a disembodied soul, and the image of her wearing a tablet on her chest, or moving on foot, etc.

Be that as it may, Plato’s intention behind the drawing of the second section’s complex earthly and celestial imagery seems rather clear: to underline the innate orderliness and rationality of the cosmos, the prime witnesses of its goodness and fairness. Before their rebirth in mortal bodies, the souls are given the chance to directly perceive the orderly nature of the cosmos, and if able, retain and cherish this vision during their embodied existence. The same image is echoed in the *Timaeus* 41e.

<sup>177</sup> This figure is bound to remain mysterious. For some possible reasons why Plato wanted to employ him, see McPherran 2010, p. 138. His worry, however, that the prophet’s powers of clairvoyance may influence the casting of the lots is unfounded.

<sup>178</sup> *psychai ephēmeroi*, souls living for a day. By this phrase Plato *does not* mean to stealthily introduce the idea that his advocacy of the concept of immortality has been all along but a dramatic fiction, as Thayer (1988, pp. 376-378) alleges. Such an understanding stands in contradiction with much of what Plato said, and receives no textual support, except maybe indirectly from some documentably early dialogues (see, e.g., the *Apology* 40c-e). It is a figurative expression, aiming to underline the inauspicious condition that arises due to the soul’s connection

*daimon* will not be assigned to them, but they will choose it themselves;<sup>179</sup> that samples of lives will be presented to them, and they will pick one of those in the order determined by the casting of lots;<sup>180</sup> that the choice of an appropriate life will be left at their own discretion, and that the decision, once made, will be irreversible. The responsibility for the ensuing happiness and distress will thus lay solely with them; god will be blameless.<sup>181</sup> The lots are then thrown, and each soul grabs the one closest to her, except for Er, who is forbidden to do so. Next, the prophet spreads out before the assembly patterns of lives, far more numerous than the souls present there. These lives are to be lived in a wide variety of human and animal forms, and abound in things bringing happiness and distress, as well as things intermediate; everything is given there, except for the quality or order of the soul (*psychēs taxin*), which will be determined of necessity by the features of the chosen life-pattern.<sup>182</sup> The prophet also notifies the assembly that those souls, who due to the will of *tychē*, come late in line, shouldn't be disheartened: even the last one to choose, provided it chooses wisely, will earn at least a tolerable life, and not an evil one.

Despite his warnings, however, many souls make hasty and foolish choices, even so the drawer of the first lot, who instantly seizes the greatest tyranny, not understanding that it will implicate him in abominable and horribly self-destructive acts.<sup>183</sup> Unable to recall the prophet's earlier instructions, he wails loudly, beats his breast and ascribes his ordeal to the workings of fate, the gods, and everything but his own choice.<sup>184</sup> Next, the others approach the life-patterns

---

with the body. In and of itself, it is immortal (*athanaton ge ē psychē phainetai ousa* (*Phd.* 114c); *psychē pasa athanatos* (*Phdr.* 245c), etc).

<sup>179</sup> Shorey (1937, p. 507, n. c) quotes the opinion of Zeller and Nestle that this is an intentional correction of *Phaedo* 107d, where the *daimon* is said to be allotted to the soul, which is also the traditional view (see Adam 1902, 617d, and Green 1948, p. 421, App. 52). The *daimon* here is nothing else but man's fate, which is basically of his own making (cf. Heraclitus' maxim: *ēthos anthrōpōi daimōn* (DK B119)).

<sup>180</sup> The same image, complete with the drawing of lots and free choice, is given in the *Phaedrus* (249b): "But in the thousandth year both [those punished under the earth and rewarded in heaven] come to draw lots and choose their second life, each choosing whatever it wishes. Then a human soul may pass into the life of a beast, and a soul which was once human, may pass again from a beast into a man."

<sup>181</sup> This is the key passage for our purpose, and we shall return to it shortly.

<sup>182</sup> Another interesting issue, which will be addressed latter.

<sup>183</sup> The story of the woeful fate of the precipitant tyrant is possibly meant to represent the final nail in the coffin of Trasymachus' thesis that the most unjust men, epitomized by the tyrant, are the happiest (see *Rep.* 344a-c). Halliwell (2007, pp. 476f) holds that with this episode Plato performs an ironically coloured mimesis of Greek tragedy, in order to negate the unsavory emotions that tragedy in general gives rise to.

<sup>184</sup> He was one of those souls freshly descended from heaven. His thousand years of bliss were well earned through a life-long adherence to justice in a well-ordered city; but his virtue was not genuine, because he was partaking in it by habit, and without philosophy. (Cf. *Phd.* 82a-c: only the lover of wisdom truly understands what virtue is). Johnson's observation on this episode is of value. According to him, Plato is here trying to discourage those who

lying on the ground and make their choices, persons renowned and ordinary, humans and animals alike.<sup>185</sup> Their choice, however, is for the most part determined by their past habits and bad experiences; wisdom plays little part in the evaluation of the offered possibilities.<sup>186</sup>

The choices thus having been made, the souls are being led before Lachesis, who attaches to each soul the *daimon* of its own choosing, as a guardian and fulfiller of its destiny; then the *daimon* leads the soul further, to Clotho, who ratifies its destiny, and to Atropos, who makes it irreversible. Finally, the souls pass beneath the throne of Necessity,<sup>187</sup> and move forward.<sup>188</sup>

*Section four (621a-b):* Their journey leads them through the Plain of Oblivion,<sup>189</sup> an expanse of parched land bereft of any vegetation. In the evening, after a long day's walk, they encamp besides the River of Forgetfulness, and are bid to drink from it, all except for Er. Tortured by thirst, many of the souls drink more than the measure, and thus forget everything

---

pursue a just life merely for its external rewards, and to show that they are not *truly* just. Such a person would be only the one who “pursues the Good in all its forms and always tries to choose what will aid him in this pursuit.” (1999, p. 9). That is one of the steps through which Plato aptly adjusts the seemingly incongruous Myth with the main argument of the Republic.

<sup>185</sup> The life-choosing scene is a very dramatic one, full of irony and pathos. Er says: “Truly it was a sight worth looking at ... to see how the souls severally chose their lives—indeed a sight pitiful, and laughable, and wonderful” (619e-620a).

<sup>186</sup> All the ‘souls’ listed in this passage are well-known, most of them tragic, characters (with the exception of Epeius, a controversial figure, and Thersites, the proverbial silly commoner). The first one mentioned is Orpheus, who, distraught by the outrage inflicted upon him by womenfolk, declines to be born of a woman, and chooses the life of a swan; the last one to choose is Odysseus, a hero so much worn-out by the tribulations he had to go through, that he seeks and happily finds a life of a private person who minds his own business. His case is also an illustration of the prophet’s statement that even for the last one in line there will be a good life available. Shorey (1937, p. 513, n. c) gives a short list of passages where Plato elaborates on the formative influence of the past life: *Phd.* 81e ff, *Phdr.* 248-249, *Tim.* 42a-4, 91d ff.

<sup>187</sup> The final act of confirmation of the soul’s destiny, which now cannot be undone.

<sup>188</sup> This is the section of the Myth from which the most important lessons for our purpose are to be drawn. It is intersected by two speeches of Socrates (618b-619a & 619d-e). In the first one he emphasizes personal responsibility and the importance of a life-long philosophical training, through which the power to discern between the essential and the trivial, the good and the evil, is to be begotten. The second one re-emphasizes the significance of proper cultivation of wisdom, and allows to *tychē* some power over the soul’s destiny. In relation to what has already been related by Er, this section shows that those who follow justice prompted by outward incentives are not truly just, and that the rewards they reap are transient and productive of great calamity. It thus brings the Myth back in agreement with the main argument of the Republic: justice should be followed for its own sake, because the just life is the best life. The wise person accepts, but is not lured by, the accidental consequences of justice, as its earthly and heavenly rewards are.

<sup>189</sup> *lēthēs pedion*. For a brief comment on this mythical *topos*, see Adam 1902, 621a. In Hesiod’s *Theogony* (227), the *daimon* Lēthē is one of the dreadful daughters of Eris. For the eponymous river, see Stewart 1905, pp. 154ff. It is the same with the River of Forgetfulness, ‘whose water no vessel can hold,’ and from which the souls drink to forget (621a).

they have seen and have experienced in the otherworld.<sup>190</sup> Then everybody, including Er, falls asleep, and at midnight there arises a thunderstorm, the earth shakes, and the souls are sent flashing across the sky like so many shooting stars to their next embodiment.<sup>191</sup>

*Conclusion (621b-d):* Here Plato gives some hints regarding the attitude we are supposed to take toward the Myth, if willing to reap the benefits it offers. “And thus, O Glaucon, the tale was saved and wasn’t lost, and would save us, provided we believe in it; so we shall cross the river of Lēthē safely, and our soul shall not be defiled” (621b8-c3).

Er’s tale is saved in at least two ways. Superficially, it is saved by being related in the presence of distinguished young men like Adeimantus and Glaucon, who are sure to embrace its message, and continue to recite it in front of different audiences on various occasions. So it may acquire the glory of the traditional myths and become part of the Greek-speaking world’s culture. More importantly, it is saved as an account – unlike, e.g., the ‘myth’ of Protagoras (*Tht.* 164d), which was proven to be a failure. This would mean that, although Er’s story is a *mythos*, and as such is not verifiable, or even trustworthy in every minor detail of its narrative,<sup>192</sup> it is not *alogos*,<sup>193</sup> because both its purpose and its purport are true and right.<sup>194</sup> In this sense, the Myth of Er, being a true account, will be preserved, while Protagoras’ myth,<sup>195</sup> being a deceptive one, will perish.

Furthermore, it is plausible to suggest that in this way Plato believed not to have saved only this particular tale, but even *mythos* in general. The Myth of Er can now serve as a paradigm of a myth reformed in accordance with the outlines given in the books II&III of the *Republic*, on

---

<sup>190</sup> This is Plato’s mythical answer to the question why do we forget the experiences of past lives. The scene implies that a moderate drinker could retain some memory, which would be of great aid during the next embodiment. No such soul is mentioned in the Myth, but neither are any philosophical souls, who would be expected to have some mastery over their appetites.

<sup>191</sup> The strongest emphasis in this short section is put on the saving power of reason, or wisdom (*phronēsis*). Only those souls who are lead by reason, instead of appetite, will successfully overcome the great challenges of life. Johnson holds that “Of all the scenes in the Myth of Er, this is perhaps the clearest allusion to the overall argument [of the *Republic*]” (1999, p. 11).

<sup>192</sup> See *Phd.* 114d.

<sup>193</sup> See *Gorg.* 532a

<sup>194</sup> Which brings us back to the above discussion of how Plato initially separated, but then blended again the concepts of *mythos* and *logos*.

<sup>195</sup> Which, as a matter of fact, is not a tale at all, but a philosopheme – the *mythos ho Protagoreios*, which was said to have been undone (*apōleto*), is Protagoras’ doctrine that ‘a thing is for each person what it seems to him to be,’ as much as Theaetetus’ myth is actually his suggestion that knowledge is perception (*Tht.* 164d9-10)

the liking of which many other tales may be composed, and later taught to the children of Kallipolis. Being such, the Myth of Er exhibits all main features of a proper Platonic myth, as briefly discussed above (pp. 30ff): It deals with subjects incomprehensible through the exercise of reason alone; it is a fantastic narrative, which, however, conveys ideas germane and true, and is thus both a *mythos* and a *logos*. The story of Er's wondrous journey also fulfills the two main functions of an enlightening myth: it educates in matters abstruse by providing pictures and images, and it persuades powerfully by making appeal to the emotions. And if we allow ourselves to be persuaded by it, as Socrates says, salvation will be ours as well.<sup>196</sup>

### I.3.3. The *theos anaitios dictum*

Now that the Myth has been outlined in its entirety, we can move to the central passage of the third section, and its auxiliaries. In the light of Plato's initial steps toward a cogent theodicean account, it comes almost as a sequel of the *Republic* 379c, where god was pronounced guiltless for the evils that befall mankind, but the reader was left in darkness with regard to the culprit(s). In the Myth of Er, the first point is strongly emphasized, while the second also receives some attention. The passage where god's liability is unequivocally denied, and where Lachesis' prophet gives some hints as to what could be the source of the universally experienced reality of affliction, moral depravity, and other kinds of unwanted conditions, is the following:

So, immediately after arriving, they had to go unto Lachesis. There a prophet first marshaled them in order, and then, after he took from Lachesis's knees lots and patterns of life, ascended a lofty tribune and said the following: "This is the word of Necessity's maiden daughter, Lachesis: Souls that live for a day, this is the beginning of another mortal cycle which is of death-bringing breed. Your *daimon* shall not obtain you by lot, but you shall choose your own *daimon*. And let him on whom the first lot falls, be the first one to choose a life, to which he shall cling of necessity. Virtue, however, has no master, and each person, as he honors or slights it, shall have more or less of it. The responsibility is on him who makes the choice; god is guiltless." (617d3-e5)

Next, Er provides some details concerning the process of choosing and its consequences:

---

<sup>196</sup> Effectuated through the acquisition of wisdom and the avoidance of the great peril of human life, which is to embrace the pleasurable instead of the good (see 618b-c).

Having said these words, the prophet threw the lots towards all, and each person took the one that fell next to him, save Er; him the prophet didn't allow. And to each one who picked the lot, it was clear which number he had drawn. After that the prophet in turn placed on the ground in front of them patterns of lives, far more than the persons present. They were of all sorts (617e4-618e3) ... However, the order of soul was not included in the patterns, because having chosen another life, the soul of necessity changes accordingly. But the other things of all kinds, both those related to riches and poverty, diseases and health were mixed together, as well as things that are intermediate to these. (618b3-6)

Obviously, the statement of the main thesis which is of interest for us here is simple and straightforward: the responsibility for whatever happens in one's life is on him who makes the choice; god is guiltless (*aitia helomenou: theos anaitios*). There are, however, quite a few unclarities and interpretative problems attached to the thesis and its context.

To be more precise, what we actually have here are two easily discernible distinct propositions, which are, nevertheless, closely connected. The second one, namely *theos anaitios*, does not require much comment; it is a restatement of the thesis introduced already in the *Republic II*, which Plato took to have been clearly demonstrated at 379a-c. Still, one interesting modification of the earlier thesis effected in the second formulation must not pass unnoticed. While in the *Republic II* god's guiltlessness was limited to the unwanted things that befall mankind (*pollōn ... tois anthrōpois ... anaitios*), in the Myth of Er it is expanded. Since both among the life-patterns offered for choice (618a4), and among the souls who choose (620a7-b1; 620d3) birds and beasts are included, god is, by implication, absolved from responsibility for the suffering of the non-human animals as well. But since Plato places no emphasis and adds no further comment on the issue, after noting some similarities with the pattern of inter-species transmigration in the *Phaedo*,<sup>197</sup> we can leave it at rest.

On the other hand, the proposition *aitia helomenou* gives rise to several complex problems and requires more detailed elaboration. The first one is to determine the status of *tychē* and the meaning of the lottery episode, which seems to stand on a no-man's land: it is neither a part of the workings of the gods, nor of the process of choosing, for which the souls are to be held responsible. This is a difficult task indeed.

---

<sup>197</sup> Both in the Myth of Er and in the *Phaedo* (81e-82d) the souls transmigrate into bodies which are in affinity with their character, just and gentle people into tame and socially organized animals, rude and violent into savage animals, and *vice versa*.

### I.3.3.1 The lottery episode in the Myth of Er

As for as the purpose of the lottery in the architectonics of the Myth, McPherran writes the following: “Every commentator on the Myth of Er has rightly understood Plato’s insertion of the initial lottery to be his way of initially absolving the gods of moral responsibility for each soul’s choice of life and the consequences that accompany that choice.”<sup>198</sup> This generalization, although unsupported by any reference, sounds quite reasonable – with the employment of lot-casting Plato must have had in mind something like diverting the responsibility from the gods on *tychē*.<sup>199</sup> What remains dubious is how successful this enterprise is, and how big a role it plays in the overall argument for god’s blamelessness, i.e. how broad its scope is. We shall first go through several objections to its credibility, all of them found in McPherran (2010), and then briefly consider the broadness of its scope.

Already in the introductory part of his article, McPherran expresses a doubt concerning the fairness of the lot-casting procedure, which, if confirmed, will clearly cast a long shadow on the entire project of absolving god from the responsibility for badness: “Unfortunately, it is unclear if the lottery is rigged in some fashion ...” This, however, seems to be a rather groundless supposition. First, there is no textual indication whatsoever that such an act could have taken place; second, and more important, there is no sufficient reason for it taking place. For, assuming that some kind of fraud is involved in the lot-casting, a very natural reaction would be to ask by whom and for whose benefit is it done? The rigging clearly must be done by a god or some other divinity. Now, if we want to exclude from the divine nature properties like utter fickleness, whimsicalness and gratuitous spite, and thus deny that any divine being would perpetuate such an elaborate fraud simply as a pastime, the beneficiaries obviously must be some

---

<sup>198</sup> McPherran 2010, p. 136

<sup>199</sup> Nevertheless, McPherran’s argument in support of this conclusion is a nonstarter: “Any doubts on this score can be settled by looking at Book 5, 460a, where the marriage lottery – albeit a ‘sophisticated’ lottery, meaning a ‘fixed’ one – is introduced with the explicit aim of deflecting blame from the guardians onto *tuchē*” (*ibid.*). In fact, had Plato constructed the lottery of the Myth on the analogy of the ‘marriage lottery,’ he would have produced only an *appearance* of blamelessness, because at 460a the responsibility for the matches is the guardians’, and not anybody else’s. Thus the analogy actually establishes the opposite of the *theos anaitios* thesis, moreover adding to the charge deliberate deceitfulness on the part of the deity. And that is certainly not how Plato wants his god to be.

of those souls who come among the first in the choice-line. But then the gods must be somehow biased, either through some error in judgment, or by being induced to partiality by gifts and implorations. The former is impossible, since in the gods not a trace of ignorance abides.<sup>200</sup> As for the latter, in the lottery scene of the *Myth* there are no other divinities involved except for Lachesis and her semi-divine servant, the unnamed prophet. Lachesis is a daughter of the goddess Necessity, and thus absolutely unshakable. Consequently, it is highly improbable that she would employ somebody of questionable character as her spokesman. Furthermore, even if they were not associated with Necessity, an emblem of the unalterable, rational cosmic law, in Plato's theology there is no room whatsoever for a wanting<sup>201</sup> or a bribable deity.<sup>202</sup> Therefore, the worry concerning any divine interference in the lottery's outcome can be safely dismissed.<sup>203</sup>

The same argumentation applies to another, but closely connected, concern which McPherran voices on p. 138: "Plato mysteriously undermines his insulation project by describing the lot-caster as a *prophet*, thus a being who can in theory know in advance the outcome of his toss. The semi-divine prophet could, then, influence his toss in a non-random way." However, his being a prophet does not mean that he knows everything that will transpire in the future, including the outcome of the toss and the best possible way to rearrange it in order to achieve the desired end, whatever it may be. And even if we assume that he in fact has full knowledge of the future (at least of the lottery), knowing that an event will take place does not imply any causal impulse aimed at altering it in any way. He could just very well know the outcome, and let it be.<sup>204</sup>

A graver doubt is, however, expressed in the last paragraph of the same page: "[F]or the audience Plato has the prophet address – the disembodied souls *and* Plato's own readers – the casting of lots (*klēroi*) was not a way of making decision via a random selection; rather, it was a way of allowing *the gods* to decide an issue." Were this statement a representation of the actual

---

<sup>200</sup> Furthermore, in the *Gorgias* myth, Plato set up an elaborate scene in order to exclude the possibility of erroneous judgment even in the case of demigods, namely the three judges of the dead (523b-524a).

<sup>201</sup> See *Rep.* 381c

<sup>202</sup> See *Leg.* 905d-907b

<sup>203</sup> Theoretically, the possibility that the prophet could make an error or could be lured into cheating remains open; but once again, for such an assumption, we would need some indication in the text.

<sup>204</sup> In this regard, it is important to bear in mind the primary meaning of the word *prophētēs*. It refers not to someone who sees the future, but to "one who speaks for a god and interprets his will to men" (*LSJ*). This is an important consideration which McPherran disregards in his objection.

attitude on the issue exercised by Plato's contemporaries, it could seriously challenge the lot-casting as an insulation technique. It seems, however, that the reality in 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century Athens had been different. Of course, there must have been a period when the lot-casting was taken as an expression of divine will, both in Greece and elsewhere, but we have very little, if not nil evidence that such an intuition was current during the age of the *Republic*.<sup>205</sup>

To start with the references from Plato's works which McPherran provides in order to add some weight to his claim (p. 144, n. 22) – none of them really supports the expressed worry. The references to the *Timaeus* are unusual, to say the least. Neither at 34b-36d, nor at 46c-47e there is any mention of lottery as indicative of any kind of divine interference. The former passage deals with the construction of the World Soul and the distribution of the soul-stuff into the circles of the Same and the Different, while the latter with the auxiliary causes that facilitate the sense organs' operation, and the benefits that these provide for the humans.

The two *Laws* references, although closer to the point, also fail to show that Plato himself took the falling of the lots as an expression of divine will. For 690c gives us nothing more than an information that one of the rights to rule rests upon casting of lots, and that this kind of rule is brought about by the favor of god and good fortune (*theophilē kai eutyche archēn*); this *does not* mean that the lottery is a way of allowing the gods to decide, but simply that the one who is chosen to rule by lot is loved by them and favored by fortune – which is a much weaker claim than the former.

The second passage referred to by McPherran, namely 756e-758a, is not only unresponsive of the thesis that the idea behind lot-casting was to let the gods decide, but actually repudiates it. First, from 756e we learn that after a certain group of councilors is chosen by lot, they are subjected to testing, which is an absurd step, had the legislator envisaged the lot casting as divine ordinance. Furthermore, at 757b-c Plato explicitly distinguishes between two kinds of equality – a superficial, arithmetical equality, determined by number, and a true, proportional equality, which gives the due measure to each person according to their nature. Now, the distribution of the first kind of equality is secured by employing the lot (*klērōi apeuthynōn eis tas dianomas autēn*), while the second one is ordained and supported by Zeus himself – *dios krisis*

---

<sup>205</sup> This dialogue probably became available to the public sometime between 390-360 BC. For the difficulties involved in establishing the *Republic's* dramatic as well as compositional date, see Nails 1998.

*esti*. As the text makes it obvious, it is not the outcome of the lot which is arranged by Zeus; if he stands behind anything, that would be the principle that the worthier should receive greater goods and honors than the less worthy. Finally we learn that the legislators, in order to foster justice, will be forced to occasionally employ lot-casting, lest the masses will become discontent and intestine discord will arise; but while doing that they should “pray, calling upon god and good luck (*theon kai agathēn tychēn*) to guide for them the lot aright towards the highest justice” (757e). They should also be careful to employ that form of equality “which needs luck (*tychē*)... as seldom as possible” (758a). Thus, what the mentioned passages in fact establish is that Plato does not consider the lot an instrument of god’s will, but a genuinely democratic (and therefore not overly laudable) means of establishing order in the state and equality among its citizens.<sup>206</sup> He is, moreover, reluctant to use it freely, and advises the casting of lots to be accompanied by prayers to god and good luck, so that they may positively influence the otherwise fortuitous outcome. Were the lot-casting conceived as McPherran says it was, it wouldn’t have been so obviously downgraded, and no separate intervention of the divinity would have been petitioned.<sup>207</sup>

For Plato, then, the lot was *not* a means of letting the gods express their will. And neither was it so for his contemporaries, and consequently, for his readers. In Athens’ everyday political life the drawing of lots was too common and too mundane an occurrence to have had any supernatural import attached to it:

---

<sup>206</sup> For a concise discussion of the principles of arithmetical and proportional equality, and references to the works of Aristotle and Isocrates where the same subject is treated in greater length, see Manin 1997, pp. 35-38

<sup>207</sup> There is, however, another place in the *Laws*, not mentioned by McPherran, which seems to ascribe the outcome of the lot-casting to divine will. It is 759b-c: “As to the priests, we shall entrust it to god himself to ensure his own good pleasure, by committing their appointment to the divine chance of the lot (*kleroun houtō tēi theiai tychēi apodidonta*).” Nevertheless, even this is far from being conclusive. For one, it refers to a very specific case, namely appointment of the gods’ personal servants. Since it is an affair of direct dealing with the divine, in this particular instance the falling of the lot may be led by god’s hand and divine luck. But maybe not; interestingly, Plato himself is rather reluctant to accept what he just said – already in the next sentence he demands that each priest thus appointed should be always carefully examined (*dokimazein de ton aei lagchanonta*) as to whether he or she is pure enough and meritable enough to perform the service. This shows that *theia tychē*, whatever it may be, cannot be fully trusted, and consequently cannot be taken as a transparent token of divine will.

The Athenian democracy entrusted to citizens drawn by lot most of the functions not performed by the Popular Assembly (*ekklēsia*). This principle applied mainly to the magistracies (*archai*). Of the approximately 700 magistrate posts that made up the Athenian administration, some 600 were filled by lot.<sup>208</sup>

Besides that, the members of the Council (*boulē*), were also appointed by lot, and the jurors (*dikastai*) were selected by lot out of the pool of *hēliastai*. All these officials were subjected to thorough examination before they could take up their office, and the magistrates were at any time liable to impeachment and, possibly, punishment, which is, again, hardly an evidence of trust in divine decision. Furthermore, many good ancient sources associate the lot with a very this-worldly activity, which is the democratic governance. Aristotle, most probably wrongly,<sup>209</sup> sees the institution of selection by lot already in the constitution of Draco (622 or 621 BC),<sup>210</sup> and says that it is a democratic principle.<sup>211</sup> Herodotus,<sup>212</sup> a generation older than Plato, stresses the selection of magistrates by lot as the most prominent feature of the best, i.e. the democratic governance.<sup>213</sup>

Finally, Xenophon's Socrates, at least according to his *katēgoros*, ridiculed the democratic practice of appointing public officials by lot, saying that "no one would choose a pilot or builder or flautist by lot, nor any other craftsman for work in which mistakes are far less disastrous than mistakes in statecraft."<sup>214</sup> He certainly wouldn't have said such a thing, had he believed that the selection by lot had anything to do with divine providence. Therefore, McPherrans worry is clearly unfounded, because neither Plato, nor his audience, were normally prone to perceive the outcome of the lot as divinely directed.<sup>215</sup> Thus, the drawing of lots in the Myth of Er is justified as an initial technique for insulating the gods from responsibility.

---

<sup>208</sup> Manin 1997, p. 11.

<sup>209</sup> See Hansen 1991, pp. 49ff

<sup>210</sup> *Const. Ath.* 4

<sup>211</sup> *Pol.* 1294b8

<sup>212</sup> *Hdt.* III. 80

<sup>213</sup> For further textual references on this point, see Manin 1997, p. 27, fn. 48

<sup>214</sup> *Mem.* I.ii.9. For an echo of this criticism in Plato, see *Prot.* 319c-d.

<sup>215</sup> Hansen 1991, pp. 50f, and Manin 1997, pp. 25f, discuss the theory that the origins and the significance of selection of magistrates by lot were religiously inspired, a theory advanced already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; but the former concludes that there is no single good source to straightforwardly testify to that, and the latter that the theory "no longer enjoys currency among today's specialists." Finley (1983), considering the period "from ... the mid-seventh century, to the conquest by Alexander the Great or a little later" (p. 12), is resolute: "Many Greek communities selected their officials by lot as a matter of routine, without any suggestion that the choice was thereby being transferred to the gods" (p. 94).

Now, from the last two sentences, two further questions arise: a) if the falling of the lot is not determined through god's ordinance, what is the particular outcome due to? b) What is precisely the responsibility that the gods are insulated from?

The answer to the first question is rather obvious – the outcome of the lot (*klēros*) is directed by luck, or chance (*tychē*).<sup>216</sup> That sounds fair enough, but what does Plato have in mind when he brings up *tychē*? What is the concept that the word stands for? Obviously, this is too complex an issue to get engaged with in the course of the present discussion, but few notes are definitely in order. I shall first venture to say what the word does not stand for, and only after that what it could mean in the context of the Myth.

For the reasons just given, as well as because in the *Republic* 619c and in the *Laws* 757e Plato places divinities and luck side by side, as two distinct factors, the *tychē* of the Myth is not the *theia moira* or *theia tychē* of the poets. Next, despite the attractiveness of the proposal, it probably does not allude to Plato's "later *Timaeus* view of the causes of evil ... that he locates in the disorderly motions of matter."<sup>217</sup> For one, in the Myth of Er luck or chance plays only a minor role as an *explanans* for the occurrence of badness, the main emphasis being put on the soul's wrong choice, prompted by ignorance; furthermore, *tychē* and *anankē* are in the Myth distinguished, if not contrasted, while in the *Timaeus* necessity and the wandering cause are rather the same thing.<sup>218</sup> It also isn't Aristotle's much more complex *tychē* of the *Physics* II. 5, which is an accidental or coincidental cause found among things that are for the sake of something and which involve decision, i.e. a conscious agent.<sup>219</sup> As a matter of fact, Plato gives no explanation of *tychē* neither in the Myth, nor elsewhere in the *Republic*. Thus it seems that he takes *tychē* as a 'brute fact,' close to the folk concept of chance, i.e. the inexplicable randomness with we believe to meet daily. It is probably the same deficient *tychē* of Empedocles and

---

<sup>216</sup> *Rep.* 619d7. Plato obviously accepts, both in ordinary parlance and on the ontological level, that chance and randomness can exert some influence on events. For the former see, e.g., *Rep.* 460a, 619c; for the latter *Tim.* 34c – *alla pōs hēmeis poly metechontes tou prostychontos te kai eikē* – "but as we to a large degree partake of the accidental and the random ..."

<sup>217</sup> McPherran 2010, p 144, n. 6.

<sup>218</sup> Necessity and chance are again brought close together in the *Laws* 889c1 – *kata tychēn ex anankēs* – the chance (results) arise from necessity.

<sup>219</sup> The outcome of the lot probably couldn't be analyzed as belonging to the set of events that arise from spontaneity either (the spontaneous – *to automaton*: discussed in Aristotle's *Phys.* II. 6). Spontaneous events come to pass not for the sake of what actually results, and in this sense are in vain (see *Phys.* 197b17-32), while the lot-casting is not such an event.

Democritus, whom Aristotle reproves for first evoking it, and then leaving it undiscussed and unexplained.<sup>220</sup>

As shown on the preceding pages, the mysterious prophet's lot-casting may be taken as a successful strategy of diverting responsibility from god to *tychē*. Now a few words are due regarding the question what are the gods really absolved from through the lot-casting process, i.e. the question b) above. This issue is coextensive with the unresolved problem of the strategy's scope, which we raised at the beginning of the discussion of the lot-casting in the Myth and its interpretation offered by McPherran, and thus one simple answer will have to suffice for both. At times, the text gives rise to an impression that *klēros* and *tychē* play a significant role in shaping the soul's future life. Such places are 619d7 – *dia tēn tou klērou tychēn*,<sup>221</sup> and 619e2 – *ho klēros autōi tēs haireseōs mē en teleutaiōis piptoī*.<sup>222</sup> It is, however, very difficult to discern Plato's intention behind these statements, since “the myth does not indicate how a soul's allotted position in the queue affects its choice of life.”<sup>223</sup> Moreover, they stand in contradiction with some other important passages and examples, besides the overall message that the chooser alone is responsible for his life. At 618a the prophet throws upon the ground patterns of lives, which are far more numerous than the souls present (*poly pleiō tōn parontōn*).<sup>224</sup> Next, at 619b the prophet is adamant in his claim that even the last one in the row shall get a desirable life,<sup>225</sup> provided he chooses with understanding (*kai teleutaiōi epionti, xyn nōi helomenōi ... keitai bios agapētos*). Finally, the only soul among those listed in the Myth whose choice is not a terrible mistake or purely a matter of reactive, emotional selection, is the soul of Odysseus, exactly the last one to choose.<sup>226</sup> All this does not conclusively repudiate the idea that *tychē*, as the actuator of the lot's outcome, has significant influence on the soul's destiny. But it does cast a serious doubt on that idea, and leaves the burden of proof on those who accept it. In the lack of such proof, it seems safe to conclude that “the point of the lottery must be that it forms an orderly

---

<sup>220</sup> *Phys.* 196a17-36

<sup>221</sup> The alternation of good and evil befalls the soul because of its indolence, and *due to the luck of the lot*.

<sup>222</sup> Happiness in the next life is achievable if one pursues philosophy soundly, and *if the lot doesn't fall in such a way that he is among the last to choose*.

<sup>223</sup> Inwood 2009, p. 42

<sup>224</sup> Maybe there will be no more philosophical lives left for those who come among the last in the queue (see Halliwell 2007, pp. 465f), or maybe only animal or barbarian lives will remain? But again, the text gives no indication that the patterns are exhaustible, or that there are more patterns of artisans' than of philosophers' lives.

<sup>225</sup> Cf. *Phil.* 61e

<sup>226</sup> Besides with his proverbial *mētis*, one can imagine that Odysseus' appropriate choice might have something to do exactly with his being last, i.e. having more time to consider his options and avoid rush decisions.

queue for the choice of lives, not that it seriously affects the choice that is eventually made.”<sup>227</sup> Thus the insulating power of the strategy is limited to the placement of the souls in the choice-queue.

### **I.3.4 *Aitia helomenou*: the problem of free agency and individual moral responsibility**

The entire project of absolving the gods from liability to blame in the Myth of Er rests upon the attestation of the soul’s moral responsibility, which is put in action through the act of supposedly free choice. The biggest issue of the Myth’s compressed theodicy is to show that the soul is indeed the chooser, and that her choice is not meddled with in any significant way, i.e., that it is factually free. Already the first statement of the prophet, which follows his introductory sentence at 617d8, aims at strongly underlining the agent’s moral responsibility: “no *daimōn* shall obtain you by lot, but you shall choose your own *daimōn*.”<sup>228</sup> And, as Plato would want us to believe, if a certain action is initiated through somebody’s own choosing, the responsibility for it, as well as for the consequent events and further actions it sets in motion, is his or hers, and not god’s. There are, however, several restrictions and difficulties related to this act of choosing and the moral responsibility it implies, some of which threaten to taint and overturn the Myth’s theodicean effort.

The first restriction is that nobody is at liberty to choose not to make any choice;<sup>229</sup> making up one’s mind and getting started with the new life is absolutely obligatory, since such is Necessity’s law, implemented and overseen by her three formidable daughters. This is certainly a restriction, but nevertheless, not a real problem; the alternative would be to remain in the *bardo* state indefinitely, or, having the whole situation transposed on everyday life, to remain utterly inactive and refrain from making decisions, which ordinarily cannot be expected.

---

<sup>227</sup> Inwood, 2009, p. 43

<sup>228</sup> 617e1-2: *ouch hymas daimōn lēxetai, all’ hymeis daimona hairēsesthe*. This, due to the employment of the word *lexomai* (from *lagchanein* – ‘to obtain by lot’), may also be read as an allusion to the lottery and its far lesser significance in comparison to the individual’s own choice. Then it would mean, ‘your destiny will not be assigned to you by lot (whether it be a chancy or a divinely directed one), but will be a matter of your own making.’

<sup>229</sup> See Thayer 1988, p. 372.

Another minor restriction is that the assortment of life patterns, although rather wide, is still limited. Picking a life of an always jolly, math-loving duck is simply not an option. Still, despite the shortcomings of this type, the variety of life-patterns is sufficient enough to provide a satisfactory future existence even for those of quite extravagant a taste. Some constraint has to be there, because the universe is of a certain kind, and in order to be as rational and as good as possible, cannot be otherwise. So these two restrictions are due to the workings of Necessity, in whose domain both the souls and the corporeal objects have to act in obedience to some stringent laws.

#### I.3.4.1 Does Plato operate with the notion of the will?

A weightier issue that ought to be addressed before passing on to the problem of free agency and moral responsibility is the question of the faculty, or the ‘mechanism’ behind the act of choice. Although the idea that Plato entertained any notion close to the will is nowadays almost completely given up,<sup>230</sup> quite a few eminent scholars in the past were prone to ascribe to Plato the concept, not only of will, but also of will that is free. Thus Zeller: “There is no doubt that Plato presupposes [the freedom of the will] in the sense of freedom of choice. ... He distinctly asserts that the will is free; and he makes even the external lot of men ... expressly depend of free choice in a previous state of being.”<sup>231</sup> As noted by him,<sup>232</sup> Plato often uses the terms ‘voluntary’ and ‘involuntary’ with respect to actions. In the *Republic* 535e1-2, for example, he speaks of *hekousion* and *akousion* falsehood, in the *Laws* 863a of *hekousion* and *akousion* injustice, the former of the two Greek terms being the one that will become standard locution for the concept of voluntariness (*to hekousion*).<sup>233</sup> Furthermore, in the *Laws* 904c, Plato

---

<sup>230</sup> Irwin 1992, and Kenny 1997 trace the concept of the will all the way back to Aristotle, but only very few contemporary thinkers dare to go any further in the past.

<sup>231</sup> Zeller 1888, p. 419. See also p. 421.

<sup>232</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>233</sup> In this respect, Socrates in the *Gorgias* famously tries to prove that the bad man does things which he imagines to be good (*ha dokei*), and not what he really desires, or wills (*ha bouletai*), and Plato seems to follow Socrates in claiming that nobody errs willingly (*oudeis hekōn hamartanei*) even beyond the Socratic dialogues. See, e.g., the discussion on ‘curable criminals’ in the *Laws* 731c-d, from where we learn that every unjust man is unjust against his will, that no one would deliberately embrace evil, etc. The same thesis is more emphatically stated and elaborated at 860d ff.

informs us that the soul's changes of character, which take place from one life to the next, are left to her own desire, or will (*boulēsis*).<sup>234</sup>

Much with the same conviction, Stewart writes, with reference to the Myth of Er: “[t]he question of how to reconcile Free Will with the Reign of Law. Both are affirmed in the Myth.”<sup>235</sup> Green is most emphatic of them all:

The autonomy of the soul implies the freedom of the will. This conception ... is implicit in the earlier dialogues ... as well as in the psychology of the *Republic* ... It will be even more clearly defined in the Myth of Er and ... in the *Timaeus*... Freedom of the will is even more explicitly upheld in an impressive passage in the *Laws* ...”<sup>236</sup>[i.e. 727b-c].

There are, however, also some contemporary critics who regard the concept of the will as more than an anachronism, and believe that it can be accommodated within our accounts of Plato's philosophy. Thus Sorabji, following Sedley and others, submits that Plato could be assigning something close to the function of will-power to the spirited part of the soul.<sup>237</sup> But then, Sorabji continues, such will-power would be divorced from the functions of freedom and responsibility, which are, for him, constitutive of the notion of the will. They are instead, in our passage of the Myth (617e), attached to the act of choosing (*hairesthai*),<sup>238</sup> which remains unexplained. Segvic goes even a step further back, and allows that the concept of the will could exist already in Socrates, whose “remarks on wanting and willing, sketchy and conversational though they are, point ... to a distinct notion of the will.”<sup>239</sup> But if Plato's Socrates is aware of something like the will (*boulēsis*), then Plato himself *a fortiori* also knows it, because the *Gorgias* and the *Protagoras*, which are in the focus of Segvic's investigation, were written by

---

<sup>234</sup> The Greek term, as found in the works of Plato and Aristotle as well as in later Greek authors, is nowadays often translated as ‘will.’

<sup>235</sup> Stewart 1905, p. 169.

<sup>236</sup> Green 1948, pp. 306f

<sup>237</sup> “*Thumos* is like will in being distinct from reason, but a desire which, according to Plato, is always allied with reason and never opposes it in a struggle against appetites.” (Sorabji 2004, p. 9. See also notes 1. and 33.)

<sup>238</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>239</sup> Segvic 2000, p. 3. In her paper she presents a discussion on Socrates' theory of motivation (in which, according to the author, he recognizes both the standard belief-desire pair, and volition), as well as on the concept of the weakness of the will.

him, and because nobody can be sure beyond any doubt that the views presented there are truly and exclusively Socratic, and not in some way Platonic.<sup>240</sup>

The problem of presence or absence of the concept of the will in Plato's works is really a question of what we are looking for, which is, in itself, not an easily solvable issue at all. Besides those who reject the theory of the will as superfluous, nay, an absurd hypothesis (most famously Ryle in the Third chapter of his *The Concept of Mind*), even its partisans are not absolutely clear about it, since neither historically there has been, nor presently there is a notion of the will simple and universally agreed upon. For the purpose of illuminating the concept from historical perspective, Kahn suggests three clusters of theories, and a single problematic approach that permeates them all. These are the ones originating with St. Augustin, Descartes and Kant respectively, while the pervading topic is the clash between free will and determinism.<sup>241</sup> In the light of this division, which assembles rather complex notions of the will and its corollaries, it is all but natural to conclude that the above mentioned scholars were mistaken, and that nothing of the kind exists not only in Plato, but even in both the Classical and Hellenistic periods as a whole. Such is, e.g., the approach of Dihle, who claims that the concept of the will proper starts its development only with the rise of Christianity, and reaches its culmination with St. Augustine.<sup>242</sup>

As far as the contemporary reflections on the problem of the will are concerned, Ekstrom (2010) provides an instructive summary of the theories that recognize the will as a factor in the explanation of action and moral responsibility. She distinguishes two main, rather wide, interpretative currents. They take the will to be: a) faculty or ability for choice, which somehow produces volitions or willings, that is, particular instances of choices; b) attitude, drive or even desire that leads one to a specific, and not any other, course of action.<sup>243</sup> Although these two sets of theories inherit most of the problems, as well as appropriate much of the achievements of their

---

<sup>240</sup> For the last point cf. Kahn 1987, p. 85

<sup>241</sup> Kahn 1988, pp. 235f.

<sup>242</sup> Dihle, besides denying the Greeks' possession of the concept of the will, somewhat surprisingly extends the intellectualists approach to morality and freedom of choice far beyond Socrates (and the Stoics), and writes: "The freedom, then, to choose the ends and means of action which human beings seem to enjoy is not primarily, in the Greek view, the freedom to direct ones intention wherever one pleases. Free will does not exist in its own right as it does according to St. Augustine's anthropology. It depends on man's alleged potential ability to reach an adequate understanding of reality by his own intellectual effort." (1982, p. 45).

<sup>243</sup> See Ekstrom 2010, pp. 99ff. On the second account, the notion of the will comes quite close to the notion of intention.

predecessors, through being to a high degree free of the theological and metaphysical burden, they are capable of providing clearer account of the will's place in human psychology. No injustice would be done to either of the two if we were to say that for a contemporary theorist, the will is, roughly speaking, simply the capacity for making choices. Thus also Frede: "The notion of a will, then, is the notion of our ability to make ... choices and decisions which make us act in the way we do."<sup>244</sup>

In this respect, we can restate the question of Plato and the will more directly and specifically as follows: Does Plato countenance something like the will – as defined above – in his works, and particularly in the *Republic*? At first sight, it may seem that the answer to this question could, or even, should be affirmative; for Plato undoubtedly recognizes that human beings are endowed with the ability to make choices. This hasty conclusion, however, demands further discussion. What actually makes it to a degree appealing is the fact that in the question, as it stands here, the noun 'will' is modified by the adjectival phrase 'something like.'

Now, even if we wish to retain the modifier, the answer will not be in the affirmative were we to take the will in Ekstrom's first sense quoted above, namely as 'faculty for choice, emitting volitions.' This is so because, on this understanding, the will is a higher-order entity, distinct from the volitions or the choices, indeed the source of them all, and as such plainly non-existent in Plato. On the other hand, the second sense of the will, which interprets it as 'attitude or desire that stirs one to a particular action,' is more hopeful. If that would be how we delineate the will, then Plato probably recognizes 'something like' it, for he clearly acknowledges that the motions of the soul, like desire, etc., are the cause of every movement (*Leg.* 896e-897a), and, in his explanation of the possibility of psychical conflict, he posits three kinds of drives, belonging to the reasoned, appetitive and spirited part of the soul (*Rep.* 439a-441b).<sup>245</sup> These are the motivational factors on account of which one makes his or her choices, significant and petty alike, and they could be taken to represent the will understood in the second sense above. This impression may be strengthened by the language that Plato sometimes uses: in a passage crucial with regard to his psychology, he speaks of wishing and willing as psychic attitudes,<sup>246</sup> using the

---

<sup>244</sup> Frede 2010, p. 8.

<sup>245</sup> For the thesis that not only the drives, but also their sits, i.e. the parts of the soul, are simply forms of desire, see Kahn 1987.

<sup>246</sup> "[the soul] draws towards its embrace what it wishes to accrue to it (*ho an boulontai hoi genesthai*); or again, in so far as it wills that anything be presented to it (*ethelei ti hoi poristhēnai*) ..." (*Rep.* 437c3-4).

both terms destined to become inseparably connected with the future reflections on the will<sup>247</sup> – *ethelein* and *boulesthai* (*Rep.* 437b-d). These attitudes are, however, considered separately from the passions or appetites (*epithymiai*).<sup>248</sup> Since the appetites clearly belong to the *epithymetikon meros* of the soul, this could mean either that besides them there are some additional wishings and willings in it, or that the wishings and willings belong to some other part of the soul.<sup>249</sup> Both alternatives map poorly onto the concept of the will in the second sense above, since they confine the will power to a narrow spectrum of undefined attitudes, excluding at least the sensuous desires, which are in themselves powerful motivational factors.

In fact, the proposal that the concept of the will in Ekstrom's second sense can be transposed on Plato is also nonviable. This understanding not only gives rise to the Augustinian problem of 'the divided will,' but also comes close to frivolous, especially when divorced from the 'something like' phrase. It receives little or no textual support, and seems to serve no purpose besides the unfavorable one of multiplying entities or names. 'Something like' the will is necessary to explain human action, but as even the contemporary debate shows, that need not be the will proper. Since none of the mentioned descriptions of the will, neither historical nor contemporary, non-controversially fits into Plato's general reflections on motivation and action, it may be safe to fall back on another prominent theory and say that in Plato, the role of inciter to action is imparted to desire, which is multifarious and performs its duty either in conjunction with belief,<sup>250</sup> or on its own.<sup>251</sup> If this is so, then any further talk of the will may be discarded as

---

<sup>247</sup> For a brief account of the 'terminology of the will' see Sorabji 2004, pp. 6f.

<sup>248</sup> "[t]hirst, hunger, the appetites generally and consenting and willing (*to ethelein kai to boulesthai*)." (437b6-7); "but what of not willing, and not consenting (*to aboulein kai mē ethelein*) nor yet desiring?" (473c8).

<sup>249</sup> The second suggestion allows for a very neat account: passions naturally belong to the appetitive part of the soul, and are altogether blind drives, devoid of any cognitive content; Plato's *boulēsis* will belong to the *logistikon* part, as Aristotle believed (*De Anima* III.9.432b); the faculty of *ethelein* will be in the *thymoeides*, performing the function of will-power in Sorabji's sense (see above, fn. 211). It is, unfortunately, groundless. The appetitive desires are not completely devoid of cognitive content (see Kahn 1987, p. 85; Thomas 2010, p. 434), *boulēsis* of the example does not seem to be exclusively rational desire, as Aristotle would take it, and neither Plato nor Aristotle bring *ethelein* in connection with *thymoeides*. Moreover, had Plato intended to draw such an important distinction, he certainly wouldn't have passed over it so lightly and failed to explain or even mention it anywhere else.

<sup>250</sup> As in Irwin 1992, pp. 453f, Thomas 2010, p. 429

<sup>251</sup> Kahn 1987. In his protest against the 'double-factor' theory of action in Plato, he substitutes 'reason' for 'belief' and claims that the *logistikon* of the *Republic's* tripartite soul is but a form of desire, i.e. rational desire. The same, *mutatis mutandis*, applies to the two other parts of the soul. Kahn's interpretation of the *Republic's* psychology is indeed controversial, yet well argued. Nevertheless, it is hard to characterize it as conclusive, since it flies in the face of the natural view that, e.g., the appetitive desires have their *seat* in the *epithymētikon* part. Plato seems to describe them as doings and sufferings (*poiēmata, pathēmata*) of the respective part of the soul (*Rep.* 437b-e).

interpretative surplus, and thus the issue *de facto* turns into the question of explaining the process by which the desire-belief pair culminates into action, or, in the context of the Myth of Er, in the act of making choice (*hairesthai*).

A very well-known Socratic tenet expounded in some early, but also transitional and middle dialogues, is that all desire is for happiness or for the good (*Charmides* 167e, *Euthydemus* 278e, *Gorgias* 468c-d, *Meno* 77b-78b *Republic* 505d-e, *Symposium* 204e-206b). It is a crucial ingredient of the intellectualist theory, which explains action with reference to desire and belief only, and claims that the choice between various courses of action depends exclusively on our belief that a particular one is better for the purpose of promoting our overall wellbeing.<sup>252</sup> This conclusion, provided the proposition ‘all desire is for the good’ is true, is confirmable by *modus ponens*, and also, in some way, makes an appeal to the common sense: nobody would reject the desire for the good or happiness in favor of some lesser desire; what distinguishes different persons’ actions are their beliefs concerning the means of reaching that (unspecified) happiness. Plato himself, however, at least after he had introduced the tripartite soul, could not keep to this view anymore, unless he had it substantially modified.<sup>253</sup> Starting with the *Republic*, he accepted the existence of non-rational desires aiming not at the good but at, e.g., sensual pleasure, desires which are more than capable of influencing action.<sup>254</sup> Consequently, the mere belief about what is really good for oneself ceases to be the only decisive factor in choosing one course of action over another; the comparative strength of different desires now plays a significant role, and even an inauspicious desire, if not curbed by higher faculty, can force a person to choose the satisfaction of the immediate fancy, however hateful and abominable it may be.<sup>255</sup> While for Socrates believing that one course of action is for the best and still not following it is an impossibility, Plato, on the strength of his different account of desire, accepts the reality of

---

However this may be, Kahn’s innovation pertains to the technicalities of the status of desire and its relation to soul in Plato, and with it he does not truly reject the belief member of the pair, but trades it for reason, which is a desire of special kind. Since, as such, it cannot significantly influence or alter the course of our discussion, I will retain the traditional terminology of desire-belief.

<sup>252</sup> On the same principle, acting badly is explained by a cognitive failure only; no one desires what is bad, the evil-doers are simply confused with regard to the nature of the object they pursue.

<sup>253</sup> For an argument that Plato would not subscribe to Socratic intellectualism in this sense even regardless the tripartition, see Irwin 1974, pp. 763ff.

<sup>254</sup> Kahn 1987, p. 91 points out that the difference between *boulēsis*, as rational desire aiming at the good, and *epithymia*, as sensual desire aiming at pleasure, has been drawn already in the *Gorgias*, and that it is deducible from the *Charmides* as well.

<sup>255</sup> As in the famous story of Leontius, the corpse-watcher (*Rep.* 439e-440a).

psychic conflict and the probability that a corrupt desire may overcome a rational one, aligned with the appropriate belief. Nevertheless, Plato does not seem ready to entirely abandon the idea that desire is for the good. Indeed, in the *Republic* itself there are some conflicting statements regarding the ultimate directedness of desire. Thus at 438a Plato obviously unveils his dissatisfaction with the Socratic idea: “Let no one catch us unprepared or disturb us by claiming that no one has appetite for drink but rather good drink ... on the grounds that everyone after all has appetite for good things,” while at 505e confirms it emphatically: “Every soul pursues the good and does its utmost for its sake.” The palpable contradictoriness of the statements notwithstanding, there seems to be a way to impel them into coherence.

A crucial difference between Socrates’ and Plato’s approach to the issue of how desire is related to the good, as noted by Irwin, is that the former fails to specify the constituents of the good, or to identify it clearly, which is needed if everybody were to follow it staunchly, provided their beliefs are right.<sup>256</sup> Plato, on the other hand, has much clearer conception of the good. Its true nature is fully revealed only after a painstaking process of dialectical assent,<sup>257</sup> in the course of which different beliefs are formed and abandoned, each of them matched by a corresponding desire.<sup>258</sup> Some of those desires, for instance the craving for a beautiful body, at the end turn out not to be desires for the good at all. In this sense, only the rational desire of the *logistikon* part is for the good, which is ultimately the Good; sheer appetite is always after immediate gratification, and therefore simply a desire for, e.g., a drink, not a *good* drink. Furthermore, as already mentioned (fn. 233), an evil person may have his desire misplaced due to the wrong identification of its object, in which case he will do what seems fit to him (*ha dokei autōi*), not what he actually wants (*ha bouletai*).<sup>259</sup> Once again the (appetitive or spirited) desire is not for the good, this time not even in the Socratic sense.

How is it, then, that Plato agrees with Socrates that ‘every soul pursues the good,’ and claims, in the *Symposium*, that everyone desires happiness, which means possessing good things? He does so, I submit, in two ways. First, reason (*to logistikon*) is not only the ruling part of the

---

<sup>256</sup> “The virtuous and the non-virtuous man are supposed to differ in their beliefs about what contributes to the final good, but yet they are to share the same desire for the final good, so that only a change in belief is needed for virtue. If this is so, the final good each of them pursues must have the same constituents, so that they recognize the same cases as cases of achieving it. Otherwise changes in beliefs, with fixed desires for ends, will not be enough for virtue.” (Irwin 1974, p. 762).

<sup>257</sup> As in *Rep.* VII and *Sym.* 210a-e.

<sup>258</sup> See Irwin 1974, p. 764.

<sup>259</sup> *Gorg.* 468d.

soul, but it *is* the soul in its pure state, or the soul immortal, as confirmed in the *Phaedo*, the *Timaeus* 69c-e, and strongly indicated by the end of the *Republic*, in the passage centered around the simile of the sea-god Glaucus (611a-612a). Therein Socrates advises Glaucon to search for the true nature of the soul in its love of wisdom (*eis tēn philosophian autēn*), which is either established in, or is *to logistikon* itself, which is elsewhere designated as *philomathēs*, fond of learning, and *philosophos*, lover of wisdom (581b9).<sup>260</sup> As the essence of a human being, it takes care of the entire soul-body complex, by “calculating concerning what is better or worse” (441c1); “caring for the whole soul” (441e5) and “deliberating on behalf of the whole soul and body” (442b6).<sup>261</sup> In this sense, everyone indeed wants the good, and not only what is believed to be good, but that which is really good (as in 505d).

Second, it is possible, though in a rather profane way, to envisage also the desires issuing from the two lower parts of the soul as aiming at some good. Obviously, they lack the reason’s deliberative capacity, which is alone capable of making all-things-considered judgments concerning the best course of action. But they do have the power to recognize their objects as desirable, what these wouldn’t be weren’t they recognized as, in some sense, good as well (e.g. pleasurable, capable of boosting one’s pride, etc). It is because of this that ‘the lower desires’ are capable of initiating action, along the line, as it were, of the principle of Aristotle’s practical reasoning.

In this way, due to his much more mature conception of the good, Plato is capable to recognize different levels of happiness and wellbeing, and thus both confirm and deny that all human efforts and desires are aimed at the good.

This brings us back to the original question of the section, as we are now able to see how action, more specifically the act of making a choice, takes place. By understanding the *Republic*’s theory of reason, spirit and appetite as distinct sources of motivation, one can also understand how both right and wrong choices are possible in the Myth of Er. Now, in order to designate the act of choosing, represented in the Myth through the soul’s picking of her own *daimon* and her new life, Plato uses the word *hairesthai* and its cognates. This word was destined to become an important technical term, since it seems to have been an anticipation of Aristotle’s famous *proairesis*. I believe that conceptually the former quite closely matches the latter. In the

---

<sup>260</sup> For the thesis that reason is nothing else but that love, or desire, for wisdom and the good, see Kahn 1987, pp. 81ff.

<sup>261</sup> The quotations from the *Republic* are given in Kahn 1987, p. 84.

*Nicomachean Ethics* 1139a23, Aristotle explains that choice (*proairesis*) is deliberate desire (*orexis bouletikē*), which means that it includes both desire and reasoning with a view to an end (1139a32). As such, it is the origin of all action. Now, Plato does not separate reason and desire as clearly as Aristotle does with his *logos* and *orexis*. In the *Republic* at least, they are amalgamated together, in the sense that reason has desire, while desire has some cognitive capacity as well. This difference notwithstanding, Plato's *hairesis* in the Myth functions very much like Aristotle's *proairesis*: They are both propelled by a combination of desire and belief that certain objective is good, and that certain action will lead to its accomplishment; they are both the origin of all action; and for both of them we stand morally accountable, because it is ultimately up to us whether we perform them or not. For Plato, the quality of the choice depends on the *logistikos*'s ability to overpower the other two forces and lead the soul to a rational decision by establishing its authority. When spirit and appetite take over, the result is inauspicious, or worse. Thus in the Myth, the unfortunate soul which chose the life of a tyrant was led by appetitive desire, those of Ajax and Agamemnon by spirited. That is why Socrates warns Glaucon, as well as every Plato's reader, that a man's prime mission in life should be to train himself in the wisdom of right choice (618b-610b), and thus avoid the disastrous consequences of his reason's falling under the sway of the lower desires.

#### **I.3.4.2 Reincarnation, determinism and persistence of personal identity in the Myth of Er**

The tentativeness of the above account notwithstanding, what Plato seems to be rather clear about is that he takes the ability to make choices as unrestrained to a significant degree,<sup>262</sup> indeed unrestrained enough to be called free. This is the assumption which allows him to assert that the responsibility for the choice and the ensuing happiness and distress is the chooser's, while god has none. Some critics, however, would conclude that Plato's theodicean argument is flawed, exactly because 'the choice is free' premise proves to be false when put against the background of some other theses expounded in the Myth. Julia Annas, for example, remarks that the overall tone of the Myth is deterministic: "The cosmos in this myth whirls round the spindle

---

<sup>262</sup> Some external restriction, actuated by the aforementioned workings of Necessity as understood in the Myth, are unavoidable (see *supra*, pp. 55f). The few inner, but unproblematic, constraints, will be briefly mentioned in the concluding part of this section.

of Necessity; the process is regulated by the Fates. The language of the passage is full of references to fate and necessity.”<sup>263</sup> Therefore, one may feel that the rewards and punishments received do not really answer to what he or she has done or chosen. But this objection is not harmful to Plato’s purpose. The Myth’s goddess Necessity does not stand for any kind of blind deterministic law, but for a principle of rational and teleological governance of the Universe, aiming at the good of the whole.<sup>264</sup> And as far as the references to fate and necessity are concerned, they are copious indeed, but a soul becomes subjected to those ‘powers’ only after the free choice has already been made,<sup>265</sup> which is not unfair at all. It is just an expression of the rule that a choice once made cannot be undone. This rule is operational regardless of whether we understand the Myth as describing cosmic choice of life forms, or we understand it as a metaphor for fundamental choice of a way of life, or even for the choices of our everyday experience. Once I board a plane for Baltimore, I am ‘fated’ not to reach Singapore. But this is hardly determinism. And in the same way as I am at liberty to make my flight either miserable or a happy and fulfilling one, Plato allows for exertion of freedom even within the pre-arranged pattern of the life one has chosen.

This last statement needs further elaboration, since it may not be obvious to everybody. In fact, Annas is not the only scholar who is worried by the Myth’s deterministic note; Halliwell, for example, also launches a complaint in that regard, although from a slightly different viewpoint: “the more strictly we press the notion of a defining, preincarnational life choice, the more we are confronted with a determinism that imperils the psychological, ethical, and political coherence of the rest of the *Republic*.”<sup>266</sup> It appears that Plato himself strongly backs up this worry, by claiming that the arrangement, or order, or character of the soul (*taxis*) follows of necessity (*dia to anankaiōs*) from the chosen pattern of life (618b), which within it contains every major state and circumstance one will pass through during his lifetime. Halliwell finds it very hard to square this proclamation with Socrates’ first instructive interposition into the Third section of the Myth, where he urges Glaucon to be learner and seeker, in a word, a molder of his

---

<sup>263</sup> Annas 1982, p. 133.

<sup>264</sup> See *supra*, fn. 174.

<sup>265</sup> Which is the case with all the lines and passages Annas cites: 618b3, 619c1, 620d6-621a1.

<sup>266</sup> Halliwell 2007, p. 470.

own character.<sup>267</sup> I believe that the solution to this conundrum, as he calls it, is rather simple. Close to the beginning of his address (617e2-4), the prophet introduced two seemingly contradictory factors, which he did not mark as such – determinism and freedom. The soul is to cling to the life she chose by necessity (*ōi synestai ex anankēs*); however, virtue is free (*aretē de adespoton*), and everyone will have it to a greater or lesser degree, depending on how they honor or disregard it. Sorabji (2004, p. 9) considers this to be ‘the earliest use of the metaphor of freedom,’ and indeed such life, despite the numerous conditionings, is a life of freedom in the most important sense of the word. Stepping out of the mythical scenery, we can observe that our own choices in life are limited in many respects – it is not at our disposal to decide on the most important things, like the place of birth, the physical features and conditions, the intellectual capacity, the sort of children we have, our neighbors, the moment of death. But we seem to be free to do right or wrong, which is the ultimate freedom. Plato recognizes that the truest expression of the soul’s liberty lies in the capacity to direct her longings toward self-improvement and eventually self-realization. That process starts with the acquisition of virtue, and virtue, which is knowledge of some kind, can be pursued under any circumstance of human existence – a poor, sickly, even physically impaired person is free to choose and cultivate virtue, and the possession of virtue, according to both Socrates and Plato, is the main requisite for true happiness. If our account has some claim to plausibility, than there is not much sense in complaining about the Myth’s ‘determinism’. Understood in this way, Plato would not count as a determinist at all, but simply as a libertarian, or at most a compatibilist. The necessary conditioning he talks about is, in a sense, contingent on one’s failure to respect and strive after virtue, i.e., knowledge, which is, unlike the external assets, at his disposal, or up to him.

The problem of determinism, unfortunately, has a further, deeper aspect, as it was already suggested in Halliwell’s foregoing statement. Namely, it is not only that the soul’s fate is sealed with a single prenatal, supposedly immediate, unhampered choice; this choice itself is already conditioned by the experiences and habits of the last earthly life, as Plato makes it plain with his descriptions of the decisions made by Orpheus, Agamemnon, Ajax, etc. Thus we are faced with

---

<sup>267</sup> Stewart 1905, pp. 170f, Thayer 1988, p. 372, Inwood 2009, p. 43, and McPherran 2010, p. 140, also comment on this passage. McPherran especially shares Halliwell’s worry: “[t]he externals of the life one chooses ... when allied to a particular sort of soul, *necessitate* a particular character-state that then *necessitates* the performance of an action that one ought not to perform ...” Stewart, however, does not perceive the problem; on the contrary, he sees the episode as a confirmation of the soul’s freedom and responsibility.

the dreadful threat of infinite regress “of states of moral responsibility, since every choice of life springs from the character of a soul whose condition is the result of the consequences of its presumably constrained prior choice, and so on.”<sup>268</sup>

Those who uphold this view, however, seem to fail to pay proper attention to two important points. The first one is, again, the *aretē adespoton* dictum; virtue, on its own merit, has the power to promote the one who is imbued with it, as much as vice has the demoting power.<sup>269</sup> And virtue is not fated, but free – it has to be consciously taken up or left aside. Epictetus, for example, was an underdog in so many respects, but he still managed to choose a life of philosophical education that brought him excellence in virtue, and also high renown. With a view on the Myth, we could say that all his previous choices, beneficial or not, all his conditionings of low birth and crippling circumstances, were overpowered and overturned by his clinging to a life of virtue, which was alone enough to secure him true happiness, as well as the external rewards that, according to Socrates (*Rep.* 612cff), belong to the righteous man.

The second point is that the seeming infinite regress is by no means such. In Plato’s later dialogues there are two closely connected, but slightly differing accounts of the ‘original fall.’ In the *Timaeus* (41e-42e), all souls are prenatally given full knowledge of the Universe, and then an equal start as male human; where will their first incarnate existence lead them – back to the companion star, or to a different, possibly ‘lower’ life form – is up to no one else but them, and their determination to practice virtue. In the *Phaedrus* (246a-248e), the iconography of the myth aside, we have a quite similar picture, with the difference that Socrates there specifies nine classes of male human existence a soul can enter into on its first incarnation. They range from a philosopher to a tyrant, and depend on the soul’s ability to perceive more or less of the transcendent world above.<sup>270</sup> Thus, besides the possibility of free agency in knowledge and

---

<sup>268</sup> McPrerran 2010, p. 137. Inwood (2009, p. 44) is stating our problem even more explicitly: “Does the myth allow any genuinely free choice within a life, or are all soul’s choices determined in advance by its choice of life in the underworld, a choice that is itself determined by its choices in its preceding life, and so on indefinitely?”

<sup>269</sup> Cf. *Phdr.* 248e3-5: Of the embodied souls in this world, the one who lived its lives justly will change to a better fate (*hos men an dikaiōs diagagē ameionos moiras metalambanei*) in the next life, the one who lived unjustly, to a worse (*hos d’ an adikōs, cheironos*).

<sup>270</sup> Could it be that this picture had served as a trigger for the development of Origen’s theory of disembodied intellects who influence their future birth and circumstances by the attitudes they develop during the disembodied state (*Princ.* II.9, esp. II.9.6-8)?

virtue during each existence as a human being, there is also an initial stage, unconditioned by any previous choice, from which every soul begins its journey in the physical world. The decisions made in the course of that first lifetime are up to the individual alone, and although they direct the further unwinding of its fate, the responsibility can ultimately, and almost unproblematically, be traced back to the same individual. This should suffice as an answer to those who believe that moral responsibility does not attach to the agent, as represented in the Myth of Er, due to the problems of determinism and regress of choice.

A closely related problem is Plato's endorsement, both in the Myth and in principle, of the theory of reincarnation. Annas (1982, p. 138) finds the whole concept "implausible, and even grotesque,"<sup>271</sup> while Thayer (1988, p. 379) believes that in the context of the *Republic* it contradicts the moral argument of the book.<sup>272</sup>

There are, however, besides the almost dogmatic dissatisfaction with it, some more pertinent objections to the employment of the theory of reincarnation in the Myth and its relation to the idea of moral responsibility, crucial for Plato's defense of god's benevolence. The most serious one tries to cast a shadow of doubt on the person's moral responsibility for his actions, conditioned by one's character, which, on its part, depends on one's previous life's activities and experiences, etc., by claiming discontinuity of the personal identity of the agent: "A conviction that the responsibility for my character and actions does not go back to me and then stop, but can be traced in large part to previous lives which I do not remember is bound to undercut the feeling that *I* am responsible for what *I* have done."<sup>273</sup> Thayer (1988, p. 378) also finds problematic the

---

<sup>271</sup> Surprisingly, Annas partly justifies her view on the matter by a lengthy quotation from St. Augustine (p. 137), as if he, as an early Christian theologian, were to be expected to have an unbiased or scholarly detached approach to the issue of reincarnation. For a concise but sweeping criticism of Annas' views on reincarnation in the Myth, see Johnson 1999, pp. 4f.

<sup>272</sup> On the strength of her assumption that, were it true that we live through an endless succession of lives we choose, Trasymachus, e.g., would adopt the spirit of moral experimentation, and continue pursuing life of injustice in the present existence, while leaving open the possibility to try Socrates' recommendation in some future life. I do not think that Plato would give such an allowance to Trasymachus, since, as we learn from the *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Timaeus* and the *Laws*, a wrongdoer is destined to sink deeper and deeper down on the scale of life forms and conditions. Turning himself to virtue is the only way to break away from this chain of causal determination. The pre-natal choices, after all, are strongly colored and even conditioned by the experiences and the mentality one has acquired in the previous life; so the chances of somebody steeped in ignorance choosing a life of virtue, just for the sake of 'moral experimentation,' are quite low.

<sup>273</sup> Annas 1982, p. 132.

lack of remembrance of the actions whose consequences we are suffering or enjoying: “Thus there is neither memory or any other vital connection binding the sequence of lives.”

This problem of loss of memory may take at least two forms: first, it could be deemed unfair that I ought to be held responsible for something I have absolutely no relation to, that particular thing having been done in an utterly different environment and circumstances, and me having absolutely no memory of it. Second, since I already forgot all the pains and pleasures of my previous existences, and since I am bound to forget whatever I am experiencing in this life, as well as whoever I think I am, maybe there is no substantial reason for me to be worried about the lot that will befall my soul in any of the future existences.

In response to the first form of the memory loss problem, I shall later argue that it is actually irrelevant for the matters of preservation of identity and responsibility. But it should be also noted that the cycle of transmigration, as presented in the Myth of Er, does not imply a complete loss of memory. It is obvious that in the intermediate state between two embodiments the soul vividly remembers the events that took place during its previous life, while the probability that it may remember the other past lives as well is not excluded.<sup>274</sup> Furthermore, Plato leaves open the possibility that some remembrance both of the previous life and of the intermediate state may be retained even in this life, under the condition that one drinks from the River of Forgetfulness moderately.<sup>275</sup> But in fact, at least as far as the punishments and the rewards in the Myth of Er are concerned, it is utterly irrelevant whether the soul remembers its deeds or not; there exists a complex cosmic mechanism, involving individual *daimones*, judges, goddesses, and finally Necessity herself, which sees to the proper and just distribution of good and bad among the souls.<sup>276</sup> Even in the present life, it may so happen that a criminal suffers

---

<sup>274</sup> This idea is found in Inwood 2009, p. 34.

<sup>275</sup> “Every soul must drink some measure of the water, but those that are not saved by wisdom drink more than the measure. And as each of them drunk, they forgot everything” (621a7-b2). This could mean that those who are saved by wisdom, e.g., who read the *Republic* or heard the Myth, might drink less and thus retain some memory of the past lives. Plato might have had the examples of Pythagoras’ and Empedocles’ reminiscences in mind, provided the testimonies are genuine.

<sup>276</sup> In Plato’s doctrine of metempsychosis and post-mortem reward and punishment Keping (2009, p. 287) sees a reminder of “the Buddhist doctrines of *samsara* and *karma*.” The parallel cannot be fully drawn. Unlike in Plato, in the Buddhist theory there exists no self underlying the thoughts and the sensations. In this regard, Buddha is quite Humean. Of course, he accepts *samsara* as a cycle of births and deaths, but he does not accept anything like the soul – only a continuity of causally connected ‘mental states.’ Thus the law of *karma* does not preside over transmigration of a soul-substance from one body to another, but over causal shaping of the ensuing life by the preceding (see, e.g. Chatterjee and Datta, 1984, pp. 135-138; Hiriyanna, 1993, pp. 138-141).

from severe amnesia, and is thus unable to recognize or establish any relation with the foul acts he performed in the past; such a loss of memory, however, will not save him from the responsibility for his actions, as long as there are officials that record them and demand retribution.<sup>277</sup>

The weakest point of this and the similar objections is that the ‘me’ and the ‘I’ are, separated from the soul which undergoes transmigration. They basically claim that this present ‘I’ cannot be held responsible for something that my soul did in one of its previous incarnations. Here it is not possible to enter into the intricacies of the personhood and the persistence of personal identity issues, as they are discussed in contemporary metaphysics. It is, however, highly unlikely that Plato would recognize the above objection as valid, since he seems convinced that the soul *is* the “I” or the self, as his Socrates explicitly argues in the *Alcibiades I*, and which is very strongly suggested in other dialogues, as in the *Phaedo*. This thesis is corroborated in the Timaeian story of the Demiurges’ fashioning and instructing the immortal souls (41d-42e). There we have a picture of souls, more precisely rational souls, as clearly individualized selves,<sup>278</sup> who are given a vision of the nature of the universe and are informed about the laws of destiny, the difficulties they would have to face, and the options that are open to them. The Demiurge does all that in order to establish the individual soul’s moral responsibility for the failings and the misfortune it might experience,<sup>279</sup> as well as to exculpate himself from the future blame.<sup>280</sup> One can deem him right, or one can deem him wrong, but so far as Plato is concerned, what we are is a rational, immortal soul. That very soul is also the ‘criterion’ of persistence of personal identity.<sup>281</sup> In other words, on the issue of persistence of

---

<sup>277</sup> Someone may retort that, while this principle is indeed observed in courtroom, legal matters should not be confounded with the philosophical question of personal identity. We should, however, keep in mind that Plato uses legal terminology when speaking of the implementation of universal justice by the gods in the Myth of Er and in the *Laws* 904d-905b, and thus believes that the legal analogies are applicable to the issue of moral responsibility over multiple lifetimes.

<sup>278</sup> “[B]y the one-one assignment to stars he gives each to know that it is a separate self, one of human plurality but not the plurality of a herd” (Broadie 2012, pp. 101f).

<sup>279</sup> “By telling each soul all these things, he lets each know that it is to be a responsible agent, and in this way he primes it for the actual assumption of responsibility” (*ibid.*).

<sup>280</sup> *hina tē epeita eiē kakias hekastōn anaitios* (42d2-4), an echo of the Myth’s *theos anaitios*.

<sup>281</sup> “Immortal intelligence is the principle of identity in souls: This soul is the very same soul that it is, whatever else may happen to it and whatever other qualities and capacities it may acquire, just in case it is or hosts *just this* particular intelligence” (Carpenter 2008, p. 11).

identity through time Plato would side with the Anticriterialists, or the advocates the Simple View.<sup>282</sup> Succinctly expressed,

The simple view of diachronic personal identity holds that personal identity is not constituted by continuities of mental or physical properties or of the physical stuff (that is, the bodily matter) of which they are made, but is a separate feature of the world from any of the former, although of course it is compatible with personal identity being caused by such continuities.<sup>283</sup>

This is why no physiologicalist's or psychologicalist's objections – like change of body, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hide scenarios, loss of memory, complete amnesia, etc. – can be rightfully leveled against Plato. Although it is true that in many such cases we would attach different 'I's to the same soul, both in a single life and over various lives, Plato's general metaphysical commitments are different. He is an essentialist regarding individuality, and so for him the frequent alteration of the empirical 'selves' does not endanger the persistence of personal identity. The animal, for example, into which the previously 'human soul' has incarnated, displays no visible connection with its former 'I'. But what gives life to that animal is the same soul which was previously giving life to the human being. Furthermore, the soul is imprisoned in that particular animal body due to the specific failures to make proper use of the opportunities that human life offers<sup>284</sup> – a point which shows that the responsibility for the actions performed in one lifetime follows the soul into the next. And if the agent and the endurer in every subsequent incarnation is indeed one and the same self – accidentally equipped with different bodies, as a man appears now attired in one robe, later in another – the conclusion that it is to be held responsible for the wicked deeds, as well as praiseworthy for the just, *throughout the spectrum of embodied existences*, seems rather uncontroversial.

Finally, few words are due to what was formulated above as the second form in which the problem of memory loss may appear. Those who say that we should not worry about the future

---

<sup>282</sup> The other two main views being the Psychological and the Physiological view. According to the former, the criterion of survival through changes is the preservation of some mental features – like memories and beliefs; according to the latter, the criterion is the preservation of the biological organism that constitutes a person. For a neat overview of the debate, the main problems involved and further references, see Olson 2010.

<sup>283</sup> Swinburne 2012, p. 105. This article contains the most recent exposition and defense of the Simple View. Understandably enough, Swinburne holds that this 'separate feature of the world' which constitutes and preserves personal identity is 'a soul' (p. 120). But unlike Plato, he believes that it is 'a human soul'.

<sup>284</sup> The *Timaeus* 91d-92c ascribes even the very creation of the lower life forms to the human being's inability to properly pursue philosophy and the true goal of life.

tribulations of the soul, since when they occur there will be no trace left of the present empirical “I,” may be retorted that they miss the entire purport of Socrates’ most important instruction. The true aim of philosophy is to learn how to die properly (*Phaedo* 64a), that is to attain the unembodied state of freedom from the shackles of the body. That accomplishment means affirmation of one’s real identity. As a matter of conventional usage of language, we use the expression ‘my soul,’ but in reality, Plato might say, it is the soul who we actually are, while the body is its, and not vice versa. Thus, to say that I have nothing to do with what is going to become of my soul, since nothing of the person I presently am survives the termination of this phase of the transmigration cycle, is to irresponsibly shy away from the gravest concern I may have: the concern for the freedom and happiness of my true self. It is tantamount to living one’s life only for the moment, like a reckless child convinced that it will never grow up and be obligated to take up responsibility.<sup>285</sup>

---

<sup>285</sup> For a different take on the problem of reincarnation and memory loss, see Inwood 2009, pp. 33-35.

## I.4 Summary

In conclusion, we may say that the *Republic* 379c marks a firm starting point for the investigation of Plato's stance on the problem of evil and his theodicy. As a genuinely theistic thinker, Plato was naturally interested in these issues, and the *Republic* passage contains the first recorded attempt at justification of god's goodness in the face of the numerous evils that humankind encounters. Plato's rudimentary theodicy here is based on a deductive argument. The verity of the propositions 'god exists' and 'god is good' is presumed, while the verity of the proposition 'the good can cause only things that are good' is argued for (379b). The set of these three, in conjunction with the obviously true proposition 'there are bad things in our lives' yields the conclusion that god is not responsible for those bad things that human beings experience. The cause of badness is not disclosed, not even hinted at. In the closing myth of the *Republic* god's guiltlessness is reaffirmed, and the responsibility is relegated to the individual agent. The Myth of Er presents a rather complex view on human freedom and responsibility. One's destiny in this and in the next life is an amalgam of three factors: *anankē*, *tychē*, and *hairesis*. *Anankē* is a personification of the unalterable rational constitution of the cosmos and its laws of orderliness, while *tychē* most probably stands for minor inexplicable randomness of occurrences. With it, Plato maybe wants to draw some attention to the undefined, but indisputably operational luck or chance which produces the contingencies of life. These may hinder, but not thwart the endeavors of those of noble character: e.g. a person of low birth and diseased body can nevertheless pursue justice and thus become happy, although he might need to invest greater effort. In other words, although *tychē* indisputably exert certain influence, its workings, as shown above, do not significantly compromise the status of *hairesis* as the prime decisional factor. The act of choice-making is essentially free and its consequences are justly delivered, since it is not thwarted by the threats of determinism, infinite regress of moral responsibility, or discontinuity of personal identity. Undoubtedly, there are some inner constrains and conditionings that pertain to the soul's *hairesis*, besides the external ones contributed by *anankē* and *tychē*; these are the allurements of heavenly pleasures that pamper the soul and weaken her judgment (619c-d), the strong influence of the last life's experiences and habits (620a-620d), and the two types of ignorance: "ignorance of the details of the life that it has failed to notice and ignorance of the

effects of the life on itself.”<sup>286</sup> However, all these factors are ultimately reducible to ignorance of good and bad arising from the neglect of life of philosophy, as explained in Socrates’ first instructional interlude of the Myth (618b-619b), and confirmed in the second (619d-e). And since this ignorance is there due to the soul’s own failure to develop wisdom, the blame and the responsibility is nobody else’s but its.

Thus, Plato’s strategy for transferring the accountability for the badness we experience from god to the individual agent may be assessed as successful, as far as that is possible. The responsibility remains upon the one that chooses, while god is indeed guiltless. The problem, however, is that, according to the Myth’s account, he is a bit too aloof or detached. From its perspective, Socrates’ earlier claim that, while unaccountable for the bad, god is still responsible for the good things that happen to humans (379b7-8), looks like a mere statement of piety, and not an expression of the factual state of affairs. Ours seems to be the responsibility for *everything* we experience. The divinities of the Myth are no more than indifferent observers and arbiters of justice, as they show no trace of positively directed good intent or compassion. They are but sustainers of the impersonal law and order of the Universe, with its goal-directedness left rather obscure. Therein reigns the *logos*, personified by the goddess Necessity, which, within the confines of the Myth, is something given, and not put in action by a benevolent power. Striving to establish god’s guiltlessness, Plato has brought his point to the limit. In order to work out a theodicy proper, he will have to introduce back into the game the benevolent deities of the *Republic II*, as well as explain the foundation of natural evils and human ignorance, which is the direct cause of all moral evil and many of our tribulations. These tasks he will duly undertake in the later dialogues.

---

<sup>286</sup> Inwood 2009, p. 44.

## Chapter II. Theodicy in the *Timaeus*

### II.1 The second profanation of traditional religion: divine envy

At the beginning of this work it was proposed that Plato, in order to provide firm foundations for his theology and theodicy, first had to suppress and refute two popular misconceptions, installed by the traditional religion in the minds of its adherents. The first, already extensively discussed one, is the idea that the gods are dispensers of both good and evil, while the second is the idea of divine envy or grudgingness. In this section, the latter will be taken as a starting point of the discussion of Plato's theodicy in the *Timaeus*.

Although present already in the works of several earlier (and contemporary) poets and dramatists, the classical expression of the motif of *theōn phthonos* is found in Herodotus' *Histories*, where it appears at least five times.<sup>287</sup> Still, the most widely known passage where it is brought up is the conversation between Croesus, the king of Lydia, and the celebrated Athenian legislator and poet Solon.<sup>288</sup> The gist of the story of their encounter and discussion is as follows: Solon, on the insistence of his Lydian host, takes a tour of the latter's magnificent treasures, after which he is asked to single out the happiest (*olbiōtatos*) man he has ever seen.<sup>289</sup> Much to Croesus' surprise, he pronounces such a man to be the Athenian Tellus, who was moderately well-off, lived a full life span, had decedents who survived him, and died a noble and heroic death.<sup>290</sup> Croesus does not even qualify for the second place: it is taken by the youths Cleobis and Biton. They performed a remarkable deed at the festival in honor of Hera, and when the goddess was besought by their mother to grant them the highest blessing a mortal can attain, she made them fall asleep in the temple, and never wake up again.<sup>291</sup> According to Solon, therefore,

---

<sup>287</sup> At I.32 – in Solon's answer to Croesus' inquiry; III.40 – in Amasis' recommendation to his ally Polycrates; VII.10 and VII.46 – in Artabanus' counsel to his cousin Xerxes; VIII.109 – in Themistocles' address to the Athenians.

<sup>288</sup> This is almost certainly a fictitious narrative, meant to present Herodotus' own pessimistic outlook on the instability and transitoriness of human happiness (see Green 1948, p. 84; Shapiro 1996, p. 348. For the view that Herodotus does not maintain, but simply reports the outlook – especially the reliance on divine grudgingness as a force behind historical events – see Lang 1984, p. 61).

<sup>289</sup> *Hdt.* I.30

<sup>290</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>291</sup> *Hdt.* I.31

by the example of these brothers, god has shown to the entire world that for a human being it would be better to die than to live (*diedexe te en toutoisi ho theos hōs ameionon eiē anthrōpōi tethnanai mallon ē zōein*).<sup>292</sup> As far as the humiliated Croesus' fortune is concerned, despite his immense riches and sovereignty, he can at best be called lucky (*eutychēs*), but not happy (*olbios*). This is so because Croesus lacks Solon's wisdom and is ignorant of the facts that: a) the divinity is always wholly envious<sup>293</sup> and troublesome regarding human matters (*to theion pan eon phthoneron te kai tarachōdes ... anthrōpēiōn prēmātōn peri*); b) consequently, man is entirely a plaything of fortune (*pan esti anthrōpos symphorē*), and his so-called happiness could be swept away at any moment;<sup>294</sup> c) in the light of a) and b), nobody should be pronounced happy, unless he has ended his life well – every matter should be examined in the light of its termination, how it ends (*skopein de chrē pantos chrēmatos tēn teleutēn*).<sup>295</sup>

As far as the explanation of the phenomenon of divine grudgingness or envy of the gods is concerned, Lanzillotta<sup>296</sup> enumerates four main interpretations, identified and adhered to by

---

<sup>292</sup> *ibid.* The story of Cleobis and Biton brings forward an idea which is virtually nonexistent in the preserved fragments of Solon. This extravagantly pessimistic view is therefore probably part of Herodotus' own philosophy (Cf. Rémillard 2009/2010, p. 16), adopted from earlier writers. Prior to him, the same idea, in its stern, unmodified form, was vividly expressed by Theognis, lines 425-428 (in Gerber 1999), and repeated by Herodotus' early contemporary Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus* 1225-1229. For the view that the entire speech of Herodotus' Solon is quite consistent with the perspectives of the historical Solon, see Harrison 2000, pp. 36ff.

<sup>293</sup> 'Jealous,' 'grudging,' 'ill-willed' are also often used synonyms for the Greek *phthoneron*. Taylor (1938, p. 78) speaks of this idea as of "the common Greek view that *to theion* is *phthoneron*, 'grudging', in its bestowal of good things" (emphasis added). Herodotus' 'contribution' lies in his unambiguous formulation and repeated insistence on the phenomenon of divine grudgingness as instigator of historic events.

<sup>294</sup> It was Herodotus who made the instability of human fortune, a commonplace among many Greek authors of various periods, programmatic for his historical account: "Knowing that human fortune never remains long in the same place, I will [commemorate both small and great cities of men]." (*Hdt.* I.5). See Harrison 2000, pp. 28-29, and 62, where he writes "The *Histories*, it seems, are founded on the principle of the instability of human fortune." The story of Solon's encounter with Croesus shows that this instability is, at least in the case of those humans who outshine the mediocre majority, due to a god's intervention.

<sup>295</sup> *Hdt.* 32-34. For arguments that Herodotus embraces as his own each of the three Solon's points, see Shapiro 1996, pp. 352ff. As far as the crucial one for our purpose is concerned, Harrison (2000, p. 32-33) states: "the conclusion that a god is angry or that he is jealous constitutes for Herodotus a deduction from the course of events."

<sup>296</sup> Lanzillotta 2010, pp. 78ff. Lanzillotta's purpose in his paper is to overturn the very idea that a concept like the envy of the gods existed among the Greeks: "It is my contention that in Greek religion there is no such a thing as the 'envy of the gods' and that when the Greeks use the term *phthonos* they in fact simply refer to the divine right to veto human happiness ... they never resorted to envy as the background explanation for divine driving force." (p. 76). Although he does an excellent job in challenging this almost universally accepted view, his effort should ultimately be judged as non-conclusive. Since it is impossible here to go into all the details of his argumentation, the following brief notes must suffice. First, Lanzillotta does not provide a justification for 'the divine right to veto

different groups of scholars. These are i) the anthropomorphic, according to which, since the Greeks used to attribute various human passions to the gods, it is small wonder that they did the same with envy as well; ii) the ethico-religious, saying that the *theōn phthonos* is a reaction to human *hybris*, and is therefore more of a *nemesis* than *phthonos*; iii) the egalitarian approach, which brings the phenomenon down to the level of the social and political tendencies in 5<sup>th</sup> century Athens, and explains *theōn phthonos* as divine intervention into the preservation of the proper measures of distribution of fortune and adversity; and finally iv) the anthropological interpretation, according to which what we are dealing with is a mythical expression of the old (and still surviving) evil-eye superstition.<sup>297</sup>

These conclusions have been reached after diligent studies of the relevant occurrences of the word *phthonein*<sup>298</sup> and its cognates (as well as the associated words, like *agasthai*<sup>299</sup> and *megairein*<sup>300</sup>) in a wide body of literature, starting from Homer, through Pindar and Bacchylides, to Herodotus, Aeschylus and Euripides. As far as Herodotus is concerned, to whom we are

---

human happiness.’ This right the gods do have, but what prompts them to exercise it? Sometimes it is rightful *nemesis*, indignation at undeserved good fortune, but at other times the exercising of the right to veto seems to be motivated by sheer whim – “for the Deity having shown a glimpse of happiness to many, has afterward utterly overthrown them” (*Hdt.* I.33). And the road from whim to spite is not very long; Croesus, for example, was in fact a pious (see *Hdt.* I.86) and forgiving man (see *Hdt.* I.44-45). Herodotus offers the following reason for his downfall: “After the departure of Solon, the indignation of the gods fell heavily upon Croesus, *probably because he thought himself the most happy of all men*” (*Hdt.* I.33, emphasis added). Second, even if he makes a strong case against the presence of divine envy in the other authors under scrutiny (pp. 86-90), it is not so in the case of Herodotus. He, however, in the passages that obviously stand against his thesis, chooses to translate the divine *phthoneria* as ‘avarice,’ instead of ‘envy’ (p. 91). Besides the fact that this move challenges the lexical definition of the word, it also does little service to Lanzillotta’s cause: ‘the divine right to veto human happiness’ boils down to ordinary avarice. And if the Greeks had no troubles accepting avarice of the gods, why wouldn’t they accept envy of the gods, when already talking about *theōn phthonos*? Lastly, it is not impossible, but is highly improbable that Plato and Aristotle, who were conversant with the language and the tradition, could so grossly misinterpret the word *phthonein* in its relevant usages. For Plato, in the *Timaeus* 29e, obviously protests against god’s envy, or jealousy, or grudgingness, not against his right to veto anything. The same applies to Aristotle. He, significantly, ascribes this mistaken attribution of envy to the gods to poets and bards, who tell many a lie: *ei dē legousi ti hoi poietai kai pephyke phthonein to theon ... all’ oute to theion phthoneron endechetai einai, alla kata tēn paroimian polla pseudontai aidoi ...* (*Met.* 982b32-983a).

<sup>297</sup> To these, Mikalson’s interpretation could be added. He takes the concept of *phthonos* to be “one of many explanations of the evils that beset men and countries,” attributable not to the personal gods of the cults (like Apollo and Demeter), but to an abstract, generalized ‘divinity.’ (2003, p. 151).

<sup>298</sup> to refuse, prohibit, bear ill-will, envy.

<sup>299</sup> to feel envy, bear a grudge against a person.

<sup>300</sup> to grudge, hold something to be too great, not to allow something.

constrained here,<sup>301</sup> it has been argued that his application of the concept of divine *phthonos* in the *Histories* could fall under the heading of the ethico-religious approach; the gods would not allow humans to transgress and become powerful beyond their allotted measure, which is set very low.<sup>302</sup> According to Lloyd, Herodotus held “[a] conviction of the all-powerfulness of the gods and insignificance of men, and a belief that the gods maintain the universal order of justice by chastising not only mortals who offend against each other, but also mortals who infringe by word or action their own peculiar prerogatives.”<sup>303</sup> He also believes that in authors like Herodotus, the demonstration of divine *phthonos* is never malicious, but always just.<sup>304</sup> Shapiro (1996, p. 350, fn. 14&15) accepts the opinion that divine envy is directed towards the trespassers of the boundaries between the human and divine sphere. A possible explanation of how this boundary could be trespassed is given by Rémillard (2009/2010, p. 163): “Indeed, extraordinary wealth – or, in fact, any excess – sets itself as a challenge to the gods: the very rich man is responsible for a sort of *hubris*, insofar as he has thought himself superior to a man and similar to a god, and in so doing has blurred the boundaries between heaven and earth.” Things, however, might not be that simple. Although it is a fact that the instances of manifestation of divine *phthonos* in the *Histories* are in each case reactions to human prosperity which surpasses the average, coupled with some kind of *hybris*, a more careful analysis shows that there is more to the phenomenon than meets the eye. Three persons are expressly mentioned by Herodotus as having incited divine *phthonos*, namely Croesus (I.32-34), Polycrates (III.40) and Xerxes (VIII.109). All of them are mighty and powerful, but also guilty of some transgressions, although these vary in nature and degree. Croesus’ was the mildest – he used to boast of being the

---

<sup>301</sup> Both due to his emblematic status with regard to the issue, and for reasons of brevity.

<sup>302</sup> Lanzillotta (2010, p. 81) protest against this interpretation: “Resorting to envy as an explanation for divine opposition to human plans, therefore, might have been nonsensical. Not only because gods and humans are then placed on the same existential level, but also, and especially, because it seems to imply that gods desired and were attracted to the nothingness of human happiness.” In his claim, however, he seems to be disregarding the underdeveloped stage of the religious tradition which was prevalent prior to and during Herodotus’ times, still characterized by anthropomorphized but not sufficiently theologized gods. He also unjustifiably disregards stories like Zeus’ punishment of Prometheus and the human race, quite likely motivated by grudgingness, which, however, might have not arisen from attraction to the ‘nothingness of human happiness,’ but could have been due to the feeling that the set boundaries had been transgressed and the cosmic order, instated and jealously guarded by the gods, had been disturbed. The very same emotion is often recognized in Indra, the Indian counterpart of Zeus. See, e.g., the story of Indra and Prthu Mahārāja in the *Bhāgavata Purāna* IV.19.

<sup>303</sup> Lloyd 1971, p. 59

<sup>304</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 69

happiest man in the world. The punishment he received was, at the contrary, rather severe and inconsiderate – he lost his son to the spear of the *xenos* Adrastus. Here we have what seems to be an evident exemplification of the ethico-religious interpretation of *phthonos* (approach ii)), since Herodotus explicitly says that Croesus, who had been warned by Solon that *to theion pan eon phthoneron*, after the latter’s departure experienced god’s *nemesis* – *elabe ek theou nemesis megalē Kroison* (I.34.1-2). But how such *nemesis* could be provoked simply by the boast of somebody who on another occasion was commended as god-fearing (*theosebēs*) and *theophilēs kai anēr agathos* (I.86.10 & I.87.11)? This is unclear. We could either conclude that sheer boasting of one’s successes is sure to prove fatal for the boaster – with which we embrace the anthropological interpretation (approach iv)),<sup>305</sup> or that Croesus was in fact punished for something else, e.g. for his aggression against the Greek peoples in Asia Minor (I.25).<sup>306</sup> Xerxes’ case is much easier, because he obviously caused disturbance to the established world order by destroying both human and divine establishments. He receives deserved *nemesis* for his tremendous *hybris*,<sup>307</sup> being, as he was, unholy and wicked (VIII.109.15). Polycrates, on the other hand, committed wrongs against humans only, at least as far as we can learn from the story as told by Herodotus. He engendered divine *phthonos* either because of his treacherous and violent nature toward humans,<sup>308</sup> or simply because he was overly and unusually prosperous. So here, as with Croesus, both approach ii) and iv) – if not i) as well – are acceptable as possible interpretations of divine *phthonos*.

Even more intriguing are Artabanus’ general statements regarding divine *phthonos*, made without reference to any particular offender or transgressor.<sup>309</sup> Counseling his nephew Xerxes against adopting overly confident attitude, Artabanus warns him that the god is wont to cut short

---

<sup>305</sup> If the ‘evil-eye superstition’ indeed plays some role here, it is a remnant of a very primitive attitude, which should have been abandoned by Herodotus: “Belief in divine *phthonos* originates from the ancient and undeniably primitive fear that some supernatural being may conceive a spite against one” – and those who brag about their achievements are most likely to provoke it. “But in such writers as Pindar and Herodotus, it has already developed into a concept of comparatively advanced theology.” (Lloyd 1971, p. 69).

<sup>306</sup> Which, if true, would be just one of the cases that go against Mikalson’s claim that “all examples of divine intervention to punish individuals in the *Histories* can be seen to arise from impieties” (2003, p. 143), i.e. that the gods in the *Histories* are not concerned with justice in general, but only with impiety.

<sup>307</sup> For some remarks on *hybris* in the *Histories*, see Mikalson 2003, pp. 153f

<sup>308</sup> Another case contra Mikalson (see fn. 306).

<sup>309</sup> Mikalson (2003, pp. 157ff) argues that many of the Persian characters in Herodotus express essentially Greek sentiments and attitudes toward life and religion (for Artabanus, see *op.cit.*, p. 160).

everything that rises to prominence (VII.10.51-52),<sup>310</sup> that god does that because he is envious (VII.10.54),<sup>311</sup> and so will not allow anybody else but himself to be proud or think big (VII.10.55).<sup>312</sup> Later on, with their expedition already on the go, Artabanus finds Xerxes lamenting the transitoriness of human life. Arguing that there are much worse things in life than its brevity, the former blames it all on divine *phthonos* – giving us at first the taste of sweet life, the god is found to be envious of his gift, and takes it all away (VII.46.18-19).<sup>313</sup> None of these statements displays much of the attitude of non-malicious just intervention, as Lloyd would have it; this is especially true of the last one, which is difficult to interpret as anything but very human-like envy of the others’ happiness. Therefore, although I believe that the ethico-religious approach to divine *phthonos* is dominant in Herodotus, even with the very broad understanding of *hybris* as given by Lloyd and Rémillard, and Herodotus’ ‘reformed’ understanding of the gods,<sup>314</sup> we have to accept that he also retains much of the ancient sense of divine *phthonos*, namely the approaches i) and iv) above. Had not it been so, Plato would not have much reason to criticize the concept, since the feeling and display of rightful *nemesis* in response to human *hybris* is not a property that could endanger the gods’ divine status.

---

<sup>310</sup> *phileei gar ho theos ta hyperchonta panta kolouein.*

<sup>311</sup> *ho theos phthonēsas.*

<sup>312</sup> *ou gar eai phroneein mega ho theos allon ē heōuton.*

<sup>313</sup> *ho de theos glykyn geusas ton aiōna phthoneros en autōi heurisketai eōn.*

<sup>314</sup> That is, as gods of the cults in opposition to the ‘primitive’ gods of the poets. See Mikalson 2003, pp. 111ff.

## II.2 Plato's answer to the second profanation

That is, in brief, the second challenge posed by the traditional Homeric religion. Plato addresses this “vulgar notion *to theion phthoneron*”<sup>315</sup> in the *Timaeus* 29d-30a, and settles the matter rather quickly, probably considering it too flimsy to be deserving of detailed refutation.<sup>316</sup> This address occurs immediately after Timaeus' Proem (27c-29d), which abounds with important ideas and sets the course for the rest of his speech. In the Proem, Timaeus first lays the basis of his ontology, making a distinction between that which always is and has no becoming, and that which is perpetually becoming, and never truly is (*to on aei, genesin de ouk echon, kai to gignomenon men aei, on de oude pote*, 27d6-7),<sup>317</sup> the former being intelligible by nature, while the latter sensible. Next, he claims that the world, since it is sensible, must have had some cause of its becoming. That cause is the father and maker (*poiētēs kai patēr*) of all,<sup>318</sup> difficult to find and, once found, impossible to explicate to everyone (28c3-5). Finally, we are told that this father and maker creates the world by looking at an eternal model, which is obvious from the facts that the world is beautiful, and he himself good (*kalos estin hode ho kosmos, ho te dēmiourgos agathos*, 29a2-3).<sup>319</sup> After his preliminary discourse receives Socrates' whole-

---

<sup>315</sup> Archer-Hind 1888, p. 91, n. 13.

<sup>316</sup> In the *Phaedrus* myth, “the vulgar notion *hoti to theion pan phthoneron*” (Thomson 1868, p. 49), is dealt with even more briefly and without any argumentation. Everything that Socrates has to say is that *phthonos gar exō theiou chorou histatai* (*Phdr.* 247c7).

<sup>317</sup> Cf. one of the opening verses of the instructions on immortality and things that really matter given in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (II.16): “The seers of the truth have observed that for the non-being there is no continuance, while for the being there is no cessation of existence (*nāsato vidyate bhāvo, nābhāvo vidhate satah*). This they have concluded after studying the nature of both.” The ‘non-being’ and ‘being’ here are Plato's ‘becoming’ and ‘being,’ respectively.

<sup>318</sup> For some prominent Middle Platonic interpretations, as well as Plotinus' understanding of these appellations, see Vorwerk 2010.

<sup>319</sup> The Proem thus contains at least three crucial assumptions, which are going to be used and somewhat developed by Timaeus during his exposition. These are: a) Plato's well-known Two-World Theory, along with its epistemological implications; b) The notion that the act of fashioning a good product requires a fixed model upon which the artificer looks while performing his activity (see, e.g. *Crat.* 389b, *Rep.* 596b); c) A rather infrequent idea before Plato's late period, that the cause of the world of becoming is the Demiurge, a rational agent having the form of a personal deity (His first occurrence is probably in the *Republic* 530a, as ‘the craftsman of the heavens.’ The idea of divine craftsmanship is also present in the *Sophist* (265c-266d), the *Politicus* (269c-273e), where the originator and helmsmen of the cosmos is called *dēmiourgos kai patēr* (273b2), and in the *Philebus* (26e-27b). Cf. Cornford 1997 (1937), p. 19ff.

hearted approval (29d), Timaeus occupies himself with what is going to become a waxing question: why would God create the world at all?<sup>320</sup>

Let us, then, declare for what reason the maker put together this becoming and universe: he was good, and in him who is good never arises no envy whatsoever over anything (*agathos ēn, agathōi de oudeis peri oudenos oudepote engignetai phthonos*); being thus free from envy, he desired everything to become as nearly similar to him as possible (*toutou d' ektos ōn panta hoti malista eboulēthē genesthai paraplēsia heautōi*). Someone who accepts from men of wisdom that this is above all the supreme principle of the becoming and the cosmos would be wholly right in accepting it. (29e-30a2).

As it is evident from the text, Plato's answer to the above question is direct and unambiguous: the reason behind the universe's becoming and existence is the goodness of his creative and ruling principle, which is the Demiurge.<sup>321</sup> We shall return to this affirmation of

---

<sup>320</sup> Among the challenges that Cicero's Velleius the Epicurean launches against Plato's artisan-god and his creative work in the *Timaeus*, as well as against the Stoic concept of *pronoia* (ND. I.18-24), is also the question what prompted god to initiate the process of creation at all: "why did these world-builders suddenly emerge after lying asleep for countless generations?" (ND. I.21). Velleius in these sections, despite the opinion of most of the ancient Platonists (Plutarch and Atticus being the notable exceptions), takes it for granted that the cosmos of the *Timaeus* was created at a particular point in time, a position which Plato need not uphold. He also neglects the conspicuous fact that Plato's Demiurge, impelled by his innate goodness, *had* to act, so that the undifferentiated visible realm could be brought from the state of discord to the state of harmony. The above question may more consequentially be posed to a Christian theologian, whose God before the act of creation has nothing to deal with except for the Heavenly Kingdom, and so it remains dubious how the imperfect product of that act would contribute to the excellence of the whole. The same objection cannot be leveled against Plato, because the Demiurge's work on the primordial stuff clearly results in a significant improvement. (Cf. Zeyl 2000, p. xxxvi).

<sup>321</sup> The word is prosaic enough: it basically means 'skilled artisan who performs some handicraft beneficial for the general public' (see *LSJ* and Senc). Sallis glosses it as "a craftsman, an artisan, someone who makes (*poiein*) things by pursuing a *technē*" (1999, p. 50). So, as the ordinary artisan produces an amphora by turning to a model and working on the already given clay, in much the same way the Demiurge gazes at the divine paradigm and fashions this world using preexistent material. There is yet an additional meaning to the word, namely 'governor' or 'magistrate.' As Carone (2005, p. 29; p. 203, n. 11) points out, it also fits well the function of the Demiurge, who does not only create the world, but also governs it through his appointed representatives, and even personally introduces the 'laws of destiny' to the individual souls (*Tim.* 41e-42e). The lexical definitions, however, are not of great help in resolving the main issue. It remains rather unclear who this figure in reality is, or what does he stand for. These questions have been extensively debated in recent scholarship, but it does not seem that any common ground has been reached as of yet. For example, Archer-Hind (1888, p. 28; p. 91, n. 12) and Wood (1968) – the former adding strong Hegelian notes to his interpretation – took the Demiurge to be a mythical personification of the Form of the Good; Taylor (1928, pp. 71ff) believed him to be the *aristē psychē* that governs the universe, also identifiable with the cosmic soul of the *Laws* X (p. 82); Carone (2005, pp. 28ff) overtly adopts the same view, holding that the Demiurge is the world-soul of the universe, but in fact interprets it abstractly, as a representation

Demiurge's goodness and the related issues shortly, while presently some attention will be paid to the concept of *phthonos* and the disavowal of its presence in the divinity. Obviously, the two sentences in which the word *phthonos* and the demonstrative pronoun referring back to it occur represent Plato's reaction and repudiation of the well-engrained view that the gods are envious.

## II.2.1 The concept of *phthonos* and the meaning of divine goodness in the *Timaeus*

Grasping the proper shade of meaning of the verb *phthonein* and its derivatives, like *phthoneria*, *phthonos* and determining for which specific emotion they stand – especially in the given context – is not an easy task. Although a detailed discussion here is not possible, a few remarks are certainly in order.

It is easy to notice that an often used rendering for *phthonos* is 'jealousy.'<sup>322</sup> This rendering, however, is not unanimously accepted. Taylor, for example, expressly disagrees with

---

of "intelligent causation aiming at an end" (p. 31), which is exactly how Cherniss chose to explain the depersonalized and demythologized divinity of the *Timaeus*: he is "[n]ot 'god' but a logical abstraction, 'intelligent causation' in general." (1944, p. 607); similarly, Johansen sees the Demiurge as a personification of *technē*, craftsmanship which automatically restores order whenever and wherever it is needed (2001, pp. 83ff), although his principle of order, unlike Cherniss' and Carone's, acts from outside the universe. Still, the majority of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century scholars agree on one thing: Plato's creator-god of the *Timaeus* is a metaphor for *nous*. They, however, differ on another crucial issue, namely whether this *nous* is ensouled or not. Among the representatives of the former view are Cornford (1937, p. 39, and, more emphatically, p. 197), and Cherniss (1944, pp. 603ff), while among the advocates of the idea of separate *nous* are Hackforth (1936), Guthrie (1978, p. 215 and p. 275, n. 1), Mohr (1982), Menn (1995), Herrmann (2003, p. 69 and p. 75), Broadie (2012, pp. 7ff). It is impossible to enter this debate here. Nevertheless, certain points seem more or less clear to me: a) the figure of the Demiurge, which appears both in the *Republic* and most of the late dialogues (the *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Philebus*, *Timaeus*), should not be taken lightly or dismissed as a mere pedagogical device – it has to stand for something; b) the text of the *Timaeus* makes best sense under the presumption that the Demiurge is separate both from the world-soul (see, e.g. Hackforth 1936, Mohr 1982, Menn 1995, pp. 19-24, Johansen 2001, pp. 79-81, Broadie 2012, pp. 7ff) and the paradigm, i.e. the Forms (e.g. Guthrie 1978, pp. 259-261, Johansen 2001, pp. 81-83, Broadie 2012, p. 27); c) the figure of the Demiurge personalizes an independent, separate *nous*; d) the most comprehensive attempt to establish the ontology of this *nous* is in Menn 1995. His interpretation, however, draws dangerously close to identifying the *nous* with the paradigm, more precisely with a part of it, i.e. the Form of intellect, and should be taken with caution. I would like to see the *nous* of the *Timaeus* as an emergence of a new entity in Plato's metaphysics, introduced or confirmed (depending on the ordering of the dialogues) in the *Philebus* 30c-d, a creative and governing principle whose proper place in Plato's overall metaphysical scheme has not yet been determined.

<sup>322</sup> The *phthonos* of the above passage is translated by Archer-Hind as 'jealousy of aught'; Cornford, as well as Waterfield (2008), has 'jealousy,' while Sallis (1999) 'jealousy (envy, ill-will).' Kalkavage (2001, p. 60) translates

that interpretation of the concept: “‘jealousy’ does not quite unambiguously reproduce the force of Plato’s word *phthonos*, which means, to speak more precisely, the ‘dog-in-the-manger’ temper which desires to engross all that is good to one’s self.”<sup>323</sup> It seems rather clear what precisely Taylor has in mind when making this objection. The word ‘jealousy’ is ambivalent in itself – when used in its amorous sense, it may rightly be regarded as a ‘three-party relation,’ and thus easily distinguished from envy and grudge.<sup>324</sup> God’s jealousy of the Exodus 34:14 (“For the Lord God, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God”) is close to this kind, because although no strictly speaking amatory feelings are involved, it betrays intolerance of rivalry in receiving devotional sentiments and a demand for exclusive faithfulness. The Greek word for ‘jealous’ in the Septuagint is *zēlōtēs*, a cognate of *zēlotypein*, whose primary meaning is ‘to be jealous.’<sup>325</sup>

Plato’s Demiurge is certainly not being defended from experiencing the emotion of jealousy in this sense. ‘Jealousy,’ however, can be used with at least one other meaning, when it refers to a feeling directed toward other people’s achievements, possessions, or perceived advantages, and when it is synonymous both with envy and grudge. Were we to take the word ‘jealousy’ in this sense, the emotion it denotes could be, of course mistakenly, ascribed to the Demiurge, as it indeed was ascribed to the traditional gods. The English meanings of the word can take us this far in unpacking the concept of *phthonos*, which is obviously not far enough; and that is, I suppose, the ambiguity of the word ‘jealous’ Taylor is talking about.

Now, the most reasonable step toward the resolution of this dilemma is to turn to the ancient sources, especially to Plato himself. Herrmann (2003, p. 58f) gives a short list of the occurrences of *phthonos* and its cognate *aphthonia* in the dialogues earlier than the *Timaeus*. In those passages, *aphthonia* signifies magnanimous spirit which does not begrudge disseminating knowledge (*Prot.* 320c, 327a-b; *Sym.* 210d), or someone who is devoid of envy and malice, and does not answer to *phthonos* with *phthonos*, because he is immersed in beholding and emulating the things that really are. The most important occurrence is, of course, the abovementioned *phthonos gar exō theiōu chorou histatai* sentence from the *Phaedrus*, because it, unlike the other

---

*phthonos* with ‘grudge,’ and writes in an explanatory note: “The word for grudge here is *phthonos*, which refers to ill will and especially jealousy.” The *LSJ* also gives ‘jealousy’ alongside with ‘ill-will,’ ‘malice,’ and ‘envy.’

<sup>323</sup> Taylor 1938, p. 189. In his *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus* (p. 78) he similarly glosses *phthonos* as “‘grudging,’ ‘dog-in-the-manger’ disposition which seeks to engross all that is good for itself.”

<sup>324</sup> For jealousy as a triadic emotion and some distinctions between it and envy, see Konstan 2003, p. 10.

<sup>325</sup> Although the *LSJ* also gives ‘to envy’ as a synonym.

examples, refers directly to the gods. *Phthonos* is mentioned once again in the *Phaedrus*, this time as absent from the lovers' relation to and affection toward their beloved: *ou phthonōi oude aneleutherōi dysmeneia chrōmenoi pros ta paidika*: "They treat their beloved neither with envy, nor with niggardly ill-will" (253b7-8). Fowler (1925), as well as Nehamas and Woodruff (1995), render *phthonos* here with 'jealousy,' which seems as a very natural choice, since the word is used in a context of loving relationship. However, the overall import of the passage is different, and the translation 'jealousy' could hamper the true understanding of the concept; Socrates continues: "but they [the lovers] endeavor by every means in their power to lead them [the beloved] to the likeness of the god whom they honor" (253b8-c2). So, *phthonos*, or more precisely its absence, bears no amorous shade here; it refers to the true lover's character trait not to selfishly withhold from his beloved the chance to come closer to god, but to actively encourage him to emulate the deity. It is not meant to underline the lover's lack of feeling of rivalry, but his generosity of spirit when it comes to distribution of spiritual values. Herrmann, quite reasonably, proposes to interpret the earlier *Phaedrus*' passage, where *phthonos* is denied presence in the chorus of the gods, with the help of this one. The absence of *phthonos* in these two classes of beings, then, means that: "The gods, as well as true lovers, do not prevent others from seeing what is in the super-heavenly sphere of true being and reality."<sup>326</sup> On the other hand, those who are *phthoneroi* are both grudging in bestowal of good things and envious of the others' happiness and success. This understanding is in accord with Plato's usage of the term in the above passages from the *Protagoras*, the *Symposium*, and the *Republic*, but also with its two earlier occurrences in the *Timaeus* itself, although they do not refer to divine *aphthonia*. At 23d4-5, the Egyptian priest says: *phthonos oudeis, o Solon, alla sou te heneka erō kai tēs poleōs hymōn* ...: "I bear no grudge," or "I envy you not, O Solon, etc." Next, at 25c6 – *aphthonōs hapantas ēleutherōsen*: "[The city of Athens] liberated us all ungrudgingly," or "without envy." 'Jealousy' would sound rather out of place as a synonym for *phthonos* in these two passages.

It is interesting to note that in the Platonic *Definitions* (416a13) the term *phthonos* is glossed as *lypē epi philōn agathois ē ousin ē gegenemēnois*: "feeling of grief upon the goods, either present or past, of one's friends." Aristotle, in his *Rhetoric* (1387b22-26), expresses exactly the same understanding of the term, though more elaborately:

---

<sup>326</sup> Herrmann 2003, p. 58.

Envy is a kind of pain at the sight of good fortune in regard to the goods mentioned; in the case of those like themselves; and not for the sake of a man getting anything, but because of others possessing it. For those men will be envious who have, or seem to have, others 'like' them.

The Stoics simply have “envy [*phthonos*] is a pain at other people’s goods.”<sup>327</sup> As far as the concept of *theōn phthonos* is concerned, the Academic and Aristotelian proviso that *phthonos* should be a kind of pain felt at the sight of those *on the same standing as oneself*, may strike us as strange, even incompatible with the context of divine envy, since nobody should be expected to be on the same level with a god. This possible objection, however, neglects the underdeveloped stage of the traditional religion at the juncture when the concept of divine envy was introduced. The Homeric gods do indeed feel that the boundary between gods and man could be breached, and they guard it carefully.<sup>328</sup> In the case of Plato’s gods of the *Phaedrus* 247c and his creator of the *Timaeus* 29e, the utter absence of *phthonos*, in the light of the above proviso, may very well be understood in the light of their quality to freely allow, indeed encourage emulation (*homoiōsis theōi*), and to make everything as similar to himself as possible, respectively.<sup>329</sup> The Demiurge, thus, being perfectly good, is devoid of *phthonos*, i.e. the selfish feeling of grudge with regard to the bestowal of good things, and envy towards those who aspire to come as close to his level of goodness as they can.

This does not show conclusively that the emotion which Plato claims to be absent in the Demiurge should not be rendered and understood as the emotion of ‘jealousy’ in its second sense above. Nevertheless, since in the Greek language there is already a term for jealousy (*zēlotypia*), which does not seem to have been understood as synonymous with *phthonos*,<sup>330</sup> it may be

---

<sup>327</sup> Quoted in Konstan 2003, p. 13.

<sup>328</sup> See *supra*, p. 78

<sup>329</sup> This is not to say that the divide between the divine and the human is not absolute; *homoiōsis theōi* does not mean becoming a god, but becoming godlike in character and behavior. Yet, when the need for further divine entities arises, the supreme divinity of the *Timaeus* does not falter: he ungrudgingly creates both the universe and his helpers as immortal gods.

<sup>330</sup> Aristotle does not provide definition, but the Stoics do: “*zēlotypia* is a pain at someone else having what one desires oneself.” (*DL* 7.111-112). This is obviously not the emotion that Plato’s Demiurge could be accused of harboring. Cf. *DL* 7.131, where *zēlotypia* clearly means amorous jealousy. For the various shades of meaning of *zēlotypein* and *zēlotypia* and substantial references to works on the subject, see Konstant 2003.

prudent to relegate ‘to be jealous’ to *zēlotypein* and to preserve ‘to envy’ or ‘to grudge’ as the closest English equivalents for *phthonein*, and thus avoid the ambiguity of the word ‘jealousy’. With this, we could be able to determine more precisely the concept of *phthonos* from which Plato absolves his Demiurge. Plato himself might have been aware that the two terms denote different emotions, since there is a passage in the *Symposium* where he uses *zēlotypein* and *phthonein* side by side, and thus greatly minimizes the possibility that they should be taken as synonyms. The passage in question appears after Socrates’ concluding speech, when, upon Alcibiades’ entrance on the scene, Socrates implores Agathon to protect him from the former’s intemperate behavior. What Alcibiades allegedly does is that, as soon as he notices that Socrates only glances at another attractive man, *houtosi zēlotypōn me kai phthonōn thaumasta ergazetai kai loidoretai te kai tō cheire mogis apechetai* (213d2-3). Now, the English translations of this sentence are quite disparate, and therefore not very much helpful in the matter of establishing the proper meaning of our two words. Jowett, rather surprisingly, gives “[h]e goes wild with *envy* and *jealousy*, and not only abuses me but can hardly keep his hands off me.”<sup>331</sup> Fowler translates “[t]he fellow flies into a *spiteful jealousy* which makes him treat me in a monstrous fashion, girding at me and hardly keeping his hands to himself,” while Nehamas and Woodruff have “[h]e falls into a fit of *jealous rage*. He yells; he threatens; he can hardly keep from slapping me around!” Especially the last two translations seem to pay much more heed to style than to accuracy. Accuracy is, however, preserved in Didot, *Platonis Opera Graece et Latine* (vol. I, p. 689). There, the Latin equivalents of *zēlotypōn* and *phthonōn* are *zelotypus* and *invidens*, which translate as ‘jealous’ and ‘envious, grudging’ respectively, which, as we have seen, are the primary meanings of the Greek words as well.<sup>332</sup> And since the Latin adjective *zelotus* is obviously borrowed from Greek, it is reasonable to assume that it has preserved its original meaning.

I believe that these observations are sufficient to show that Taylor was justified in claiming that the emotion which the word *phthonos* denotes is indeed not jealousy. His ‘dog-in-the-manger’ is, however, not accurate either; the phrase refers to a person who selfishly

<sup>331</sup> Here, as well as in the following two quotations, the emphases are mine.

<sup>332</sup> Compare *Phil.* 47e1: ... *zēlon kai phthonon* ... = ... *aemulationem, invidiam* ..., and 50c1: ... *zēlon kai phthonon* ... = ... *aemulationem, invidiam* ...; D. Frede renders the terms as ‘jealousy’ and ‘malice’; *Leg.* 679c1: ... *zēloi te au kai phthonoi ou gignetai* = *nec rursus aemulatione aut invidia inflammantur animi*. Saunders’ English translation reads: “and feelings of jealousy and envy simply do not arise.”

withholds from the others things he *cannot or does not need* to use,<sup>333</sup> and this kind of silly selfishness is not what the gods were charged with. Hence, the phthonic attitude whose presence in the Demiurge and the gods Plato resolutely denies, seem to represent some kind of mixed feeling of envy of the goods and privileges others possess, and grudgingness in the bestowal of goods they themselves enjoy.<sup>334</sup>

Going back to the issue of divine goodness, we can observe that the Demiurge created this world because he wanted to produce something better out of something worse.<sup>335</sup> Being devoid of *phthonos*, understood in the above sense, and preeminently good, the Demiurge is always disposed to share unhesitatingly every value in his possession with everything he puts together. Thus, he makes both the world as a whole and each of its individual parts as similar to himself<sup>336</sup> as it is possible.<sup>337</sup> He perceives a realm given to discord and disorder, and brings it into order, considering the latter to be in every way better (30a). That is his primary task: to produce order and hence goodness,<sup>338</sup> to turn the proverbial chaos into cosmos, a task which he accomplishes by imparting his own properties to the world.<sup>339</sup> God's most valuable assets are

---

<sup>333</sup> Like a dog lying in a manger and thus preventing the horses to eat the hay he neither wants nor needs.

<sup>334</sup> For the Homeric meaning of *phthonein*, *phthonos*, see Herrmann 2003, p. 73. For a tentative etymology of *phthonos*, see *op. cit.* p. 80. For an interpretation of *phthonos* that involves a wider range of meanings and also includes jealousy, see Dickie 1993, p. 382. Nevertheless, when it comes to the restricted sense of the *phthonos* from which the Demiurge is absolved, he also has the following: "The Divine Demiurge is free from the *phthonos* that resents sharing goods with others, and he also has no share in the *phthonos* that cannot bear to see someone else enjoying some good." (*ibid.*)

<sup>335</sup> I will here avoid the vexed question whether the creation story in the *Timaeus* implies a temporal beginning of the universe or not. Although in itself very interesting and important, the different stances taken on it do not exert much influence on the interpretation of the problem of evil in Plato. For a synopsis of the debate among the adherents of the 'literal' and 'metaphorical' reading, see Zeyl 2000, pp. xx-xv. For a more comprehensive list of the representatives of both views, see Carone 2005, p. 204, n. 19. For an alternative take which aims at reconciling the opposed readings (the so-called perpetual, or on-going creation view), see Johansen 2004, pp. 87-91 (esp. 90-91), and Carone 2005, pp. 31-35.

<sup>336</sup> *Tim.* 29e3: *panta hoti malista eboulēthē genesthai paraplēsia heautōi*. This statement has been utilized in support of the view that the Demiurge should be identified with the model, on whose likeness the world is constructed. For a brief rebuttal of this thesis, see Guthrie 1978, pp. 260f.

<sup>337</sup> The philosophical implication of the modifier 'as far as possible' (*hoti malista, kata dynamin*) with regard to the problem of evil will be discussed in the second chapter of Part II of this work.

<sup>338</sup> This is an old postulate, which Plato elucidated already in the *Gorgias* 503dff, most emphatically stated at 506e2-3: *kosmos tis ara eggenomenos en hekastō ho hekastou oikeios agathon parechei hekaston tōn ontōn*; – it is that specific order apposite to each thing which makes each existent good after appearing in it. The world itself is a *kosmos*, but not on its own merit: it has been made such by the benevolent intervention of the Demiurge.

<sup>339</sup> See Mohr 1985 for the view that the Demiurge's interventions are aimed at epistemological end, i.e. that he improves the world's intelligibility, so that forming true opinions concerning it may be facilitated.

immortality and rationality or wisdom,<sup>340</sup> and he bestows them with perfect benevolence.<sup>341</sup> Immortality he grants to the universe (37d, 39e), gods (41a-b) and souls, both cosmic and individual. *Nous* he also gives to the cosmos, by endowing it with supremely rational soul (30b-c), and to the individual soul (90a), so that it can emulate the divine and become as godlike as possible, which is the ultimate end of all philosophic endeavors.<sup>342</sup> These acts of selfless improving and ordering, whose facticity is deducible from the world's state of affairs, are the ultimate proof of god's ungrudging attitude, freedom from envy and goodness. Furthermore, they have the impact that both the macro and the microcosms become good in so far as the Demiurge's immortal and rational nature is imparted to them.

That is why Plato in the *Timaeus* does not make any separate effort to substantiate by argument his assertion that god is good (and therefore free of *phthonos*). As a matter of fact, by the end of the passage in which the divine craftsman of the universe is first introduced (28a-29a), he inserts a conditional proposition that initially looks like a premise of some deductive argument in course of which god's benevolence would be established: "if this cosmos is beautiful and its craftsman good, then it is clear ..." (29a2-3). But instead of constructing a proper argument, Plato affirms the consequent by *argumentum ad baculum* and *petitio principii* – since one cannot even voice its contrary supposition without aligning himself with the blasphemers, and since the antecedent is true, the consequent is obviously true (29a4-6). Elsewhere, however, Plato utilizes the beauty and orderliness of the universe, which he takes as self-evident, to present an *a posteriori* argument for god's goodness. It occurs in the *Laws* 897c-898c, and is basically a variant of the Argument from design, although it does not aim at proving god's existence, but his property of being preeminently good.<sup>343</sup> The gist of the argument is as

---

<sup>340</sup> See *Phil.* 30c, where Plato uses *sophia* and *nous* as synonymous appellations for the cause which brings together Limit and Unlimited.

<sup>341</sup> For Sedley (1999, p. 798) rationality is the sole criterion of establishing likeness with the divine: "This likeness amounts to the controlling presence of intelligence, all the way down from the world-soul to the lowest level of particle physics, taking in the human soul on the way." It is interesting to note that Aristotle, in the *Metaphysics* 982b32-983a2 proposes the following counterfactual: 'were god indeed envious, as the poets say, he would be most grudging in bestowing wisdom, his most highly prized possession;' but since he is not so, men are entitled to aspire for it. One of the implications of this observation is that we become as godlike as possible exactly by cultivating reason or wisdom.

<sup>342</sup> Sedley in *op. cit.* argues that the concept of *homoiōsis theōi* was indeed 'a pivotal feature of Plato's thought,' and briefly discusses the influence it exerted on Aristotle and Plotinus.

<sup>343</sup> Earlier on (886a2-4), the Athenian's interlocutor Clinias invoked a very brief version of the Argument from design as an easy proof for god's existence. Plato, however, feared it unreliable due to the confusion created by

follows: since the heavens' motion is orderly, regular and in accordance with reason, and since a soul, or god, is presiding over it, this god has to be rational and supremely virtuous, i.e. good.<sup>344</sup> Although that god of the *Laws*, being a soul, most probably cannot be equated with the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*, the strong affiliation with the property of orderliness is common to both of them, i.e. they, respectively, share the affinity and potency to maintain and impose order.

---

the speculations of the natural philosophers (886a-e), and presented his own *a priori* proof, a line of reasoning that relies on the concept of self-generated motion (893b-899c). Plato's apprehension, however, has not prevented the Design argument from becoming one of the most important tools of the theologians, both in Antiquity (see, e.g. Cicero, *ND* II.15) and in modernity.

<sup>344</sup> The argument once again starts off with a conditional: "If ... the whole course and movement of the heavens and all that is in them reflect the motion and revolution and calculation of reason ... then clearly we have to admit that it is the best kind of soul that cares for the entire universe and directs it along the best path" (897 c). The motion of the heavens, being regular and orderly, is shown to exhibit the closest possible affinity with the movement of reason, and thus the consequent is easily confirmed. A few passages later, Plato also 'proves' that god's goodness manifests practically in the form of his caring concern for the welfare of the universe and its inhabitants (899d-905d).

## II.3 Implicit and explicit theodicean strategies in the *Timaeus*

### II.3.1 The principle of plenitude

The assertion of god's goodness, benevolence, and providential care for the universe, gives rise to the well known and notorious problem of reconciling the obvious presence of both moral and physical badness in the world with the factuality of superintendent characterized as above. This is a problem which theodicy is supposed to solve, although it is highly dubitable that it ever will, at least to everyone's satisfaction. As a profoundly religious thinker, Plato is well aware of the challenge, and in the *Timaeus* offers several brief and scattered, but valuable, remarks that may be seen as constituting proper theodicy, which had its origin in the *Republic*, and will have its continuation and culmination in the *Laws* X.<sup>345</sup>

After having answered the 'why the world at all?' question, and before specifically addressing the problem of how the presence of badness is justifiable in an universe shaped by an omnibenevolent divinity, Plato, deliberately or spontaneously, turns to another issue with strong theodicean implications. In a nutshell, this issue is best expressed with the question 'if a world must exist, why it has to be so complex and variegated?' More elaborately put, wouldn't the god of the *Timaeus* exemplify his all-good nature much more effectively had he confined his demiurgic impulse on fashioning only the world-soul and the lesser gods, and ceased from performing or inducing any further creative activity? In other words, wouldn't the cosmos be a better place had it been inhabited by gods only, and how does the vast variety of creatures add to the perfection of the whole? This is what Plato explicitly claims at 41b7-8: "three mortal kinds are still left unbegotten, and unless they come into being, the universe will remain incomplete."<sup>346</sup> The problem of the variegated world is that diversity implies inequality – some creatures will be stronger than others, some more beautiful, some faster, some bigger, some more

---

<sup>345</sup> Broadie (2001, p. 1) curiously overlooks the *Republic* and the *Laws* when writing: "[Plato's] theodicy, if it is to be found anywhere, is surely in the *Timaeus*."

<sup>346</sup> There are, all together, four broad sorts of living things that populate the universe, classified in accordance with their habitat: the gods, living in the fiery regions, then the airborne creatures, creatures inhabiting the waters, and those living on dry land (39e10-40a2). The last three are, obviously, mortal, while the first sort, being a superb creation of the Demiurge himself, although not intrinsically indissoluble, through his own will has been blessed never to suffer death and dissolution (41b).

virile, some more intelligent. Some will be missing almost any admirable property. Instead of accommodating only the most excellent kind, the world is infested with scorpions, cockroaches, bed-bugs, and, after all, humans. This distribution of powers and qualities, and lackage thereof, at first glance seems arbitrary, and therefore unjust.<sup>347</sup>

Now, it is to these worries<sup>348</sup> that Plato gives his specific answer at 39e3-a2 and 41b7-c2;<sup>349</sup> it is not offered in response to the inquiry “why was the human race, of all things, part of the craftsman good plan?”<sup>350</sup> nor even to the inquiry ‘why mortal creatures must be part of the creation?’<sup>351</sup> The answer plainly meets the question ‘why the world needs to contain such a variety of life-forms’? The former ones are closely related and relevant to the main issue, but are nevertheless not directly addressed in the passages under discussion. Plato does not say ‘the universe needs to contain human beings with rational souls in order to be perfect’,<sup>352</sup> or ‘it must possess mortal beings in order to be perfect’,<sup>353</sup> but ‘it needs to contain each kind of living entities there are in the paradigm in order to mimic it perfectly.’<sup>354</sup> Thus, his reply to a highly complex issue, though rather dogmatic, is extremely simple, and straightforward: this universe was produced on the likeness of an eternal model (28a-29b); that model is a Living Creature, comprising within itself all intelligible *zōia* (30c5-8); the maker of the cosmos, being good (29e1), wanted his creation to be as similar as possible to the most excellent model (30d1-3, 39e); he, therefore, made it into a single, all-inclusive copy, also embracing all the kinds of *zōia* (30d3-31a1). Hadn’t the cosmos contained them all, it wouldn’t have been a perfect replica of the perfect paradigm (39e, 41b8-41c2). The principle of variety in this world is thus not applied

<sup>347</sup> For a detailed presentation of the problem, see Hick 2010, pp. 70ff.

<sup>348</sup> Which are, as a matter of fact, not stated, but only implied.

<sup>349</sup> In short, ‘The Demiurge determined that the universe should possess as many sorts of entities as are contained in the Living Thing that really is’, and ‘unless the remaining three mortal kinds are born, the universe will remain incomplete, because it will lack all the kinds it needs to have in order to be perfect’, respectively.

<sup>350</sup> Broadie 2001, p. 8

<sup>351</sup> As, we can imagine, Taylor (1928, p. 253) assumes.

<sup>352</sup> As Broadie (2012, p. 90) does: “[t]hat reason’s self-development from within a mortal body assaulted by forces not friendly to reason is just the kind of things without which the world would be incomplete.” I do not want to say that her point is not valid, only that it is not directly the issue in the above passages.

<sup>353</sup> As far as the necessity of existence of mortal kinds is concerned, Taylor (*ibid.*), believing that the main bulk of the religious and metaphysical ideas expounded in the *Timaeus* are of Pythagorean origin, claimed that the mortal and the immortal had to be present in the good cosmos as constituents of one of the basic pairs of opposites. Arher-Hind’s (1888, p. 140) is more accurate: “To materiality belongs becoming and perishing: accordingly *aisthēta zōia*, the copies of the *noēta zōia*, must, as far as material, be mortal.”

<sup>354</sup> With which Cornford (1937, p. 141) also seems satisfied, since he comments neither on humanity nor on mortality.

capriciously, but its presence stands naturally in accordance with a) the commonsensical notion that a copy, if it is to be a copy at all, must imitate the original all the way through; b) the well-known Platonic tenet that the reason for the being of the sensible world of is to be found in the world of the Intellect.

In Plato's justification of the existence of the world and its fullness and diversity, one eminent scholar of the last century saw the emergence of an important philosophical thesis, appropriated by Plotinus and implemented in his and the Augustinian theodicy, which he called 'the principle of plenitude'. Applied to Timaeus' story, it could be laid in the following way: since existence is better than non-existence, and since the Demiurge would not begrudge existence to any being that might conceivably possess it, the created cosmos will instantiate each and every *zōon* contained in the paradigmatic Living Creature. In the words of the author himself, the principle of plenitude is

the thesis that the universe is a *plenum formarum* in which the range of conceivable diversity of *kinds* of living things is exhaustively exemplified ... that no genuine potentiality of being can remain unfulfilled, that the extent and abundance of the creation must be as great as the possibility of existence and commensurate with the productive capacity of a "perfect" and inexhaustible Source, and that the world is the better, the more things it contains.<sup>355</sup>

As it usually happens, not everybody is happy with the ascription of this concept to Plato. Sarah Broadie extensively criticizes Lovejoy's treatment "of the question to which the *Timaeus* ought to suggest an answer."<sup>356</sup> However, as already mentioned, Broadie takes that question to be 'why are humans part of the divine plan?', and that is definitely not the one in reply to which Lovejoy formulated his principle of plenitude. He states expressly that the question under scrutiny is "How many kinds of temporal and imperfect beings must this world contain?"<sup>357</sup>, or, to put it differently, 'if a world, why so diverse?', and as the Platonic answer to it he quotes the exact two passages of the *Timaeus* we were concerned with.<sup>358</sup> Thus, the phrasing of the principle of plenitude, which follows almost immediately after the quotations, may be taken as an succinct elucidation of the *Timaeus* passages, and undoubtedly represents the proper answer to the question that Lovejoy and, in all probability, Plato intended to pose. This does not mean

---

<sup>355</sup> Lovejoy 1936, p. 52

<sup>356</sup> Broadie 2001, p. 8

<sup>357</sup> Lovejoy 1936, p. 50

<sup>358</sup> *ibid.* and p. 51

that each and every detail of Lovejoy's answer and all its corollaries should be taken as unmistakably representing Plato's own position. For example, Plato never says that the sheer overabundance of entities makes the world a better place than another possible world populated with less entities, as Lovejoy probably believes when writing "the world is the better, the more things it contains." Likewise for his assertion that, "The Intellectual World was declared to be deficient without the sensible. Since a God unsupplemented by nature in all its diversity would not be 'good', it followed that he would not be divine,"<sup>359</sup> which is supported neither by the *Timaeus*, nor by any other Platonic text. Now Broadie, as a matter of fact, offers some convincing arguments against this conjecture, as well as some other mistakes in Lovejoy's account.<sup>360</sup> Nevertheless, she takes her case too far by denying any value to the principle of plenitude. Besides the confusion of the question to which it is supposed to serve as an answer, she does not even quote the main statement of the principle, but focuses on corollaries like the above (p. 10ff). Next, discussing the *Timaeus* 39e3-a2 and 41b7-c2, Broadie writes that they support Lovejoy's thesis only insofar as they show that "the all-inclusiveness of the visible cosmos is nothing more than the fact that it lacks nothing on the visible level that is present in the intelligible archetype."<sup>361</sup> But there is no need for them to show anything more, because the statement of the principle of plenitude, as I understand it in relation to Plato, aims exactly at that – to lead us to the conclusion that the creator and the world are such as not to allow for any 'genuine potentiality of being to remain unfulfilled'. This plain fact might not be open to Broadie because she seems to come to a conclusion about the content of the paradigm by looking at the copy: "For this classification [of intelligible kinds] rests on the necessarily exhaustive division of the materials of the universe into earth, fire, water and air, and the corresponding division of regions ..."<sup>362</sup> Plato's argument, however, is the reverse. "Because the Model contains these types, the cosmos, to be complete, must contain them too."<sup>363</sup> Thus, it may be concluded that Plato's answer to the issue of the variegatedness of the cosmos is in conformity with a slightly restricted form of the principle of plenitude.

---

<sup>359</sup> *op. cit.*, pp. 52f

<sup>360</sup> For her arguments, see Broadie 2001, p. 11.

<sup>361</sup> 2001, p. 14.

<sup>362</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>363</sup> Guthrie 1978, p. 305

This assertion notwithstanding, Broadie's insistence on the eminence of human race within the world of the *Timaeus* has its independent value. Timaeus' job was, after all, to relate the story of creation, starting with the birth of the cosmos, and ending with an account of the nature of mankind (27a5-6). Humans are most exalted among the living beings other than gods, because they have free access to rationality, which is very much dimmed in the case of the rest of the mortal species.<sup>364</sup> Besides, humans, through degradation of consciousness, are, in a way, 'creators' of the non-human animals;<sup>365</sup> when a soul incarnated in human body shows itself unworthy of the responsibility that comes with the gift of full-blown rationality – by becoming morally corrupt – it is being transferred into a lower body, appropriate for the lustful, avaricious, etc. frame of mind that such a soul has acquired (42a-9, 91d-92c).<sup>366</sup> Since the immortal souls created by the Demiurge and assigned to a particular star each (41d8-e1) are bound to get incarnated,<sup>367</sup> the human form holds the key to the 'rational victory' and 'rational achievement'<sup>368</sup> or the opposite, on micro level. Through the image of the Demiurge instructing the souls-to-be-incarnated and warning them of the perils that await the embodied beings (41e-d), Plato emphasizes the true value and responsibility of human life.

---

<sup>364</sup> For an argument that all non-human animals are intelligent, see Carpenter 2008, pp. 47ff. Her view, presented in the same article, that they are also capable of reordering the circles of the Same and the Different, is more difficult to accept. For the relation of plants to intelligence, as deduced from the *Timaeus*, see Carpenter 2010.

<sup>365</sup> By projecting the suitable mentality; the bodies themselves are fashioned by the lesser gods.

<sup>366</sup> The text of the *Timaeus* does not leave open the possibility that the degradation might not happen. The body of, e.g., snail exists for the purpose of accommodating a specific degree of decline in the quality of human rationality; since it is instantiated in this world, this life-form has to be somehow represented in the Intellectual paradigm; but because this perfect replica would not be such without mirroring the model in the best way possible, the snail-body is bound to appear sooner or later. The degradation of the soul is thus prodded by two types of necessity: the first one stemming from the structure of the Intellectual paradigm, the second one from the presence of materiality. This may be taken as an illustration of Plato's pessimism: he is well aware that only the rare few shall walk the path of spiritual exaltation and salvation.

<sup>367</sup> Maybe due to the second and third grade of purity of the material they were fashioned from (41d3-4)? Or simply, because such is the law of necessity (42a3-4)?

<sup>368</sup> As Broadie designates the individual struggle with psychic disorderliness in 2001, p. 20, and 2012, pp. 104ff.

### II.3.2 Personal responsibility

The sections describing the composition of human souls, their ‘sowing’ on the planets, and the construction of their bodies and inferior soul parts by the demigods (41d-42e), are also significant for the question of theodicy in the *Timaeus*, because in some of those passages Plato once again embraces the theodicean strategy he undertook in the Myth of Er. At this point, as Cornford (1935, p. 143) puts it, the veil of myth grows very thick, and thus allows for many different interpretative options. But this should not concern us here, because the theodicean motif is rather clear and already known. The Demiurge turns to the same *kratēr* in which he mixed the ingredients of the cosmic soul, but now uses inferior material, so that the individual souls may have similar cognitive capacities, but also be fallible (41d). Next he divides the soul stuff into portions equaling the number of the fixed stars, assigns each soul to a particular star, and mounts them on the stars as if on chariots,<sup>369</sup> showing them thus the nature of the universe and disclosing the laws of destiny (41d-41e).<sup>370</sup> The first law is especially significant: the initial birth appointed for all will be one and the same, that of a male human, so that no one might suffer disadvantage at god’s hands – *hina mētis elattoito hyp’ autou* (41e4). This means that each soul will be given an even start and equal opportunity to make the best out of its life. Thus no envy may arise among the embodied beings out of feeling that some of them are favored over the others by god and destiny, and subsequently no blame for partiality may be laid upon the latter. Once implanted in bodies, the souls will experience a mighty and disturbing surge of violent sensations, desire blended with pleasure and pain, and also fear and anger. Virtue and salvation of the soul will depend on its ability to master these affections, while vice and enslavement are the results of being mastered by them (42a-b). The good and just souls will be exempt from the obligation to undergo the cycle of reincarnation, while those who succumb to the power of the affections will be born again, first as women, and if they continue to follow their evil ways, later on will slide down into beastly forms (42c). This painful transmigration from body to body may

---

<sup>369</sup> This is remindful of the *Phaedrus* myth of the chariots (246eff), although there exist significant differences: the souls in the *Phaedrus* are not contemplating the universe, but the *hyperouranios topos* (247c); while in the *Timaeus* all soul are bound to be incarnated, in the *Phaedrus* ‘the law of destiny’ prescribes that those soul who have obtained a vision of the eternal truths may postpone the fall in a body indefinitely (248c); etc.

<sup>370</sup> Cornford (1937, p. 144) here draws a significant parallel: the souls of the *Timaeus* “are also taught the laws of their own destiny, as the souls in the Myth of Er, between their incarnations, hear the discourse of Lachesis, daughter of Necessity. The chief lesson, here as there, is that the soul is responsible for any evil it may suffer.”

cease only when the inner irrational turbulences will have been appeased by the employment of reason, whereupon the soul will return to its original blessed state of a companion of its appointed star (42c-d).<sup>371</sup> The Demiurge spoke this solemn proclamation to all souls so that they might understand that their success or failure would be their own responsibility, and that he might be held blameless for the future evils of each of them – *hina tēs epeita eiē kakias hekastōn anaitios* (42d3-4). Next the god ‘sows’ the souls in the Earth and the others ‘instruments of time’, and delegates to the younger gods the responsibility to create their bodies as well as the mortal soul-parts.<sup>372</sup> They are also given the duty to govern and steer the mortal animal in the noblest and best way as they are able, save in so far as it might become a cause of evils to itself – *hoti mē kakōn auto heautōi gignoito aition* (42e3-4). With these statements, the guiltlessness of both the creator god and the created gods is once again strongly emphasized. Despite the different narrative setting, these statements’ purport is the same as the purport of the *aitia helomenou’ theos aniaitios* dictum of the Myth of Er,<sup>373</sup> and they raise the same problems as the latter.<sup>374</sup> Since these issues were already discussed in some detail in the section dedicated to the *Republic*, we shall not say much here. The bottom line is clear: all embodied souls should pay heed to the Demiurge’s (or Plato’s?) instructions and be aware that, although being primarily rational creatures, they will be facing violent reactions of the elements of materiality, which are present by necessity. Still, these powers may be resisted; however, if the souls succumb to the forceful flow of sensations, pleasures and pains, and renounce their most prized possession, the blame will be their own. God has provided proper knowledge, as well as other facilities – like the orderly revolution of the heavens which attests the providential guidance of the divinities – and thus has washed his hands clean of any guilt for the unbecoming deeds of the mortals. The

---

<sup>371</sup> The mechanism through which a soul returns from the lower bodies to a human body, apparently the only one in which the capacity for rational redemption is fully present, remains unclear.

<sup>372</sup> For a brief statement of the controversy concerning Plato’s endorsement of extraterrestrial animal life and references to Taylor and Cornford, see Zeyl 2000, p. lii, and fn. 113.

<sup>373</sup> As far as 42d3-4 is concerned, both Archer-Hind (1888, p. 144-146) and Taylor (1928, p. 264) refer the reader back to the *Republic* II and the Myth of Er. As usual, the former’s interpretation of the presence of evil among souls is seasoned with generous dash of Hegelianism, while the latter, also not surprisingly, ascribes the idea that god is in no sense responsible for human shortcomings and failures to the Pythagoreans. In his note on 42e3-4, Archer-Hind aptly remarks that while we are not answerable for the badness that stems from the limitations of materiality, “for all that is the result of our own folly we are answerable” (p. 146). Taylor, in a similar vein, writes: “The ‘created gods’, like the supreme God, are not responsible for the mischief a man causes by his own willful folly” (p. 266).

<sup>374</sup> For example, Archer-Hind, Taylor and Cornford (1937, p. 147), all seem to presuppose some notion of the free will.

responsibility for their subsequent degradation and betterment is theirs alone.<sup>375</sup> In this way Plato once again applies the theodician strategy of the *Republic*; after affirming the all-benevolent nature of his deity, he delegates the responsibility for the badness that living beings experience to the individual agents. He thus sets firm foundations for what will become known as the Free-will defense of God's goodness.

### II.3.3 A factor beyond god's control: the Timaeon Necessity

The above strategy, which puts the blame for all badness on human folly, may be a somewhat adequate response to the problem of moral evil, but is still insufficient. Besides, it leaves many areas of the physical aspect of the overall problem ill-covered, such as the occurrences of natural catastrophes, still-born infants, congenital diseases, diseases not brought upon oneself by overindulgence, etc.<sup>376</sup> Although the mythical frame of Er's tale maybe could accommodate all moral depravity, as well as the above instances of physical evil, by ascribing them to exceedingly unwitty choices made in the pre-natal state, Timaeus' *eikos logos*<sup>377</sup> is assumed to be a scientific exposition of the nature of the universe and its occupants, and thereby must provide a more probable account. This is done by the introduction of the complex Platonic notion of the Errant Cause, or Necessity,<sup>378</sup> which proves to be a very serviceable maneuver. Besides partially accounting, through its fickle and unintelligent nature, for the physical evils,<sup>379</sup>

---

<sup>375</sup> It is opportune to note here that, while in the Myth of Er there were two additional factors which somewhat influenced the overwhelmingly dominant element of free choice, namely necessity and chance, in the *Timaeus* Plato introduces a different kind of necessity, which limits and conditions the soul's motions.

<sup>376</sup> In opposition to this understanding, Plantinga (1974, pp. 164ff) claims that *all* evil is essentially a result of moral depravity, by arguing that *it is possible* that the so-called natural evils are caused by free non-human (im)moral agents, i.e. Satan and his minions.

<sup>377</sup> For a very appealing interpretation of the *eikos mythos (logos)* phrase of the *Timaeus*, see Burnyeat 2009 and Betegh 2010.

<sup>378</sup> The discussion of the nature and status of the Timaeon Necessity will be postponed till the second chapter of Part II.

<sup>379</sup> Broadie (2001, p. 6) claims that Plato did not consider natural evils as real evil, and believed that "the only truly bad things are moral evil and such non-moral conditions as promote it." Cornford (1937, p. 144) quotes Proclus to the same effect. However, Plato should not be completely aligned with the Stoics on this matter; he doesn't seem to overlook natural evil altogether. The *Republic's* statements 'good things are fewer than bad things in our life' and 'god is the cause of good things only' (379a-380c), hardly exclude non-moral evil and suffering. The same applies to the *Laws* 906a2-5, which transposes the predominance of badness from human to cosmic level: *einai*

it fittingly supplements the free choice solution to the moral aspect of the problem,<sup>380</sup> and also satisfies the conditions for being a causal principle of metaphysical evil, i.e. of the overarching issue of imperfection, transitoriness and instability. After all, it is rather expected that Necessity should play a significant role in the constitution of the world, since “the generation of this universe was a mixed result of the combination of Necessity and Reason” (48a).

At the beginning of the third part of *Timaeus*' discourse, which Cornford entitles “The Cooperation of Reason and Necessity” (69a-92c), Plato offers an interesting teleological explanation of the physical insufficiencies of the human body. The title is aptly given, and the section indeed deals with the cooperation of *nous* and the ‘persuaded’ *anankē*, which is aimed at the best possible result. This successful merger is visible in many instances, as for example in the case of the lesser gods’ creation of the mortal soul. The spirited and the appetitive part of the soul are, in and of themselves, not really desirable, but a human being could not operate without them. Therefore, they are at least placed in such locations that will guarantee maximum functionality, with the highest end in view. Thus, the spirited part is situated in the heart, so as to be close to the head, the seat of reason, and to be able to easily hear and convey the reason’s commands all over the body through the circulatory system. Moreover, the lungs, soft and perforated, are begirding the heart, in order to cool and refresh the heart when it is agitated by anger arising due to the actions of the appetites (69e-70d). The appetitive part, a beast untamed, but also necessary for the existence of mortal beings, is stationed between the diaphragm and the navel, as far away from the seat of reason as possible, so that it might cause the least possible disturbance to its intellectual activity. The liver is also close by, and on its surface reason (*logos*) projects images, by which the appetitive part becomes intimidated (70d-71b). In the process of

---

*men ton ouranon pollōn meston agathōn, einai de kai tōn enantiōn, pleionōn de tōn mē.* Furthermore, Plato in the *Timaeus* does discuss diseases of body and soul, which are undoubtedly unwanted conditions, and even to some of the latter ascribes purely physical cause. Carone (2005, p. 25) hints that she believes natural evil to be a result of the workings of Necessity. Finally, at the *Laws* 906c, Plato seems to recognize both physical suffering and moral depravity as something unwanted, but conflates them by saying that disease in a body, plague in a season, and injustice in a city are but different names of the same thing, namely lack of measure or proportion. As we learn from the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*, proper measure, both on individual and cosmic level, is brought about by reason.

<sup>380</sup> See *Tim.* 42a-b, where it is said that passions and emotions necessarily (*anankaion*) attack the embodied soul, because “[i]t is not possible to create individual living things without an external environment, hence without sense perception, pleasure and pain, and their concomitant violent emotions. [g]iven such a world, it is not possible to create living things not susceptible to moral degeneration” (Zeyl 2000, p. lxxix).

creating the mortal soul and the bodily organs, Reason establishes certain functions for the different parts and organs, all of them ultimately subservient to the highest goal of life – the return to one’s original position. Necessity participates by providing the material ingredients, furnished with certain characteristics. The cooperation of *nous* and *anankē* becomes manifest through the Reason’s successful utilization of the given material for the envisaged purpose.<sup>381</sup> Necessity, however, at times refuses to be subjugated, and in these cases Reason has to make some concessions, sacrificing lesser considerations for higher.

One such conflict is fittingly exemplified in Timaeus’ discussion of the uneven distribution of flesh over the bones that contain different quantities of marrow. Marrow is a substance of central importance for the living entity, since all three parts of the soul are ‘anchored’ to it: the immortal part to the brain, the other two parts to the rest of the marrow, extending through the spine and the bones (73c-d). Therefore, it would be only proper that those bones which shelter most marrow should be covered with thickest flesh, so that their content would be well protected. But the artificer(s) of the body did just the opposite:

Now those bones in which there is most marrow he fenced about with the smallest amount of flesh; those having least life within them, with flesh in greatest abundance ... [so] that the solidity of many layers of thick flesh packed close to one another should not cause dullness of sensation and produce hardness of apprehension and unretentiveness in the quarters of the mind. (74e)

Instead of shielding the brain with dense bone and thick flesh, as Reason would demand, the lesser gods enveloped it with the brittle bone of the skull and almost no flesh whatsoever. This is so because Reason also demands that the brain should be as sensitive and responsive as possible, and the necessary means for accomplishing that goal is thin bone and flesh. So, on the one hand stands the necessity to have the brain well protected, on the other the necessity to have it fine-tuned and sharp.

For if these two characters had consented to coincide, the structure of the head would have possessed them above all, and the human race, bearing a head fortified with flesh and sinew, would have enjoyed a life twice or many times as long as now, healthier and more free from pain. But as it was, the artificers who brought us into being reckoned whether they should make a long-lived but inferior race or one with life shorter but nobler, and agreed that everyone must on all accounts prefer the shorter and better life to the longer and worse. (75b-c)

---

<sup>381</sup> For a neat overview of the creation of the mortal soul and the bodily systems, see *op. cit.* pp. lxxviii ff.

In this case Necessity could not be fully persuaded by Reason, and so longevity and freedom from pain had to be given up for the sake of a higher good, which is keenness of mind.<sup>382</sup> We thus end up with the second-best option, but the reason for that lies in the recalcitrant nature of Necessity; hadn't she been a causal factor, the benevolent gods would have blessed us with life of many more years and much less pain. These considerations lead us to a very important conclusion: Plato's god is omniscient and omnibenevolent, but not omnipotent as well. His best intentions are hampered by a factor which is coeval with him and which god cannot eliminate, but only accommodate, as far as possible, to his all-good purposes.

Plato did not make it explicitly clear that he intended the passage 74e-75c to serve as a theodicean strategy, i.e. as one of the solutions to the problem of evil. But it was nonetheless taken as such, and used by the Stoics in their theodicy. In a nutshell, this response to the problem of evil states that some of the so-called evils are unavoidable consequences of the purposeful acts of Nature, aimed at some higher good. It is clearly visible in Chrysippus' answer to the question "do the diseases that humans suffer also arise in accordance with nature?", as reported by Gellius.<sup>383</sup> Chrysippus says that the prime intention of Nature, or God, or Providence, is certainly not to create man as a sorrowful creature liable to diverse sicknesses and injuries; such an act would not be becoming of the creator of everything that is good. Still, while God was producing his magnificent works, perfecting their functions and increasing their utility, certain inauspicious qualities came about together with the final product. These are also produced in accordance with Nature, but as some kind of necessary concomitances (*kata parakoluthēsīn*), or accidental consequences. As an example of such an occurrence, Chrysippus points out the fragility of the human skull, which makes the brain vulnerable to numerous injuries. Nevertheless, a skull of such constitution is necessary for a being meant to live a life of reason; therefore, the good which its sensitivity generates much outweighs the evil, i.e. the pain and untimely death. This example is obviously drawn from the *Timaeus*, and furthermore, as reported by Plutarch, Chrysippus also explicitly evokes Plato's principle when saying that the badness is present in the world because there is also a considerable involvement of Necessity – *poly kai to tēs anankēs memichthai*.<sup>384</sup> Thus, according to this Platonic theodicean strategy appropriated by the Stoics, the things we

<sup>382</sup> See Cornford 1937, p. 297f; Archer-Hind 1888, p. 278; Taylor 1928, p. 533; Zeyl 2000, p. lxxxix; Gregory 2008, pp. xlviii f.

<sup>383</sup> See SVF II.1170

<sup>384</sup> See SVF II.1178

experience as bad, in fact cannot but exist in the makeup of the world where the benefits and the goods, by their value and utility, by far surpass the obstacles and inconveniences created by the so-called evils.

## II.4 Personal responsibility abandoned?

By the end of the *Timaeus*, there is another passage, and a rather puzzling one, relevant to our discussion of theodicy in this dialogue. Although it does not challenge god's immunity from responsibility for the evils, it contradicts, at least seemingly, the earlier statements concerning the individual agents as fully answerable for their wrong choices and misdeeds.<sup>385</sup> This passage appears in the section which deals with the diseases of the body and the soul (81e-87b).

Plato groups all bodily diseases into three kinds: a) those that arise due to excess, deficiency or misplacement of the four elements in the body (81e-82b);<sup>386</sup> b) diseases that are caused by corruption and untimely decay of the secondary tissues – flesh, sinew, bone, marrow (82b-84c); c) those that occur when air, bile and phlegm are blocked in the body (84c-86a). Next, the diseases of the soul are discussed (86b-87b), more precisely those diseases of the soul “that result from a bodily condition” – *ta de peri psychēn dia sōmatos hexin* (86b2).<sup>387</sup> All these represent nothing else but mindlessness or folly (*anoia*)<sup>388</sup> and fall into two classes: madness (*mania*)<sup>389</sup> and ignorance (*amathia*).<sup>390</sup> The most dangerous diseases of the soul arise from excessive indulgence in pleasures (primarily sexual) and intense feelings of pain. The intense longing after sensual pleasure has purely physical root: in some men, the marrow produces excess of seed, which flows out through the abnormally porous bones and moistens the body (86d3-5). Pains are caused by poisonous phlegm and bile incarcerated within the body, which

---

<sup>385</sup> As in the *Republic*: *aitia helomenou*, and in the *Timaeus*: *hoti mē kakōn auto heautōi gignōito aition*.

<sup>386</sup> Regarding the aberrant behavior of the elements which causes diseases, Zeyl (2000, p. lxxxiv) writes the following: “Timaeus does not speculate about the causes of these ‘unnatural’ (82a7) phenomena. These are no doubt the effects of the residual random motions of the Receptacle, and as such are the products of Necessity over which Intellect has no power to prevail.”

<sup>387</sup> This is Zeyl's translation. I believe it is closer to the original than Archer-Hind's, who renders *ta de peri psychēn dia sōmatos hexin tēide* with “those of the soul depend upon bodily habit in the following way,” and even Cornford's, who has “disorders of the soul are caused by the bodily condition in the following way.” Zeyl's rendering clearly narrows the number of the diseases described in this short section, leaving open the possibility that there are some maladies of the soul that are *not* caused by bodily states, which was, most probably, Plato's intention; Archer-Hind leaves little room for that possibility, and the same, although to a slightly lesser degree, goes for Cornford, although he actually needs such an interpretation to substantiate the conclusions of his commentary on the section.

<sup>388</sup> “‘Folly’ means any state in which the divine reason (*nous*) is not exercising due control over the rest of the soul” (Cornford 1937, p. 346).

<sup>389</sup> Not “pathological insanity,” but “frantic passionate excitement” (*ibid.*), with ‘passion’ being also one of the secondary lexical meanings of the word.

<sup>390</sup> Cf. *Soph.* 227d228-e, where related, but still different classification of the badness in the soul is given.

affect the motions of the soul and in this way produce melancholy, cowardice, dullness, etc (86e5-87a7). Therefore, he reasons ill who consider a man maddened by pleasure and pain deliberately bad; such a person is, as a matter of fact, only sick (86d1-2). To make this point even clearer, Plato writes:

And indeed, just about every type of succumbing to pleasure is talked about as something reproachable, as though the evils are willfully done (*ōs hekontōn legetai tōn kakōn*). But it is not right to reproach people for them, for no one is willfully evil (*kakos men gar hekōn oudeis*). A man becomes evil, rather, as a result of one or another corrupt condition of his body and an uneducated upbringing (*dia de ponēran hexin tina tou sōmatos kai apaideuton trophēn ho kakos gignetai kakos*). No one who incurs these pernicious conditions would will to have them. (86d5-e3)

To many, this passage seems to straightforwardly reject the notion of individual moral responsibility, established in the Myth of Er, as well as earlier in the *Timaeus*. Even the ‘real’ culprits are here identified, and a little later once again emphasized:

That is how all of us who are bad become so, through two causes that are altogether against the will (*tautēi kakoi pantes hoi kakoi dia dyo akousiōtata gignometha*). For these the blame must fall upon parents rather than the offspring, and upon those who give, rather those who receive nurture. (87b3-6)

So, it seems as if Plato were saying that no individual bears the blame for his moral failure, but that the parents, who were somehow neglectful at the moment of conception, and the lazy teachers are responsible for it.<sup>391</sup> The former supplied their child with a corrupt body, the latter deprived their protégé of solid education.

Not everybody, however, is ready to draw this consequence from the above texts. Commenting on 86d7-e1 (*kakos men gar hekōn oudeis*) and what follows, Archer-Hind writes: “This passage is one of the most important ethical statements in Plato’s writings,” as well as that the *aitia helomenou* declaration of the Republic is implied by the *kakos hekōn oudeis*, and vice versa: “each statement in fact involves the other and could not be true without it.”<sup>392</sup> As for the second quotation, Archer-Hind approves of it and bolsters it with a further quotation from the *Republic* 492a;<sup>393</sup> he nevertheless, recognizes the regress problem (as does Taylor), insofar as my

---

<sup>391</sup> I suppose that the parents should be guilty of their offspring’s *mania*, while the teachers for their pupils’ *amathia*.

<sup>392</sup> See Archer-Hind 1988, pp. 324-326. I have to admit that it remains a mystery to me how this conclusion follows from his explanation of the passage.

<sup>393</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 327

parents' and teachers' responsibility for my moral badness would not be their own, but of their predecessors, etc.

Taylor (pp. 610ff), on the other hand, spares no effort to demonstrate that Timaeus' interpretation of the Socratic formula *oudeis hekōn hamartanei* denies individual moral responsibility, insisted upon by Plato in many other places in the dialogues, as well as by Timaeus when he spoke on ethics and theology: "[Timaeus'] exposition explains away that very fact of moral responsibility on which Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Timaeus himself, when he is talking ethics and not medicine, are all anxious to insist."<sup>394</sup> The doctrine presented in the section on the diseases of the soul demands wrongful attribution of moral-freedom-and-responsibility-denying-determinism to Plato, and thus stands in stark contradiction with what he already wrote and will write on the subject. Taylor, therefore, wishing to save Plato (and Socrates) from self-contradiction, ascribes these ideas to Timaeus himself and to certain medical men of the fifth century. Despite the characteristic attribution of the Timaeian ideas to non-Platonic sources, Taylor's argument is comprehensive and rather persuasive: Plato could not have believed in what he wrote in this section of his book. Therefore Cornford (pp. 343ff), who wants to refute it, takes the only possible route: he limits the scope of the *peri psychēn nosēmata* Timaeus is talking about. It is not needed here to enter into the details of this interesting discussion; Cornford's main thesis is that the *anoiāi* Timaeus is presenting, namely *mania* and *amathia*, does not "[c]over the whole field of what could be called 'disorder of the soul'. They are the conditions which can arise from 'a bad habit of body' and be encouraged by 'unenlightened upbringing' in youth."<sup>395</sup> This is not an uncontroversial statement, because Timaeus is talking in general terms when he says "A man becomes evil, rather, as a result of one or another corrupt condition of his body and an uneducated upbringing" (86e1-2), and "That is how all of us who are bad become so, through two causes that are altogether against the will" (87b3-4). Nevertheless, the entire section is introduced by Timaeus' announcement that he will be speaking of the diseases in the soul that *arise from certain bodily states* (86b2); from this unproblematically follows that there are some disorders of the soul that will be left out of the discussion. Furthermore, he says that all men who are *incontinent in pursuing pleasures* are wrongly reproached as if they were willingly bad (86d6-7). In other words, Plato here does not seem to want to convey the message that no

---

<sup>394</sup> Taylor 1928, p. 611

<sup>395</sup> Cornford 1937, p. 346

wicked person is blamable for his mental states and behavior, but that each sex-addict, all other considerations aside, should not be reproached for his vice as if he brought it upon himself intentionally. There is every chance that he was pushed into it by his bodily constitution. This does not mean that there are not other forms of moral badness, as excessive love of moneymaking, unprovoked violent demeanor, sadistic impulses, etc, which call for reproach and punishment. Even licentiousness itself, when one engages in it against and despite the good advice and the admonition of the well-wishers, turns into a proper moral transgression of which the perpetrator has to bear the consequences. That is one of the reasons why, I think, Plato warns us against the bad governed cities and the negligent educators who are unable to bring those under their custody on the right path (87a7-87b6). In other words, the possibility of improvement and the *duty* to undertake it, as Cornford notes (p. 347), is always there, otherwise Plato would not be in position to urge us to “make every possible effort to flee from badness, whether with the help of one’s upbringing, or the pursuit of studies one undertakes, and to seize the opposite” (87b6-8).

Thus, the section on the maladies of the soul once again draws the reader’s attention to the workings of Necessity as opposed to the good counsel of Reason, and stands in no contradiction with the *aitia helomenou* and the similar formulas, only when understood as describing a limited domain of moral failures.

## II.5 Summary

This chapter was dedicated to the investigation of Plato's theodicy in the *Timaeus*. Its first and second section dwelled on the mistaken concept of divine *phthonos* and its refutation, respectively. It was shown that, at least for Plato, the emotion to which the term '*phthonos*' refers is not jealousy but rather a complex feeling of envy of other people's goods and grudgingness in the sharing of one's own goods. The absence of this emotion from the Timaeian craftsman-god is obvious from his desire to produce a creation as similar to himself as possible, and his readiness to share the gifts of rationality and immortality with all sentient beings that populate the cosmos.

In the third section, I attempted to extract several theodicean strategies from the text of the *Timaeus*. The first one is the so-called Principle of Plenitude. It is a strategy implicit in the *Timaeus*, which indirectly justifies god's ways by explaining how the diversity of creation makes sense, despite the presence of inequality and some seemingly inauspicious or unwanted life-forms. It was observed that Plato bases his answer on the propositions that this cosmos is a copy of an eternal model; that the model is a Living Creature encompassing all intelligible living creatures; and that the Demiurge is good. A good craftsman will want his copy to be as similar to the model as possible, which is the reason why the Demiurge included in his creation every living creature present in the intelligible model. The second theodicean strategy was the already known freedom of choice defense, which places the responsibility for the individual failures and sufferings on the agent himself. The Demiurge does all he can to provide the soon-to-be-embodied souls with right injunctions and proper knowledge of what is ahead of them. If they fail to act accordingly, the blame is only theirs. Plato's god in the *Timaeus*, however, although perfectly good and knowledgeable, is not all-powerful as well. His goodness may therefore be defended with yet another strategy – the Rival substance solution – which could not be implemented by the later orthodox theodicies. Thus Plato introduces the recalcitrant factor of Necessity, which, despite the Demiurge's best wishes and endeavors, contributes to the world the properties of instability and imperfection. It does serve as the basis of all badness, including the ignorance and moral failures of the soul, which arise only due to the contact with the bodily nature.

Finally, in the fourth section, a curious passage of the *Timaeus* was discussed, which seemingly contradicts the assertions of individual moral responsibility, apparently affirmed in the Myth of Er and the *Timaeus* itself. According to this controversial passage, which deals with the maladies of the soul, the blame for the agent's badness does not fall upon him, but upon his parents and educators. An attempt was made to find a way around this contradiction by appealing to the great force of Plato's exhortation to make every possible personal endeavor to flee from badness and improve one's character – which would not be possible, granted that it has been crafted as such by our guardians, and by trying to limit the scope of the discussed maladies of the soul to a group of specific ones, namely those that arise from certain bodily states. This leaves an open window for a different cluster of evils, or psychic maladies, which depend on the agent's level of desire to acquire virtue, or the opposite.

## Chapter III. Theodicy in the *Laws X*

### III.1 The Natural Theology of the *Laws*

The final stage in the investigation of the Platonic theodicy is represented by the *Laws*. This dialogue is the longest and the last written work of Plato, and contains his concluding words on political philosophy, jurisprudence, theory of education and theology.<sup>396</sup> The theodicy of the *Laws* is presented in book X of the dialogue, and is imbedded in Plato's discussion of theology. Therefore, before focusing on the theodicean ideas of this dialogue, we shall pay some attention to their broader context, i.e. the theological discourse as delivered by the character of the unnamed Athenian.

In the *Laws X* Plato sets the foundations of a relatively new field of theological inquiry, known as natural theology. The term comes from the Roman polymath Marcus Terrentius Varro, who distinguished between three types of theology: mythical, natural and civil. Detailed information about his view on the subject can be gathered from St. Augustine's *City of God*, VI. 5ff., where he presents Varro's taxonomy of theology in the course of establishing his own point that worship of the heathen gods for the sake of gaining eternal life is an ill-conceived idea. Mythical theology is, then, the one set in writing by the poets, natural (or philosophical) the one worked out by the philosophers, while the term civil theology refers to the religious rites and temple worship instituted and performed for public benefit by the priests. Varro himself deemed the first kind merely fictional and unbecoming to the dignity and sacredness of the gods, their origin depicted as mundane and impure, their activities as befitting human beings of the basest character. The second kind of theology is to be found in the books of the philosophers, who discuss, in plurality of voices, issues like the eternity of the gods, the stuff they are made of, their role in the universe, etc. Civil theology is the 'applied kind' – it is instituted in the cities and prescribes suitable ways of worship and sacrifice due to each of the gods, as well as the blessings that are to be expected from them in return. It is not to be abandoned, but encouraged. These three kinds of theology are respectively adapted to the theater, the world, and the city. St.

---

<sup>396</sup> For a detailed overview of the dialogue, see Taylor 1949, pp. 465ff.

Augustine argues pretty convincingly that there is no substantial difference between the first and the third kind, and that, subsequently, only the second one deserves the name theology.

This division is also implicitly present in Plato's writings, but his stance on it is a little less radical. As we have already seen, he insists on a thorough reform of the Homeric religion, discarding all those depictions that represent the gods as 'human, all too human' and the heroes as stubborn, selfish and lacking in ethical considerations. However, some concessions to mythical theology are given. To name just a couple, the genesis of the traditional gods is accepted as presented by Hesiod (*Tim.* 40d-41a), and Magnesia's Pantheon includes both the Olympian and the gods of the underworld, as well as different *daimones*, heroes and ancestral gods (*Leg.* 717a-b). So, Plato could not be accused of being "a maker of gods", someone who "creates new gods while not believing in the old gods" (*Euthyph.* 3b2). At the contrary, the guardians of Magnesia not only recognize the traditional gods, but also, with the help of the Delphian pronouncements and the counsels of the city's priests and prophets institute monthly and daily sacrifices and festivals dedicated to them (*Leg.* 828a-d).<sup>397</sup> This, of course, makes the civil aspect of religious life very much alive. The concessions and commitment to traditional religion are not meant to challenge the authority of natural theology, which remains most important. Unfortunately, it will be very difficult for the general masses to accept it,<sup>398</sup> and therefore its main role is to serve as a corrective of the mythical, and provides firm basis for the civil. Mayhew writes that natural theology fulfills these purposes by philosophically demonstrating that a) the gods exist as non-physical entities, prior to anything physical; b) they are good, i.e. do not neglect human beings and are not appeasable by gifts and prayers of the unjust; c) private shrines and private religion must be abolished.<sup>399</sup>

Now, Plato's exposition of natural theology in the *Laws X* actually has a very practical purpose: it is supposed to serve as a prelude to the laws on impiety, which are given by the end

---

<sup>397</sup> On the necessity of strict adherence to the pronouncements of the traditional oracles and the established worships and religious practices, see also 738b-d. For the thesis that in the religious life of Magnesia predominance is given to the astral gods (i.e. the stars and the planets), see Schofield 2006, pp. 313f.

<sup>398</sup> This is due to the complexity and extensiveness of the arguments, as the Athenian says at 890e. See also Mayhew 2008, p. 96

<sup>399</sup> See Mayhew 2008, p. 6. For a survey of the theology of the *Laws* and some important issues that it raises, see Mayhew 2010. On the importance of rationally underpinned religion for the build-up of common values, establishing close social contact and the overall well-being of Plato's city, both in the *Republic* and in the *Laws*, see Schofield 2006, Ch. 7.

of the book (907e-910d), and is directed mainly against the hybristic mentality and acts of the misguided youths (884a, 888b). This prelude is meant to persuade the citizens in the uprightness of the laws, and thus protect the legislators from the accusation that they are passing random laws and imposing them on the strength of fear from penalty.<sup>400</sup> The *hybris* of the young stems from three possible misapprehensions, turned into religious offences, which, in increasing order of severity, are the following: a) plain atheism, the belief that the gods do not exist; b) deism,<sup>401</sup> the doctrine that the gods do exist, but are indifferent to the good and the bad done and experienced by humans; c) gross commercialization of religious practice, or the conviction that unjust men can escape divine punishment by offering sacrifices and supplications (885b).<sup>402</sup> Plato's three objectives in the prolonged prelude of the *Laws* X, which provide the historical basis of natural theology,<sup>403</sup> are set up in response to the above false theological beliefs. Those objectives are: a) to prove that the gods indeed exist; b) that they are mindful of human affairs; c) that they are not liable to bribery. Thus, in order to establish true theology, it is not enough to prove only that the gods exist, but also that they are good and more mindful of justice than men: *hōs theoi t' eisin kai agathoi, dikēn timōntes diapherontōs anthrōpōn* (887b7-8). Two chief hindrances on this path are 'the old mythology and the new philosophy',<sup>404</sup> i.e. the works of the ancient poets and of the Pre-Socratic *physikoi*. The latter are responsible for the lapses of atheism and deism (886b-e),<sup>405</sup> with the implication that the charge for the third type of offence is laid upon the heads of the poets.

---

<sup>400</sup> See 886e-887c and 890b-d. For an earlier elaborate statement of the same principle, see 719e-723d. The preludes are meant to create a more cooperative frame of mind in the subjects, to introduce them to the details and purpose of the legislation, and thus enable the laws not only to demand, but to command respect. On preludes and persuasion in the *Laws*, see Taylor 1949, pp. 464f and p. 475; Schofield 2006, pp. 319ff; Mayhew 2008, p. 4 and pp. 59f. For a detailed discussion of the nature of persuasion and the thesis that Plato in the *Laws* envisaged a concept of rational persuasion as the best way to direct a human being on the right path, see Bobonich 1991.

<sup>401</sup> Following Mayhew. Taylor calls this misapprehension 'Epicureanism', although the Epicureans, of course, never took their attitude towards the gods as an expression of impiety, but as a virtue, i.e. confirmation of divine blessedness, goodness and transcendence in relation to the world and the acts of the mortals. See *Key Doctrines* I, *DL* X.123-124, and cf. *DL* X. 97.

<sup>402</sup> The same three 'heresies' are listed in the *Republic* 365d

<sup>403</sup> See Taylor 1949, p. 489.

<sup>404</sup> England 1921, p. 447.

<sup>405</sup> The cosmologies and the physical doctrines of the philosophers and men of science are the reason why the Athenian rejected Clinias' Argument from Design (886a); after he had demonstrated that the heavenly bodies are not just earth and stone, but souls and gods, the Athenian showed no qualms about the persuasiveness of the Argument (See 968d-967e, where both the priority of the soul and the orderliness of the heavenly arrangement

So, Plato sets off to fulfill his three objectives, starting with the proof for the existence of god. He does that by introducing a rather complex line of reasoning, which may be tagged as Argument from Self-generated Motion (893b-899c). The argument commences with a claim regarding motion: the moving things are incited to motion by other moving things, capable of imparting motion, but incapable of self-motion. Since it is impossible to have an infinite chain of motion transmission, there has to be an initial cause of the sequence of motions, characterized by self-generated motion. In this way Plato singles out the source of all motion. That principle is shown to be the soul. Common sense teaches us that only living things are capable of self-motion, while they are alive due to the presence of soul; therefore, all motion is ultimately due to soul, which in this way proves to be also the fundamental principle, the original source of all motion, including generation, change and destruction. Furthermore, since the heavenly bodies move, they also must be operated by souls, and, for that matter, good souls, souls who act purposefully and for the benefit of the living creatures inhabiting the universe. That those souls are gods is rather clear, and the Athenian, Clinias and Megillus harbor no doubts concerning that fact (899b7-c1).<sup>406</sup>

Once the theistic position has been secured, proving that the gods are neither heedless nor venal remains a relatively easy matter. It has already being established that, as controllers of the natural phenomena and celestial bodies, the gods have taken up the duty to watch over the universe. The objection is that this cannot be, because very often one can witness that the unjust prosper at the expense of the virtuous; a ruthless tyrant snatches the governance of the city away from the hands of the meek and cultured citizens, enjoys many comforts and exercises unrestrained power, while his subjects suffer various tribulations. No just and benevolent controller would allow for something like that to happen, and therefore the gods could not be involved in human affairs. In answer to this objection, the Athenian points out that the gods have also been proven to be good, because everything in the universe moves according to the principle of rationality. One who is considered to be a good individual is expected to possess virtues, or

---

are invoked as confirmations of the validity of theism). For a precise statement and brief analysis of Clinias' Argument from Design and from the *consensus gentium* (to which he also adds the Cosmological Argument), see Mayhew 2008, pp. 61-63.

<sup>406</sup> For Plato's turn on the atheists, complete with a detailed statement of the latter's position, description of the ten kinds of motion and step by step analysis of the argument, see Mayhew 2008, pp. 76ff. For a discussion of the first part of the argument, which establishes the priority of self-motion over mechanical motion, see Carone 2005, pp. 164-170.

attributes that qualify him as good, like exercise of reason, moderation, courage, justice, and to shun away from their opposites. This is true of the mortals, and so much more of the gods who are, by nature, unable to be bad, or to possess vices. So, Plato's second argument is clear and straightforward: the gods are supremely good, devoid of any vice; neglect, idleness and laziness are vices; therefore, the gods do not neglect (*amelein*) even the minutest detail of the universe's affairs (899d-905d).

The answer to the third challenge, namely that the gods are liable to be bought off by gifts, sacrifices and libations is based on the similar premises as the previous one: the gods are supremely virtuous guardians; no good guardian succumbs to bribery of the powerful, but unjust persons, and consequently leaves his dependents unprotected;<sup>407</sup> therefore, the lustful and greedy men cannot influence the gods' good judgment and distribution of justice by presents and lure them into turning a blind eye to their transgressions (905d-907b).<sup>408</sup> By accepting these three truths about the gods, the citizens of Magnesia will save themselves from voluntarily committing any unholy act in words or deeds (885b5). On the other hand, those stubborn ungodly non-believers who will not abandon their evil ways are to be subjected to stringent laws and severe punishments (907d-910d).

---

<sup>407</sup> The opposite would force the gods into the position of shepherds and watch-dogs who sacrifice their flocks to the wolves in exchange for a share of the prey (906d-e), which is a most impious thought. Even the mentioned human and animal guardians would not commit such a blunder, what to speak of divine beings.

<sup>408</sup> For a detailed discussion of the last two arguments see Mayhew 2008, pp. 155ff, and 184ff.

## III.2 Plato and the Aesthetic Theme

Leaving aside the question of how successful this project of constructing theology based upon reason is in confronting and overthrowing the atheists' outlook, we shall now move to the part of the *Laws* X most important for Plato's theodicy. That is the section 903b-905d, which appears in the course of the polemic with the deists, after the Athenian has completed the main line of his argument. In conclusion, he says that they have given a most fitting answer to the person who used to accuse the gods of negligence, by forcing him with arguments (*tois logois*) to agree that he had been wrong. This assertion receives Clinias' unreserved approval (903a7-b1). Nevertheless, the Athenian is of the opinion that they still need some additional "words of counsel to act as a charm" (Bury), or "a form of words to *charm* [the deist] into agreement" (Saunders), or "some "mythic incantations" (Mayhew): *epōidōn ... mythōn eti tinōn*. Mayhew is rather adamant that what follows, namely the account of the providential care of the deities and their blamelessness for the badness in the world is a *myth*, as opposed to the previously offered *arguments*. He claims that the targets of that myth, by its function comparable with the Myth of Er of the *Republic*, are "those people (especially the young) who cannot understand or respond to serious philosophical argument."<sup>409</sup> I do not think that this idea should be pressed too far. For one thing, the young were the imagined audience of the Athenian throughout the prolonged proemium. For another, a possible implication of the very usage of the word 'myth' without a solid explanation of what is meant by it,<sup>410</sup> could be that the Athenian is now about to employ some non-rational means of persuasion. But this is not so.

Firstly, the section 903b-905d is not a mythical tale. The souls' journey through the Plain of Oblivion of the Myth of Er, the Demiurge's mixing bowl full of soul-ingredients of the *Timaeus* are mythical episodes within symbolic narratives, but the Athenian's account here contains no mythical elements, unless we want to downgrade Plato's doctrines of divine providential care and transmigration to mere metaphors. The only theme that can loosely be called mythical appears at 904 d-e, where Hades and, in a quotation from Homer, the Olympians

---

<sup>409</sup> Mayhew 2008, p. 170

<sup>410</sup> "What Plato would and would not call a *muthos* is a notoriously complex question, and one that probably cannot receive a single answer" (Betegh 2009, p. 85, n. 9). For some reflections on the issue and references to recent literature, see *supra* pp. 34ff.

are mentioned.<sup>411</sup> However, at least within the setting of the *Laws*, these are far from being only a mythical *topos* and mythical entities, while it is highly probable that Plato also personally believed in both, regardless of how he understood them. Furthermore, the grammar of the above quoted sentence, as well as its context, demands that the word *mythoi* should be taken in its primary sense, as ‘words’ or ‘speeches.’ This is so due to the following: a) the word is in plural – even if what follows were a myth, it would be a single one, not a multitude of them; b) the Athenian is talking of *mythoi* that are *epōidoi*, not vice versa. In other words, *mythoi* is the noun, *epōidoi* the modifier, and therefore “mythical incantations” is not an accurate translation. Bury’s and Saunders’ renditions are better, where substituting ‘myths’ for ‘words’ would make the sentence sound awkward; c) immediately after proposing that they need some additional words or speeches capable of charming the deist into agreement, the Athenian, in answer to Clinias’ question “which ones, my good man?”, says that they should persuade the young man by arguments, or discourses: *peithōmen ton neanian tois logois* (903b4).

Secondly, the Athenian’s speech at 903b-905d is not less ‘rational’ than the arguments that preceded it; “[t]he ‘mythic incantation’ that Plato gives is, in fact, an argument: it is an appeal to the atheist to change his mind on the basis of rational considerations.”<sup>412</sup> As England has it (in slightly vague terms), Plato actually offers not something less, but something *more* than a proof based on sound logic: “To win him thoroughly on our side we want more than argument; we must appeal to his soul as well as to his reason; we will use *epōidōi mythōi* – put the case in such a way as to *charm* him into a full agreement with us.” The ‘charming side’ of the speech is that a) it does not consist of a series of deductions, as basically did the preceding argument, but is put in a form of an enticing narrative, full of epithets and tropes; b) it directly addresses the emotions of the listener, by making appeal to his personal mental states and convictions (903c1, d1, 905c), evoking his immediate self-interest (903d1-2), issuing threats (904c10-d4, 905a), promising rewards and giving hope (904d4-e1); c) most importantly, while the previous argumentation demonstrated that the gods *could not* be neglectful in respect of human affairs and as such *would not* turn a blind eye to injustice, 903b-905d alleges to show positively that, at the contrary, and despite the appearances, they *are* very much involved and deeply interested in

---

<sup>411</sup> Hades appears once again at 905b1.

<sup>412</sup> Bobonich 1991, p. 374

securing the victory of justice. In this section, the mysterious workings of the providence are revealed.<sup>413</sup>

Yet, the crucial issue regarding the section of the *Laws* most important for Plato's theodicy is different. From the beginning of our discussion of this subject, we have made two presumptions, both expressly and silently: a) that Plato does have a theodicy, and b) that a very important part of it is contained in the *Laws* X, 903b-905d. The former should be beyond doubt by now, and to the latter we shall presently turn. As a matter of fact, Mohr is one of the rare critics I am aware of, who explicitly claims that the Athenian here unveils a theodicy: "This paper offers some general reflections on the nature of *Laws* X as a theodicy."<sup>414</sup> Nevertheless, this point seems as uncontroversial as the previous, i.e. that Plato did put in writing some of his thoughts on the defense of god's goodness in the face of evils. Close to the beginning of his argument against the deists, the Athenian states their position: you believe that the gods exist, but that they despise and neglect human affairs – *hōst' einai men dokein autous, tōn de anthrōpinōn kataphronein kai amelein pragmatōn*. This conclusion arises from a conjunction of two factors: a) want of reason, or shortsightedness (*alogia*) and b) inability to find fault with the gods (*oudynamenos dyscherainein theous*) (900a8-9).<sup>415</sup> The latter, taken on its own, is laudable and in itself a sign of good character: the deist enjoys some kinship with the divine – *syngeneia tis isōsse theia* (899d7), and owing to that kinship he is unwilling to blame the gods as the cause of badness: *memphesthai men theous hōs aitious ontas tōn toioutōn dia syngeneian ouk an ethelōn* (900a6-7). Still, through his own flawed reasoning, he has been fooled into thinking that bad people might become happy by performing evil deeds. Not wanting to make the gods responsible for this undeserved happiness and the suffering of the just by which it is being purchased, the deist concludes that the gods do not supervise human affairs.<sup>416</sup>

So, it turns out that the deist's project is also to a certain degree of theodicean character. He believes that a) the gods exist; b) that they are good; and c) he tries to explain the obvious

---

<sup>413</sup> Cf. Saunders 1973. He takes the section to be a myth, but finds it incompatible with the other Platonic eschatological myths, and writes: "[t]he prevailing tone of the myth is drily philosophical ..." (p. 233).

<sup>414</sup> Mohr 1978, p. 572. See also Taylor 1938, p. 184 and Dombrowski 2005, pp. 89ff

<sup>415</sup> For an analysis of these two factors, see Mayhew 2008, pp. 155-159

<sup>416</sup> Mayhew writes: "Deism occurs in the mind of a youth whose reason is sufficient to prevent him from believing that the gods are capable of evil (or that the gods do not exist), and yet whose reasoning is flawed enough to conclude that evil men can be happy" (*op. cit.*, p. 158).

presence of injustice and evil without having recourse to them. To Plato's mind, however, this does not absolve the gods from responsibility, but implicates them even deeper, by indirectly denying their benevolent and perfectly virtuous nature. Therefore, he has the Athenian present an alternative view on the matter, i.e. a much firmly sustained theodicy. This point, as well as the presence of the sprouts of some theodicean strategies amply employed by later philosophers and theologians, speaks loudly enough in favor of those who find that Plato offers a theodicy in the *Laws X*.

Although the explanation from freedom of choice, with which we are familiar from the Myth of Er and the *Timaeus*, figures prominently in the theodicy of the *Laws X*, the overarching approach here is rather novel. In an attempt to justify the ways of god in the face of injustice and suffering, Plato applies a strategy which will become known as the Aesthetic solution to the problem of evil. Rebuking his imaginary interlocutor for holding that god fails to perform his duty properly – in other words, allows for the presence of evil – Plato says the following:

The supervisor (*epimeloumenos*) of the universe has arranged (*syntetagma*)<sup>417</sup> everything with an eye to its preservation and excellence (*sōterian kai aretēn*), and its individual parts play appropriate active or passive roles according to their various capacities (*eis dynamin*).<sup>418</sup> These parts, down to the smallest details of their active and passive functions, have each been put under the control of rulers (*archontes*) that have achieved their goal to the utmost fraction (*eis merismon ton eschaton telos apeirgasmenoi*) (903b3-c1).

Plato here presents a unified picture of the universe and all its constituents, a picture that discloses the overall goodness and beauty of the whole, for which the apparent ugliness or badness of the minute parts is not a setback, but an enhancement. From the view point of the 'supervisor of the universe,' and, even, more importantly, from the view point of each of the conscious parts awakened to their genuine knowledge, the universe is wholly good. Those not yet awakened need to overcome their ignorance and switch the focal point from themselves to the whole.<sup>419</sup>

---

<sup>417</sup> "The *syn-* in *syntetagma* conveys the notion that all things are fitted into a consistent system" (England 1921, p. 490).

<sup>418</sup> "*eis dynamin* implies that the perfection of the system is limited by the powers of individual creatures" (*ibid.*).

<sup>419</sup> As *Tim.* 43a-44c suggests, the life of selfishness and affliction starts with the violent surge of affections that overwhelm the individual soul at its very birth. The function of the soul's reason is disrupted, and all it can think of

Now then, you stubborn man (*ō schetlie*), one such part – a mere speck that nevertheless constantly contributes to the good of the whole – is you,<sup>420</sup> you who have forgotten that nothing is created except to provide the entire universe with a life of prosperity. You forget that creation is not for your benefit: you exist for the sake of the universe (903c1-5).

Here we have an almost classical exposition of the Aesthetic solution, which affirms that “[s]een in its totality from the ultimate standpoint of the Creator, the universe is wholly good; for even the evil within it is made to contribute to the complex perfection of the whole.”<sup>421</sup> The Aesthetic theme had acquired its full form in the works of Plotinus,<sup>422</sup> before it was appropriated by Augustine, who made this theodicean strategy really well-known.<sup>423</sup> It was Plotinus who introduced the artistic analogies into the argument, to which it actually owes its name. The Aesthetic theme is nicely developed in *Ennead* III.2, with Plotinus starting off in a similar, although more complex, way as Plato did:

So from Intellect which is one (*ex henos nou*), and the formative principle that proceeds from it (*tou ap’ autou logou*), this All has arisen and separated its parts, and of necessity some became friendly and gentle, others hostile and at war, and some did harm to each other willingly, some, too, unwillingly, and some by their destruction brought about the coming into being of others, and over them all as they acted and were acted upon in these kind of ways

---

is how to avoid the unpleasant and enjoy the pleasant sensations. With the help of proper education in astronomy and philosophy, one may bring the circles of the Different and the Same in harmony with the revolutions of the heavens, and thus transcend the petty individual concerns and experience unity with the cosmos.

<sup>420</sup> Carone (2005, p.) translates: “one of these portions [which have rulers] is also yours, and, however small, tends towards the whole and always looks to it”, and holds that the human beings should be counted among the *archontes* of the previous quote (see also Carone 1994, p. 291 and England 1921, p. 491, who has *men* as the primary referent of the word *archontes*). Although this interpretation is very convenient for Carone’s general thesis that, if a soul is responsible for the evil in the universe, then it must be a human, not a cosmic soul (with which I agree), and although the grammar of the sentence at 903c1-2 allows for the foregoing rendering, the context of the passage is not in favor of it. The ‘rulers’ must be the created gods (to use a locution from the *Timaeus*), because they are said to bring to perfection (*telos*) all the constituents of the universe placed under their care, as far as that is possible. So, the *schetlios neanias* is one of those parts, not an *archōn* of some portion of the universe, because the passage does not refer to bad, but only to good rulers. See also Mayhew 2008, p. 171, as well as his, Saunders’ and Bury’s rendering of 903c1-2.

<sup>421</sup> Hick 2010, p. 82. He as well refers his readers to the *Laws* 903, “For the Platonic starting-point of this strand of thought” (*op. cit.*, p. 83).

<sup>422</sup> Prior to him, it is also brought up by Epictetus, *Discourses* I.12 (1890, p. 43) and Markus Aurelius, *Meditations* VI. 39-45 (1964, pp. 69ff). It is quite possible that they were directly inspired by Plato, because both of them in their expositions evoke and criticize ‘the deist fallacy,’ while Epictetus also confronts the outright atheist’s position, which are Plato’s second and first objective in the *Laws*, respectively.

<sup>423</sup> For St. Augustine’s utilization of the aesthetic theme in his theodicy, see Hick 2010, pp. 82ff.

they began a single melody, each of them uttering their own sounds, and the forming principle over them producing the melody and the single ordering of all together to the whole (*Enn.* II.2.2.24-31).

Later on, in the same treatise, he employs a wide variety of artistic analogies, meant to bring closer to the reader's understanding the innate harmony, the spotless beauty and the overall perfection of the whole, regardless of the seemingly faulty and blemished parts. Plotinus there uses the analogies of painting (III.2.11.9-12), theater (III.2.11.13-17), and more strikingly III.2.15.44-47), dance (III.2.17.9-12), and music (III.2.17.70-75).<sup>424</sup> The contrast between the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly present in the universe may be understood as acquiring two distinct shades: that of complementarity and of 'Heraclitean opposites.' The former relies on the truism that a certain colour, in and of itself not particularly attractive, undoubtedly adds to the beauty of the entire painting, when properly blended in by a skilful artist, or that silence, in the form of a dramatic pause, may serve as an excellent embellishment in music. The latter, on the other hand, invokes a much stronger thesis – the opposites of good and bad are so strongly intertwined, that they are viewed as a kind of *spiritus movens* of the cosmic events, not as contingent, but necessary ingredients in the universal harmony. Plato and Plotinus do not resort to the doctrine of 'Heraclitean opposites' in explaining the presence of evil. This strategy proclaims that the good and the bad are mutually dependent, in other words, it makes evil, as a logical and metaphysical counterpart of good, a necessary requisite for the latter's very existence. Plato would not allow for such an intuition.<sup>425</sup> The focus of Plato's Aesthetic solution is, therefore, placed on the complementarity thesis, or on the claim that the minute parts of the whole, i.e. the living entities, each endowed with creative capacity to a certain degree, play their appropriate role in the world-drama, under the wise supervision of god. In this way, although an isolated part might give an impression of an aberration, might seem to be inflicting or suffering pain and injustice, *sub specie dei*, each of the parts is a contributor to the goodness and the

---

<sup>424</sup> For an aesthetic analogy in Plato, involving painting a statue and with reference to the good or the beauty of the state as opposed to those of the individual, see *Rep.* 420c-d.

<sup>425</sup> But the Stoics did; according to the testimony of Gellius (*SVF*, II.1169) Chrysippus believed that goodness and badness are inseparably connected, both in logico-epistemological and in ontological sense. In the first case, he claims that the notions of justice, moderation, etc., cannot be understood without their correlative notions, i.e. their opposites. In the second, he falls back on Plato's short 'Aesopian myth' of the *Phaedo* 60a-c, where pain and pleasure are depicted as Siamese twins joined at the crowns of their heads, so that when a person obtains one of them, the other inevitably follows. Chrysippus concludes that good and evil cannot exist without each other: if one is eliminated, the other becomes eliminated as well (*si tuleris unum, abstuleris utrumque*). This is, however, a misreading of the myth. Plato's point there is not that the good cannot exist without the bad, but that in this world badness cannot be avoided (see *infra* pp. 157ff).

beauty of the whole, which, by the unifying power of its purpose, provides for a perfect blend of the sometimes discordant tones into a perfectly harmonious symphony.

Furthermore, the Athenian reminds the wayward youth that he exists for the sake of the universe, not vice versa, and that he should not expect anything for himself, but should always be ready to give his share for the overall good (903c2-4). At first, this sounds as small consolation for the suffering ones, and it remains rather unclear how this information is supposed to help. The example which the Athenian offers as an illustration of his point is not very fitting either. He speaks of craftsmen and doctors who always produce parts having in mind the good of the whole, not of the part (903c5-d1). Besides causing some strain between itself and what has been said quite recently – namely that no good doctor (or captain, general, mason) focuses only on the whole and neglects the part (902d-e) – the analogy is not really adequate. Although it is a fact that any doctor would treat a leg exclusively for the sake of the body, and not of itself, the leg is neither conscious nor aware of its separateness, which is obviously not the case with the addressee of the speech. For the same motif in Plato's political philosophy, Mayhew (2008, p. 172) rightly refers the reader to the *Republic* 420b-c, where it is said that the aim in establishing a city is not the happiness of one group, but of the whole city.<sup>426</sup> This principle is, however, to be embraced and implemented by the semi-divine guardians, who are nowhere to be found, except in the hypothetical ideal state. How could, then, the young man, whose soul is riddled with misunderstandings, be expected to find solace in it? Marcus Aurelius, in his *Meditations* VI.45, reiterates the part-for-the-whole doctrine, without much comment or explanation. Lewis, in his commentary on the *Laws* X, at first acknowledges it as “unquestionably true,” only to reveal his distaste with it, pronounce it fatalistic and non-Christian, and place his preference on the converse, “equally true” doctrine, i.e. that the whole is made for the parts<sup>427</sup> – which is something that Plato never actually said.

So, is Plato here advocating some doctrine of ‘abstract benevolence’ and complete renunciation of personal happiness for the sake of self-forgetting contemplation of the cosmic grandeur? Already the next line shows that, despite the appearance and the unhappy analogy, it is not so: “But you are irritated, not knowing that your position is best for the whole and for you as

---

<sup>426</sup> England (1921, p. 491) points out the general principle, as given in *Phil.* 54c4: “all generation taken together takes place for the sake of being as a whole.”

<sup>427</sup> Lewis 1845, pp. 286ff.

well (*agnoōn hopēi to peri se ariston tōi panti symbainei kai soi*), in virtue of the power of your common generation” (903d1-3). The ‘common generation’ here probably refers to the kinship of the individual with the cosmic soul (*Tim.* 41d). Human beings, represented by the young deist, are in general ignorant about their shared origin with the cosmic soul and consequently unaware that real happiness lies in harmonizing the motions of their souls with those of the cosmic one, which makes them think thoughts ‘immortal and divine’ (*Tim.* 90b-d). In other words, since perfect rationality is the highest good for the Universe as a living being, the same is the highest good for the individual living being as well. Often, however, it is hard to awaken to this Platonic thesis those who have their souls lulled with the feeling of false security and pleasure. With regard to that fact, being subjected to injustice or suffering should not be taken as something altogether negative – those states do not demonstrate divine neglect and are actually employed in the service of the individual’s ultimate good. The divinity is supremely benevolent and just; therefore, the misfortune of the gentle must be nothing but inevitable punishment for some mistake done in the previous life.<sup>428</sup> Such Rhadamanthine punishment purifies the soul from the unwanted effects of its previous misdeeds<sup>429</sup> and makes it wiser by administering the necessary disciplinary measures.<sup>430</sup> This is how the global organization of the cosmos is justifiable and best with a view to the suffering of the just.<sup>431</sup>

---

<sup>428</sup> See *Rep.* 612e8-613c2

<sup>429</sup> See *Rep.* 380b1-2 – “what god does is just and good, and those who are punished are benefited;” *Gorg.* 525b, where rightly inflicted punishment is said to make the curable sufferers better: “their benefit comes to them by way of pain and suffering, for there is no other possible way to get read of injustice.” The suffering of the incurable wrongdoers is also beneficial, inasmuch as it provides an example for others.

<sup>430</sup> See *Rep.* 619c-d, where those souls who are coming from the heavenly region and who have not seen and endured suffering, are depicted as prone to make much worse choices than those who have suffered punishment.

<sup>431</sup> A very interesting alternative interpretation is given by Bobonich (2002, p. 433): “[g]od aims at what is best and it is the fact that this goal is best should also be our reason for pursuing it. ... [t]he theology of Book 10 invites the citizen to see fostering virtue as sharing in god’s plan for the universe as a whole.”

### III.3 Inescapability of divine justice and personal responsibility

Furthermore, it should be known that everything will end well for them, either during this lifetime or in the afterlife, because the gods never neglect those who strive for virtue and thus make themselves as godlike as possible (*Rep.* 613a7-b1). As for the ruffians who flourish undeservedly, exactly the opposite is true (613b4). So, the organization of the cosmos is such as to provide the necessary purification and education, but also to quickly and without failure rectify the seeming injustice presently witnessed by the deist. With this last statement, an additional attempt to answer the problem of evil is introduced within the scope of the overarching Aesthetic theme of the passage, which may be tagged Justice-in-the-afterlife solution. The Athenian explicates it with the following words:

Since soul is always put together with bodies ... and undergoes all kinds of changes through itself or through another soul, no other function is left for the draught-player except to transfer the character (*ēthos*) that is becoming better to a better place, and the one becoming worse to a worse place, according to what is appropriate to each of them (*kata to prepon autōn hekaston*), such that each is allotted its proper fate (*prosēkousēs moiras*) (903d3-e1).

Here we have a confirmation of faith that everything will be well in the end, that all wrongs will be righted. It could not have been otherwise anyways, taking in consideration that the gods exist, that they are good, and that they take care of the creation, as Plato has been trying to demonstrate throughout the *Laws* X. But in this and in the following passages a description is given of how this occurs. The Athenian is assuring the deist that justice will be served, if not in this, than in the next life. The soul is always put together with different bodies because such is the nature of this world and because it constantly undergoes the cycle of transmigration. The gods position it in such a body and realm as to get its befitting lot, good and auspicious for the virtuous, the opposite for the wicked. These bodies and realms are appropriate to each of the souls because it is them who have earned their particular fates, a point on which Plato insisted in the eschatological tale of the Myth of Er and the transmigration account of the *Timaeus* 42.<sup>432</sup> So,

---

<sup>432</sup> As far as the changes of character are concerned, which are said to be either self-imposed and other-agent-produced, Mayhew (2008, p. 173.), in opposition to England (1912, p. 492), is right in holding that these refer to the changes for the better or for the worse brought about by the individual himself, and the changes brought about by his human guardians. The observation that an inapt guardian may unwittingly contribute to the corruption of the souls of those entrusted to him prompted Plato to write his long sections on education in the *Republic*, the *Laws* and elsewhere. We have already encountered his worry that bad parents and teachers can do

intermingled here with the Justice-in-the-next-life solution we have once again the well-known and closely connected ideas of inculpability of the divine and of personal responsibility for one's tribulations.

As for the first of the two ideas, from this and the following passages we learn that the distribution of justice takes place with minimal involvement of the gods, who are simply overseers and permitters; all they do is to somehow facilitate the sprouting of the individual's own *karma*-seeds, so to say.<sup>433</sup> The rewards and punishments, the promotions and demotions are all parts of a system which works almost automatically: "the process ... seems to be automatic or semi-automatic, with perhaps some remote control from a supervisor who may have done no more than construct the system in the first place, which thereafter operates by virtue of its own built-in mechanisms."<sup>434</sup> Something like that is indicated by the sentence "no other function is left for the draught-player" above, and the difficult passage 903e3-904a4, which purports to explain how the management of universal justice by the gods is 'marvelously easy.'<sup>435</sup> This gives certain air of aloofness to the gods, as somebody could possibly object that they might be just, but still hardhearted, since inflicting suffering even on the deserving is something a benevolent person shies away from. By underlying the almost spontaneous character of the trans-life motion of the soul, god is exempted from being directly implicated in the punishment of the wicked, as well as from the charge of being partial to the virtuous. Nevertheless, this does not endanger his status of benevolent caretaker of the universe, because the whole system has been set up and is being constantly supervised by him.

The second notion, namely that of personal responsibility is further emphasized a little later, when the Athenian explains that the good or bad condition of each soul depends primarily on it:

---

much harm to the souls of their protégés, as stated in the *Timaeus* 87b, and seen how the individual should still be held responsible for most of the badness it experiences.

<sup>433</sup> "At each fresh *genesis* the *petteutēs* has only to assign body to soul, and in so doing considers the inclination and character of the soul in question" (England 1912, p. 493). It seems to me that the trope 'draught-player' (*petteutēs*) is not the happiest one. A draught-player is somebody who moves pieces along the game-board, an activity which implies personal involvement and decision-making. Unlike such person, a god is led by no personal motive except for the determination to preserve justice and order.

<sup>434</sup> Saunders 1973, p. 234

<sup>435</sup> For discussions of this passage and further references, see Saunders 1973 (especially pp. 238-244) and Mayhew 2008, pp. 174-177.

But he leaves the causes for the coming to be of each particular sort of person to the willings of each of us (*tais boulēsesin hekastōn hēmōn tas aitias*).<sup>436</sup> For as one desires, and as one is with respect to soul (*hopēi gar an apithymēi kai hopoios tis ōn tēn psychēn*) so, pretty much in every case, is the sort of person each of us becomes,<sup>437</sup> for the most part (*hōs to poly*)<sup>438</sup> (904b8-c4).

The same message is reiterated at 904c6-7: “So all things that are sharing in soul change, possessing within themselves the cause of the change (*en heautois kektēmena tēn tēs metabolēs aitian*).” And again at 904d5, where the moral improvement or degradation of the soul is ascribed to its own will and the influence of social intercourse (*hautēs boulēsin te kai homilian*).<sup>439</sup> Thus the theodicy of the *Laws* X, despite the introduction of a novel outlook – which is the Aesthetic theme – is very much in conformity with the ones of the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*, where the burden of responsibility was transferred from god to the individual soul.

Before winding up his speech meant ‘to charm the young deist into agreement,’ the Athenian once again emphatically declares that it is as inevitable as anything can be that the distribution of justice and the transfer of souls to their deserved destinations will take place. If not in this life, than in the next, the vicious souls will join other vicious souls in unholy places, while the virtuous will associate with the like of them, both the former and the latter receiving appropriate treatment. This justice of the gods (*theōn dikē*) no one will ever boast of having escaped, no one will ever be neglected by it (*ou gar amelēthēsēi pote hyp’ autēs*), even if he were to sink into the depths of the earth, or to soar to the heights of heaven (90e4-905b2).<sup>440</sup> The Athenian concludes his account by saying that the young man thought he had detected

<sup>436</sup> ‘The willings,’ which are the causes of the particular good or bad condition of the soul are many, and thus the picture offered here is much more realistic and much less deterministic than the one in the Myth of Er, where a single act of choice was said to determine one’s fate.

<sup>437</sup> This sentence is supposed to supplement the previous, and clearly means that one’s character is formed in accordance with one’s desires and psychological states. So it seems that Plato uses *boulēsis* and *epithymia* almost synonymously.

<sup>438</sup> The phrase ‘for the most part’ is probably given here in order to account for the exception to the rule mentioned in fn. 432.

<sup>439</sup> The influence of social intercourse, or the instructions of the associates or teachers (*katēchēsīn tōn synontōn*), as one of the reasons for declination from *orthos logos* and thus moral degradation, is emphasized by the Stoics as well (see *DL* VII.89). The ultimate responsibility, however, is upon us, because, as creatures endowed with reason, we have the duty and privilege to judge which of the external influences are beneficial, and which are reproachable (see, e.g., *SVF* II.990). For the Stoics, moral failure ultimately arises from the wrong judgment of what is truly good.

<sup>440</sup> Lewis (1845, pp. 333f) gives a series of quotations from the Old Testament, and one from Sophocles, which reflect closely not only “this doctrine of an ever wakeful, retributive justice,” but also the exalted language that Plato uses especially at 905a4-b2.

negligence (*ameleian theōn*), only because he was unable to discern how the wicked individuals and the invisible guidance of the gods contributes to the good of the universe (*ouk eidōs autōn tēn syntelean hopēi pote tōi panti symballetai*).<sup>441</sup> But precisely how, somebody may ask, does the undeserved prosperity of the impious or the seeming misfortune of the pious and their management by the gods in this and the next life adds to the good of the universe? Plato gives an answer which is condensed and liable to various interpretations: god, our king (*hēmōn ho basileus*), is aware that all actions proceed from souls, that all souls are associated with bodies (and therefore, we may add, associated with vice as well), and that the good element in the soul is beneficial, while the bad element, or vice, is harmful (904a6-b3). “Seeing all this he designed a position for each of the parts so that virtue would be victorious in the universe, and vice defeated, in the easiest and best way” (904b3-6). So, the whole distribution of goodness and badness, reward and punishment in this and in the next life is so arranged as to proclaim the victory of virtue and justice over their opposites. Mayhew (2008, p. 179) comments: “This relocation of souls to places they deserve to be is what it is for virtue to be victorious in the universe; this is what the good of the universe consists in.” This being said, it still remains unclear how virtue becomes victorious in this way. Somebody may say that the souls thus learn that the good element (virtue) is indeed beneficial, while the bad (vice) is harmful. However, in fact most of them do not learn, unless they take Plato’s words very much to heart. Then, how do the states of those who are lousy learners enhance the beauty of the universe? Is it simply that their punishments proclaim that justice has won a victory?

I think that the answer to these doubts should be sought in leaving the realm of the individual and focusing on the broad picture. As we know from the *Timaeus*, god made this world as good as it could be. That means that there are some factors which interfere with god’s good intentions. The most prominent one is *anankē*, but she is not being discussed in the *Laws X*. Another one are the willings, or desires, of each of us, which are the causes of what we become – *tais boulēsesin hekastōn hēmōn tas aitias* (904c1-2).<sup>442</sup> So, if we have willings and desires, some

---

<sup>441</sup> With this we are back to the Aesthetic theme. Cf. 903d1-3, and *supra*, pp. 120f, where I offered one proposal of how the inauspicious position of a seemingly undeserving individual could nevertheless be useful for him and aimed at his ultimate good. Now it remains to see how the presence of badness, paradoxically, does not tarnish the goodness of the universe as a whole.

<sup>442</sup> This, however, should not deceive us into thinking that Plato at one time relegates the responsibility for badness to Necessity, at other to the souls; as it will be argued in Part II of this work, Necessity, or corporeality, is

of them will be directed towards the good, but some will unavoidably seek the reproachable. In other words, there will necessarily be both virtuous and vicious actions. The good ones and their contribution to the overall goodness are unproblematic – the gods reward them and thus proclaim the excellence of virtue. As for the vicious actions, they are not part of the divine plan, but are still here of necessity. By and of themselves they do not enhance the beauty of the creation, but as being righted through punishment, they indeed do. A world where moral failure is unavoidable, but the same is being meticulously superintended and punished, is far better than a world with sin, but no punishment. It is in this way, I think, that the allocation of the virtuous and the sinful souls to their respective places through the agency of the gods proclaims the victory of virtue over vice and contributes to the good of the whole. I also believe that a similar line of reasoning made St. Augustine, another champion of the Aesthetic theme, write the following:

In this creation, had no one sinned, the world would have been filled and beautified with natures good without exception; and though there is sin, all things are not therefore full of sin, for the great majority of the heavenly inhabitants preserve their nature's integrity. And the sinful will, though it violated the order of its own nature, did not on that account escape the laws of God, who justly orders all things for good. For as the beauty of a picture is increased by well-managed shadows, so, to the eye that has skill to discern it, the universe is beautified even by sinners, though, considered by themselves, their deformity is a sad blemish (*CG XII.23*).

---

the sole cause of evil. The souls receive badness upon themselves and become vicious only after prolonged contact with the bodily nature, and are thus only secondary causes of evil.

### III. 4 Summary and some further remarks

In the theodicy of the *Laws X* Plato remains loyal to his strategy of choice of the Myth of Er, also prominent in the *Timaeus* – god is not to be blamed for the misfortune and the injustice we all encounter in this world, because the responsibility is upon us. However, unlike in the *Republic*, and to some degree in the *Timaeus*, the theme of personal responsibility is here totally stripped off of mythical overtones, and determined through the process of character-making induced by various willings or desires. Plato in the *Laws X* also employs the theory of transmigration, and binds it strongly with what we called Justice-in-the-afterlife solution to the problem of evil: the gods are ever watchful, and will relegate each soul to its proper position in accordance with its merit, without failure. No unjust deed will remain unnoticed and unpunished. Finally, the overarching strategy of the *Laws X* is the Aesthetic solution, which proclaims that the whole is as beautiful and as perfect as it can be, while the few ugly and unbecoming parts do not blemish its beauty, but even contribute to the overall perfection. It should be noted here that Plato is not in denial when it comes to the gravity of evil. He is not trying to downplay the presence of suffering and injustice,<sup>443</sup> but only to point out their purpose, which is at least double: a) they have purifying and educational role; b) within the broad picture, they proclaim the victory of virtue over vice. It is by this role of theirs that evil and ugliness contribute to the beauty of the whole, not by simply adding a darker shade to the otherwise bright-colored picture.

Much of what was said here diverges from Mohr's treatment of the *Laws X* theodicy in his "Plato's Final Thoughts on Evil." In this paper he makes several assertions that are far from being self-evident, to put it mildly. One such claim, although of minor importance to us, is that "the *Laws*, like the *Timaeus*, interprets divinity as a demiurge (902e)."<sup>444</sup> However, there is no explicit statement of this kind in the dialogue. All that 902e does is to assure us that god (*theon*), as a supervisor, cannot be inferior to mortal craftsmen (*thnētōn dēmiourgōn phauloterōn*), some of which were mentioned in the previous passage.

---

<sup>443</sup> See *Rep.* 379c, *Th.* 176a., *Leg.* 906a

<sup>444</sup> Mohr, 1978, p. 573

Next, he writes: “Unlike the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*, however, the god of *Laws X* seems to be omnipotent.”<sup>445</sup> Since the god of the *Laws* is omnipotent, the presence of evil need not be explained as due to some recalcitrant factor like in the *Timaeus*, so Plato now propounds theodicy proper, i.e. “verges on explaining away evil.”<sup>446</sup> Let us first turn to the issue of divine omnipotence. In holding this opinion Mohr finds an ally in Taylor (1938, p. 184), who cites *Laws* 904a-b and writes: “[t]here is nowhere in the universe any independent power which can cause this divine purpose to fail of its intent.” Mohr believes that Taylor with this words aims at establishing the notion of omnipotent god. There are, however at least two points that go against the interpretation that Taylor advocates such a position: a) the ‘divine purpose’ here is limited: it is to facilitate “triumph of virtue and rout of vice throughout the whole;” b) in this section of his paper, Taylor is arguing against the ascription of the qualificative ‘polytheist’ to Plato, so his idea is not that there is no insubordinate element of some kind in the creation, but that there is no other god – maybe of evil intents – who may be seen as a competitor to ‘Our King.’

Furthermore, the passage which Mohr (p. 573) evokes as a confirmation better than Taylor’s – in fact, a decisive proof that the god of *Laws X* is omnipotent, namely 902e7-903a – says no more than that he is both willing and able to *supervise* or *superintend* the world, so that injustice will never be its permanent feature. But if this is omnipotence, then the Demiurge of the *Timaeus* is omnipotent as well, because before retiring, he entrust his emissaries with the power to rule and steer the mortal creatures in the best and most beautiful way, as far as the latter’s own wrongdoings allow them (*Tim.* 42e). Finally, it seems rather clear from 901d-e that Plato himself rejects to view god, or the gods, as omnipotent. Of the three most prominent properties of the Supreme Being, namely omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence, the first and the third are ascribed to Plato’s gods without any qualification: “the gods know and see and hear everything” (901d2-3), and “they are good – in fact, best” (901e1-2). When it comes to power, however, it is restricted to what *is possible for them to do*, very much like in the *Timaeus*: the Athenian and Clinias agree that the gods can do whatever is possible to mortals and immortals – *dynasthai panta hoposōn au dynamis estin thnētois te kai athanatois* (901d7-8). And if the divinity of the *Laws* is not omnipotent, then the theodicy of the *Laws*, although in some respects divergent from the one of the *Timaeus*, is not as radically different as Mohr would have it. In

---

<sup>445</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>446</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 572

other words, if he is not omnipotent, then Mohr is not justified in claiming that “In the *Laws* evil does not exist over and against and despite the Demiurge, but is adapted just as it is directly into his design.”<sup>447</sup> Indeed, even with god’s omnipotence granted, it still does not seem that Plato in the *Laws* X has anything like ‘explaining away evil’ on his mind.<sup>448</sup> In order to prove his case, Mohr makes two claims: A) In the *Laws* X, evil is for Plato an appearance, not as being illusion, but in the sense of belonging only to the parts and not being applicable to the universe as a whole; B) although Plato doesn’t take evil to be a necessary condition for the existence of good, he still believes that evil contributes to the overall goodness of the whole.<sup>449</sup> On the basis of these claims, Mohr concludes that “the Demiurge’s action or rather inaction with regard to small evils” – i.e. those which pertain to the parts of the whole – “is actually a choice for the best,”<sup>450</sup> which implies that “the Demiurge supposes the whole which he constructs of parts that are both good and bad is better than a whole of only good parts.”<sup>451</sup>

As far as Mohr’s claim A) is concerned, it is in one sense uncontroversial, in another not very precise. It is uncontroversial inasmuch as it represents a restatement of the Aesthetic theme, and says that the whole is beautiful despite the presence of traces of ugliness. Imprecise it is because the fact that evil belongs only to the parts does not make it an appearance proper; what Plato claims is that badness is there in the parts, but somehow turns for their best and is *thus* integrated in the goodness of the whole (903d),<sup>452</sup> a point which was discussed above. As for B), the evil’s contribution to the goodness of the whole is again made possible by its transformation through the wise management of the gods – it is utilized for educational purposes, or it somehow makes apparent the victory of virtue over vice, etc. Evil does not contribute to the perfection of the whole *qua* evil, but in a very specific fashion – as something that can be rectified through knowledge, something that can be overcome. Understood in this way, neither A) nor B) lead to Mohr’s conclusions; ‘the Demiurge’ is not inactive with regard to small evils, and badness is not adapted *directly* into his design, but only as transformed into something good. Furthermore, Plato

---

<sup>447</sup> p. 575

<sup>448</sup> He, in fact, acknowledges it very clearly. For badness on a broader level see fn. 443, for badness in soul in our passage 903d, 904b-e.

<sup>449</sup> Mohr 1978, p. 572

<sup>450</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 573

<sup>451</sup> p. 574

<sup>452</sup> Plato does not say that evil disappears by being integrated in the goodness of the whole; the whole point of the Athenian argument was that the instances of badness were not neglected by the gods.

nowhere says that god considers the whole constructed of parts both good and bad better than the one constructed only of good parts; the presence of badness is something he resents and tries to mitigate.<sup>453</sup> Evil is an unavoidable consequence of some other factors beyond his power. Directly it is caused by Necessity, while indirectly, and with limitation to the moral sphere, by the soul's capacity for free choice, distorted by the contact with corporeality. Given the actual state of affairs, a world constructed of entirely good parts is not possible. Therefore, Plato's intention in the *Laws X* is not to 'dissolve' the problem of evil. He offers a theodicy in the line with the ones of the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*, although less dependent on mythical motifs and richer for the Aesthetic theme.

---

<sup>453</sup> Therefrom the gods' participation in the *athanatos machē* for the victory of virtue, mentioned in the *Laws* 906a5.

**PART II**

**THE ORIGIN OF EVIL**

## Chapter I Traces of the Platonic Theory of Evil in the *Theaetetus*

Plato acknowledges, but does not seem overly concerned with physical evil. Moral evil he ascribes to the individual non-divine soul and insists that each one of us is responsible for the actions we perform. But this should not lead us to the conclusion that Plato somehow locates all evil in the soul; it is a fact that many souls are bad, but what remains unclear is why they are bad, or what makes the badness in soul at all possible. This is the question of the origin of evil, with which we should be dealing in this part of the thesis, starting with an analysis of an important *Theaetetus* passage. I take the inquiry into the origin of evil to be under the domain of the problem of metaphysical evil; it is a search for the ‘why’ of evil, for that phenomenon or entity which makes evil possible, an inquiry into the circumstances that make moral failure and natural evil possible. For these circumstances god is also not responsible. In Plato’s view, uninhibited by the postulate of divine omnipotence in the Christian sense, there exists a part of reality independent of god, a rival substance, so to say, which partly curtails his benevolent efforts. However, this factor should not be understood as an active force of evil, but as the primal insufficiency which transfers its imperfection to the created universe. In fact, as we saw in section three of Chapter II, Part One, this act of isolating the origin of metaphysical evil as distinct from god, may be utilized as yet another theodicean strategy.

## I.1 Setting the Scene: the *Theaetetus* Digression

The most important text for the investigation of the Platonic origin of evil are the cosmological account of the *Timaeus*, the ‘great story’ (*megas mythos*, 268d9) of the *Politicus*, as well as the *Laws* X passage on the ontological and causal priority of *psychē*, and on the allegedly bad, irrational cosmic soul operational in the cosmos (896c-898c). Still, there are several other passages pertinent to the problem, unsystematically dispersed through Plato’s numerous writings. Such a short, but rather important textual snippet is *Theaetetus* 176a-b, and especially the two sentence at 176a4-8. In this chapter I shall try to offer some reflections on the passage and clarify its purport, with the intention to emphasize its eminence in the frame of Plato’s thoughts on the origin of evil. If the following interpretation has some claim to plausibility, then we are dealing with a text which stands in a programmatic or at least anticipatory connection to the later developments on the issue.

The passage in question is to be found midway through the *Theaetetus*, in the part which Socrates himself closes by pronouncing it a digression from the main flow of the argument (177b8). The famous Digression appears in the course of Socrates’ presentation and refutation of the thesis that *Knowledge is sense perception* (151d-186e). Its immediate context is the attack on the modified *homo mensura* doctrine of Protagoras (170a-172b), more specifically the argument starting with the generally accepted premise that some men are wiser than others, at least in “[t]he matter of what is expedient because it will bring future benefits.”<sup>454</sup> The unnamed proponent of this opinion partly agrees with Protagoras and holds that, although most of the things *are* the way they seem to the individual, there are still some who require an expert’s opinion, i.e. which are objectively better known or performed by some people, whom, furthermore, the rest of the population recognizes as experts and prefers as agents in the given cases. Two pairs of judgments are being compared: those concerning sensations versus those concerning soundness of body, and those concerning values versus those concerning social wellbeing.<sup>455</sup> Thus, while the relativity of the degree of saltiness of a broth may be safely maintained, matters of health require objective opinion of an expert physician. Again, while no

---

<sup>454</sup> Guthrie 1978, p. 88

<sup>455</sup> Cf. Burnyeat 1990, p. 32; McDowell 1973, p. 172; Sedley 2004, pp.63ff

citizen (or state) is wiser than another in judgment of things commendable, just or pious, decisions concerning matters of general advantage or disadvantage for the state are readily delegated to the most capable, and the objectivity of their success or failure is easily observable.<sup>456</sup>

This is certainly not an understanding in any way appealing to Plato; he wants to maintain that the commendable, the just, the pious are absolute values. However, a discussion in the direction of establishing such a position seems to him to require “a very complex argument, arising from a smaller one” (172b9-c1), which cannot be pursued there and then. So, he uses the Digression mainly as an indirect argument against the relativity of moral values.<sup>457</sup> But there is much more to it. Perfectly Platonic consequence of the attempt to ascribe objective value to justice or piety is the stealthy introduction of the theory of Forms,<sup>458</sup> seemingly irrelevant for the dialogue’s argumentative strategy and incompatible with its aporetic end. Two other quite striking points are the brief exposition of the nature of evil (176a4-8), and the most direct formulation of Plato’s far-reaching exhortation to become like god as far as it is possible (176b1), this being the path leading to human happiness and perfection.

So, at the beginning of the Digression (172c4-176a1), Socrates pauses for a while with his evaluation and criticism of Protagoras’ ideas and makes a comparison between a philosopher devoted to intellectual pursuits, and a practical man frequenting the law-courts. The former, although socially awkward, rightly enjoys the privilege of being called a free man. He has *scholê* for pursuit of any argument he likes for as much time as he likes, and his exertions are not aimed at merely satisfying the bare necessities of life, but at investigating the things as they are, especially the lofty concepts of justice, happiness and the like. The latter, on the other hand, is well adapted to society, but has slavish mentality and misses the true purpose of human life by focusing on the petty particulars of everyday pleasure and pain. His subjects of choice are mostly discourses concerning accusation or defense of some other slave. A flatterer aiming at the pleasure of the jurymen and at the rebuttal of the opponent whose patience is very limited, he is being constantly

---

<sup>456</sup> This argument precedes the final refutation of Protagoras (177c-177d), which simply elaborates on the point already made: ‘man the measure’ doctrine cannot stand since there are people, including Protagoras himself, who sincerely believe that they know what is better for the rest of the people to do in the future.

<sup>457</sup> “Plato offers no formal refutation of these claims, but it would seem that the main point of the digression is to make it clear that he sharply disagrees”. (Bostock 1988, p. 98)

<sup>458</sup> How else should a Platonist argue that goodness, justice, piety, etc., exist by nature, and not by convention only?

pressed by time. This comparison brings to mind the contrast drawn in the *Gorgias* between the rhetor and the philosopher,<sup>459</sup> but its main purpose is to declare clearly the distinction between the objects of their interest – the philosopher’s being stable and admirable, the practical man’s transitory and useless. These, as will become obvious from the rest of the Digression, are equivalent to Plato’s two orders of reality – Being and Becoming. Theodorus the geometrician, one of Socrates’ interlocutors in the dialogue, agrees wholeheartedly with what has been said, and expresses his belief that were everyone convinced of the importance of the philosophical investigations, this world would be infested with far less evils than it presently is. On that notice, Socrates utters the sentences that are of crucial importance for us here, and to which we shall return shortly:<sup>460</sup> “But it is not possible, Theodorus, that evil should be destroyed – for there must always be something opposed to the good: nor it is possible that it should have its seat in heaven. But it must inevitably haunt human life, and prowl about this earth.”<sup>461</sup> Next we learn that the only way to shun evil is to fly away from this place to the higher region, a task which, of course, does not involve any kind of physical motion in space, but can be accomplished only by becoming as similar to god as possible: *phygē de homoiōsis theō kata to dynaton* (176b1). He being the ultimate paradigm of goodness, the task of emulating god is accomplished simply by perfecting one’s moral character. According to the very well known Socratic tenet, virtuous life is possible only for those who have acquired wisdom, and here moral perfection is exemplified through the acquisition of two of the five cardinal virtues, namely through becoming just and pious, by means of wisdom: *homōiosis de dikaikon kai hosion meta phronōseōs genesthai* (176b2-3). Plato’s motivation behind the choice of these two particular virtues is quite clear – there were already mentioned at 172a3 as examples of values that were, according to those who “don’t accept in all respect the arguments of Protagoras” (172b5), subjective and relative. Thus the rest of the Digression (176b-177c) is dedicated to drawing a clear distinction between the

---

<sup>459</sup> Socrates’ description of the philosopher’s clumsy behavior in a house of law at 174c is reminiscent of Callicles’ fair warning that if unjustly charged, Socrates would have no use of himself as a defender against the accusations (*Gorg.* 486a). It thus may serve as an allusion to his imminent end. Socrates of the *Theaetetus* is, after all, bound to the *stoa* of the King Archon, to meet Meletus’ accusation (210d).

<sup>460</sup> The very fact that Theodorus’ rather general statement receives such an energetic and specific response may be an indication of Plato’s hope that his readers’ curiosity would now be further stimulated; and that is good and desirable, because he has something very important to say, although he is saying it in only a few words. The austerity of the expression, however, must not fool us: “What is being said in a Platonic dialogue must be watched most carefully: every word counts; some casually spoken words may be more important than lengthy, elaborate statements” (Klein, 1977, p.).

<sup>461</sup> *Tht.* 176a4-8, as translated by Levett, with Burnyeat’s revision. (Burnyeat 1990, p. 304)

civic and philosophical understanding of justice,<sup>462</sup> the former depending on conventions underlying human interaction, the latter on wisdom and *mimēsis* of the perfect paradigm, divine and supremely happy. Civic justice turns out to be nothing else but ignorance and wickedness (176c6), resulting in unholy life on earth and denial of access to the pure realm after death, while philosophic justice is just the opposite, both in substance and results. Real justice is thus an absolute value after all, since it is firmly grounded on and dependent upon a divine paradigm and safeguarded by God himself, who is entity in no way whatsoever unjust: *theos oudamē oudamōs adikos* (176c1). The impression of relativity of justice “[a]rises from the narrow perspective that is enforced if one concentrates on issues of justice and injustice within the city – in the law courts, the assembly, the council.”<sup>463</sup>

---

<sup>462</sup> Piety is completely dropped out of the picture. For possible reasons, see Sedley 2004, pp. 82ff.

<sup>463</sup> Sedley 2004, p. 65

## I.2 Is Plato's theory of Forms present in the *Theaetetus*?

It is interesting to note that none of the (relatively) recent *Theaetetus* scholars with whose work I got acquainted, pays much heed to the mention of evil at 176a-b and its implications on Plato's overall view on the subject. Kennedy (1881), Taylor (1926), Cornford (1935), McDowell (1973), Bostock (1988), Burnyeat (1990), Chappell (2004) and Tschemplik (2008), in their commentaries and notes, basically pass over the passage on evil silently, or dedicate only few words to it.<sup>464</sup> That is, however, a rather easily understandable omission. All these authors were, naturally, predominantly focused on the epistemological import of the *Theaetetus*, 'What is knowledge?' being the main question of the dialogue. They do indeed treat carefully the issue of relativity of justice and the possibility of reading the theory of Forms in the Digression, but these as well are all too closely connected with the epistemological pursuit of the dialogue. If Socrates, albeit indirectly, indeed introduces the Forms in the Digression, then Cornford might have been right in claiming that the main lesson to be learned from the *Theaetetus* was that no plausible account of knowledge was possible if they were left aside.<sup>465</sup> He might, but need not have been right. Nothing, as far as I can see, precludes McDowell's supposition that if the theory of Forms is present in the Digression, its purpose could simply be to help Plato assert, contrary to the opinion of the anonymous opponents, that the moral values are firm and objective things.<sup>466</sup> That issue is, however, immaterial for our purpose. What is not immaterial is the very question

---

<sup>464</sup> One exception is Stern (2002), to some of whose comments I shall turn later. Another one is Guthrie (1978), who dedicates somewhat lengthy excursus to the problem of evil. In it, however, he does not interpret specifically the *Theaetetus* passage, but presents something like a general theory of evil and its sources that can be extracted from Plato's dialogues (p. 92ff).

<sup>465</sup> "The *Theaetetus* will formulate and examine the claim of the senses to yield knowledge. The discussion moves in the world of appearance and proves that, if we try to leave out of account the world of true being, we cannot extract knowledge from sensible experience." (Cornford 1935, p. 7). A similar opinion is summarily expressed in Cherniss 1936, pp. 449-451, and taken up by Guthrie: "The attempts to define knowledge in the main part of the dialogue are carried out by every means short of the doctrine of Forms, and end in failure. The digression assures us that the teaching of *Phaedo* and *Republic*, *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* has not been abandoned, and that the successful search for the nature of knowledge lies beyond Plato's self-imposed limitations here." (1978, p. 91). For the author of the *Didaskalikos* as the Ancient Platonist precursor of Cornford's theory, see Sedley 1996, pp. 89-93.

<sup>466</sup> See McDowell 1973, p. 177

whether the Forms are indeed present in the *Theaetetus*,<sup>467</sup> and here it deserves a digression of its own.

Some commentators are adamant in their claim that the Forms in the *Theaetetus* are conspicuous by the avoidance to be properly discussed, as well as that there are more than a few unmistakable indications of their presence. Thus Cornford, Cherniss, Hackford and Guthrie. Others, like Robinson, Cooper (1970)<sup>468</sup> and Bostock (1988)<sup>469</sup> are not in favor of that opinion. Still other scholars are not openly opposed to the idea that Plato is letting in ‘through the back door’ his theory of Forms in the dialogue,<sup>470</sup> while some are quite comfortable with it.<sup>471</sup> This is a huge and still ongoing debate which, due to limitations of space, cannot be paid due attention here. What we can do, however, is to limit our ambition to the Digression and look for textual indication or evidence for the presence of Plato’s most characteristic doctrine of the Middle period. And indeed, there are at least three passages in the Digression where language and images are used which – especially when placed against the background of their context – are highly evocative of, and probably meant to call to the reader’s mind the transcendent Forms. The first one is at 174a1, where Socrates, after explaining to Theodorus that a first-class philosopher is oblivious of the things related to the body, presents the latter’s true interest: “searching in every possible way after the total nature of each of the things that are, taken as a whole” (*pasan pantēi physin ereunōmenē tōn ontōn hekastou holou*). The key word here is, of course, *to on*, which in the Platonic corpus is more than often used to refer to being, or the entity which is *aei kata tauta on*, i.e. a Form. The next indicative passage is at 174b, where Socrates depicts the philosopher as somebody who is almost unaware whether his neighbor is a man or some other creature, but is nevertheless highly interested to discover “what in the world a man is” (*ti pot’*

---

<sup>467</sup> I am actually concerned about the presence of the Forms in the Digression only, and will disregard few other places in the *Theaetetus* where Plato could be evoking them. For a sample of the detailed discussion see Cornford 1935, Robinson 1950 and Hackforth 1957. They are, respectively, presenting an interpretation that accommodates the Forms into the *Theaetetus*, one that denies that they are mentioned or, even if so, that they serve any substantial purpose in the dialogue, and a vehement defense of the former position.

<sup>468</sup> Cooper’s article is to a significant degree reaction to Cornford’s and Cherniss’ interpretation on Plato’s rejection of the thesis that knowledge is *aisthēsis*. His criticism of the idea that the Forms are in any way invoked in *Tht.* 184b-186e is thorough and sustained. Nevertheless, he does not touch either upon the Digression or upon Socrates’ last unsuccessful attempt to define knowledge.

<sup>469</sup> Bostock understands the *Theaetetus* as taking a critical stance towards the Middle-period theory of Forms, especially towards their role as exclusive objects of cognition, and his arguments are quite compelling. However, he, like Cooper, also never engages with the Digression, which apparently has a different tone and goal from the main bulk of the dialogue.

<sup>470</sup> See e.g. McDowell 1973, pp. 176f, Burnyeat 1990, pp. 38f

<sup>471</sup> See Sedley 2004, p. 71, Tschemplik 2008, p. 143

*esti anthropos*, 174b4). This is very much remindful of the Platonic method of dialectical ascent from a sensible particular (in this case the individual human neighbor) to what-the-thing-itself-is (*auto ho esti: anthropos, agathon, kerkis, onoma*, etc.). Still, the statement most suggestive of Plato's theory of Forms at its best is to be found at 175c, where the highest philosopher is depicted during his dealings with the others, when he is giving his best to drag them out of their slavish state of worrying about mundane issues, and to engage them instead in the investigation of what justice, injustice, kingship, happiness in themselves are. Here we have almost unmistakable allusion to the Allegory of the Cave of the *Republic* VII,<sup>472</sup> complete with the missionary activities of the returnee from the spiritual journey to the Intelligible realm, and the necessary study of the eternal realities behind the particular entities and phenomena.

[w]hen, o friend, the philosopher drags someone upward, and that one is willing to drop the question 'What injustice have I done to you or you to me?' and to think about justice and injustice in themselves, what each is, and how they differ from one another and from everything else (... *eis skepsin autēs dikaiosynēs te kai adikias, ti te hekateron autoin kai ti tōn pantōn ē allēlōn diaphereton*, 175b9-175c3).

After this quick reminder of some key passages in the Digression, let us briefly examine Robinson's stance on the issue, since his is the most vocal protest against the idea that the theory of Forms plays any role in the *Theaetetus*, the Digression included.

There is some ambiguity involved in the first section of Robinson's article "Forms and Error in Plato's *Theaetetus*". It is, namely, hard to clearly isolate his claim – is he trying to demonstrate that the Forms are "inconspicuous in the *Theaetetus*", or that they "are absent from the *Theaetetus*"? The ambiguity is not only verbal, since on p. 10, while discussing Cornford's interpretation of 185a-e – where knowing things that are common to all is mentioned – he writes: "[I] think it quite possible that they are Forms." I shall nevertheless assume the latter, since that is how he is closing the section on the Forms: "This account of the reason why the Forms do not appear in the *Theaetetus*..."<sup>473</sup>

Robinson builds up his case on several assumptions, but most of those that are not concerned with the Digression itself will be omitted. We shall focus on three. Firstly, he writes

<sup>472</sup> See, e.g., Cornford 1935, p. 86; Sedley 2004, p. 73

<sup>473</sup> Robinson 1950, p. 18

that two doctrines closely associated with the theory of Forms are absent from the dialogue, “[n]amely recollection and the absolute difference of knowledge from opinion.”<sup>474</sup> But it was nobody’s claim that fully developed theory of Forms with all its auxiliaries is presented in the *Theaetetus*; the whole idea is that its inconspicuousness, combined with the occasional strong allusions to it, should help any “Platonist [to] draw the necessary inference.”<sup>475</sup> Secondly, on p. 5 he insists that “The general atmosphere of the dialogue seems unfavorable to the theory of Forms”, especially “the empiricist and subjectivist tone of the *Theaetetus*”. It is a fact that all the theories of knowledge discussed in the *Theaetetus* are either strongly subjective or empirical or both, that they involve knowing particulars, etc. But does that mean that Plato himself is holding an empiricist’s stance? Certainly not. Socrates, after all, is satisfied with none of the attempts to discover the essence of knowledge. Guthrie writes: “[a]ll empirical and subjective theories discussed are shown to fall, and the dialogue could be regarded as a demonstration of their inadequacy.”<sup>476</sup> Moreover, the spirit of the Digression is not only non-empiricist and favorable to the Forms, but even requires them strongly. Thirdly, and most importantly, Robinson writes: “[In the *Theaetetus*] There is little or no talk about two worlds”,<sup>477</sup> and:

The theory of Forms is the theory that there is a second world, of objects which, unlike the objects here, have the attributes of being perfect, unchanging, eternal, divine, etc.; and this theory is not implied by the *Theaetetus*’ description of the philosopher [in the Digression] though it is not denied either.<sup>478</sup>

It is very hard to justify these statements in the face of the evidence from the Digression. As far as the first one is concerned, there *is* actually a strong indication of the existence of two separate realms, to which objects of sensation and thought are respectively delegated: “[o]nly his body sojourns in his city, while his thought ... takes wings, as Pindar says, ‘beyond the sky, beneath the earth’, ... seeking the true nature of everything as a whole, never sinking to what lies

---

<sup>474</sup> *op.cit.*, p. 3

<sup>475</sup> Cornford 1935, p. 162. Besides, as we learn from Sedley 1996, pp. 95ff, some ancient Platonist argued that the theory of recollection was indirectly alluded to in some passages of the *Theaetetus*.

<sup>476</sup> Guthrie 1978, p. 66

<sup>477</sup> Robinson, *ibid.*

<sup>478</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 9

close at hand” (173e-174a).<sup>479</sup> Furthermore, even a negligent reader is bound to stumble upon the explicit mention of two worlds at 176a7: “This is why we should make all speed to take flight from this world to the other”. The divinity and eternity of the other realm, denied by Robinson in the second quotation above, is again strongly asserted in the Digression. Fleeing from this world is accomplished by becoming as godlike as possible, while emulating god is advised since he is never and in no way unrighteous, a state which is in stark contrast with the state of affairs in this world. Then again, there is a very clear account of bifurcation of the All, which does not leave much hope for Robinson’s purpose: we hear of two paradigms established in reality, one of divine happiness, the other of godless wretchedness.<sup>480</sup> Those who lead a life of unrighteousness will become more and more like the latter, and will be shunned from the region where there is no evil (176e-177a). The divinity of the first paradigm naturally includes the other properties that are, according to Robinson, missing here, namely perfection, eternity, etc. Its perfection is also implied by the fact that it is free from evils, while the eternity by the allusion to the process of reincarnation of the wicked in this world, which is said to continue for all time (*aei*). If existence, though in diverse forms of life, goes on uninterrupted for the wicked, how much more so is it for the righteous, inhabiting the divine realm?

Besides the strong other-worldly spirit of the above quoted passages, there are in the Digression those allusions to the Forms themselves that were already mentioned. And even if Robinson were justified in his attempt to explain away 175c, which its insistence on investigation of justice and happiness themselves, as simply Socratic “request for definition of the essence,”<sup>481</sup> which does not presuppose the theory of Forms, it is hard to see how the same

---

<sup>479</sup> Sedley (2004, p. 71) concludes his interpretation of the passage thus: “The philosopher’s flight to the heaven, his act of intellectual self-distancing from civic concerns, is for Plato his transportation from sensible to intelligible world, where the truly non-relativized paradigm of justice, and the other Forms, are to be found.”

<sup>480</sup> By ‘the All’ here I mean *to holon*, all there is, including both the transcendent world and the world of becoming. The two patterns would then be reminiscent of the two possible models that any craftsman may use, spoken of in the *Timaeus* 28a6-b4 – the unchanging and the generated one. This understanding involves a very loose sense of *tôî onti* – reality as including both Being and Becoming, since the latter is not mere illusion. Admittedly, making up one’s mind on the question what these paradigms actually are is not an easy task. ‘Reality’ could be taken to refer to the realm of Forms, while the patterns would be e.g. the Form of Virtue and the Form of Vice. Presently it is not possible to discuss the unresolved issue whether Plato admits into his ontology Forms corresponding to bad things (e.g. Cherniss (1954, p. 27) is adamant that he does, Guthrie (1970, p. 97ff) sits on the fence). Third option is that the paradigm ‘of divine happiness’ represents God: “The wording, taken in context, makes it virtually explicit that the good paradigm that we are urged to imitate is, once again, god” (Sedley 2004, p. 78f). Nevertheless, regardless of which interpretation is assumed, it remains undisputable that Plato here, against Robinson’s contention, draws clear distinction between a province divine, eternal, etc., and its opposite.

<sup>481</sup> Robinson, *ibid.*

strategy could be applied to 174b3-5. Therein, as already said, describing the ‘leader in philosophy’, Socrates says that “he spends all his pains on the question, what man is, and what powers and properties distinguish such nature from any other.” Considering that the prime Socratic objects of investigation were the ethical and aesthetic concepts, like virtue, pleasure, beauty, etc., inquiry into the nature, properties and differentia of man seems quite Platonic and hence might have firm foundation in the theory of Forms. Therefore, I believe it is safe to conclude that, for one reason or another, the most eminent Platonic doctrine finds its place in the *Theaetetus*.

### I.3 Evil in the *Theaetetus* 176a

After this necessary excursus from our main topic, it is now time to go back to the *Theaetetus* 176a-b and the seeming opposition of *to agathon* and *ta kaka* mention there. It is plain that, although this passage is somewhat neglected by many scholars, it shouldn't be overlooked by those who are trying to understand Plato's stance on the origin of evil. Despite its brevity, the passage seems to contain some valuable insights into the issue, possibly developed by Plato in the later dialogues in some more detail. Plotinus, for example, is probably the first interpreter of Plato who clearly acknowledged the importance of the passage on evil, by referring to it rather often. He starts *Ennead* I.2, entitled "On Virtue", by quoting a part of this passage,<sup>482</sup> and comments on it in *Ennead* I.8.6, which is rather apposite, since treatise I.8. is entitled "On What Are and Whence Come Evils." He brings it up once again in "On Providence I" (III.2.5 and III.2.), where his final word on theodicy is given. It is thus clear that those few sentences from the *Theaetetus* are one of the most prominent threads woven into the fabric of his own theory of evil. That is quite natural, considering that both Plotinus' philosophy in general and his thoughts on evil in particular bear a strong soteriological mark, and that the part of the *Theaetetus* under discussion is strongly coloured by other-worldliness.

What could, then, be the import of the passage on evil as presented by Plato in the *Theaetetus*? Philosophically, it could be analyzed as being constituted of two parts. The first one states that the evils cannot be eradicated (176a4-5): *alla out' apolesthai ta kaka dynaton*,<sup>483</sup> and gives the reason why it is so (176a5-6): *hypenantion gar ti tōi agathōi aei einai anankē*.<sup>484</sup> The second ascribes a particular location to the evils, calls attention to their inevitability, and possibly their origin as well (176a6-8): *out' en theois auta hidrysthai, tēn de thnētēn physin kai tonde ton topon peripolei ex anankēs*.<sup>485</sup>

---

<sup>482</sup> "Since the evils are here and prowl about this place as a matter of necessity, and (since) the soul desires to escape the evils, it must flee from here" (*Enn.* I.2.1.1). Plotinus goes on, following the text of the *Theaetetus*, to identify the escape with becoming similar to god, and becoming similar to god with becoming perfectly virtuous. The interesting move is his claim that the god in question is the World Soul (see *ibid*).

<sup>483</sup> "But it is not possible that the evils should be destroyed."

<sup>484</sup> "For it is necessary that the Good always has some opposite."

<sup>485</sup> "Nor it is possible that they are situated among the gods, but they prowl about the mortal nature and this place as a matter of necessity."

### I.3.1 The status of *to agathon* in 176a6

Point of primary importance with regard to what was called the first part of our passage is that by the mention of *to agathon*, Plato does not want to refer to any particular good, but to the Good itself. This is, of course, just an assumption, but I can try to offer several reasons for being of such opinion, listed in increasing order of substantiality.

A) In the *Theaetetus* there is a single mention (and that one in the center of the dialogue) of the good with a definite article and in the singular, which is, since the *Republic*, a standard Platonic locution for the highest reality. This certainly does not prove anything, but is highly reminiscent of the singularity and centrality of the Form of the Good in Plato's philosophy.

B) One undisputable purpose of the Digression is to draw a contrast between civic, i.e. apparent, and true or philosophic virtue. Plato holds that not only the common so-called boons of aristocratic lineage and wealth, but even the highly commendable qualities like being pious or courageous, when used unwisely, cease to be good. Hence, the vital element of philosophic virtue is knowledge.<sup>486</sup> Knowledge, on the other hand, is primarily of the Forms, while all of them owe both their being and knowledgeability to the Good. Virtue, thus, ultimately depends on the Good. And vice, if opposite of virtue, has to depend on something that stands as the Good's opposite. In 176a4-6 all of them – the good, its opposite and the evils are referred to, though none of them is clearly identified as a particular something.

Now, the entire spirit of the Digression, the reminiscence of the *Republic* VII allegory of the Cave<sup>487</sup> and Socrates' advice that those who desire to escape from the evils should try to emulate god, all point out to transfer from a lower to a higher plane of existence. The higher plane, although almost unmistakably identifiable with the world of Forms, in the Digression is outwardly represented by god, whom the humanity is invited to imitate. Those who do so, choose the higher realm as their abode, both in this life and in the next. God, being supremely just and devoid of any wrongdoing whatsoever (176b8), can easily be equated with Justice itself, as

---

<sup>486</sup> Socrates famously believed that all virtue is knowledge (as argued in the *Laches* and *Protagoras*), and Plato never really disassociated himself from his master's stance on the issue. An echo of this understanding in the *Theaetetus* Digression is found in Plato's exhortation to become as similar to God as possible. That aim is achieved by becoming just and pious, *through wisdom*.

<sup>487</sup> As already mentioned, it appears at 175c, where Socrates is painting a picture of the philosopher as someone who drags his fellow citizens upwards, by inspiring them to give up enquiry into particular cases of justice or injustice, and investigate what justice and injustice truly are.

Sedley claims: “In the *Theaetetus* Digression Socrates’ god represents a justice ... free from all relativities.”<sup>488</sup> He, however, could represent the whole array of moral Forms as well, since one becomes like god when not only just, but also pious and wise (*Tht.* 176b2-3). Next, it is easily conceivable that such a concept as the Socratic god would also stand for the good paradigm spoken of little later (176e).<sup>489</sup> So, if god is the good paradigm and he stands for the Forms, why wouldn’t he stand for the Good itself as well?

It seems that we are offered two options: one is to look upon the bad paradigm, the other upon the good one. By following the former a person becomes associated with badness and evil. By embracing the latter, he or she can become as godlike as possible; that achievement means acquiring virtue; virtue depends on knowledge, knowledge is of the Forms, their knowledgeability is due to the Good. Is, then, unconceivable that in a text where such lofty concepts are implicitly applied the opposite of the basis to which badness and evils are attached is something more than some ordinary good? In other words, is it unconceivable that *to agathon* from 176a4-6 represents the Good itself?

C) In a similar vein, I believe that a reader who carefully takes into account the broader context of the Digression, as well as the foregoing attempt to show that Plato’s theory of Forms is at least implicit in it, would agree that the conclusion of the latter shouldn’t be taken lightly. And if the Forms are indeed there in the Digression, it is a small wonder that in its most remarkable passage, where Socrates is talking of the good and the evil, of god and salvation, Plato’s highest principle would also be evoked.

D) Finally, has not Plato had in mind the Good while writing 176a-b, it would be hard to determine what he was referring to. Some particular good, like pleasure or virtue? But that is not possible. For one thing, were that the case, Plato should have used plural number of the noun (*tagatha*), its counterpart being in plural as well (*ta kaka*). For another, Plato never considers any particular ‘good’ to be a proper good at all; pleasure had been dismissed as such already in, e.g. the *Euthydemus* and the *Gorgias*. Furthermore, since the philosopher of the Digression has been depicted as someone who soars high with his interests, ‘seeking after the total nature of each of the things that are’ (174a1), it would be absurd to assume that *to agathon* here designates

---

<sup>488</sup> Sedley 2004, p. 78. For corroboration of the claim of correspondence between Socratic god and Platonic Forms, see pp. 77-79.

<sup>489</sup> Sedley is rather explicit on this point: “The wording, taken in context, makes it virtually explicit that the good paradigm which we are urged to imitate is, once again, god” (op. cit. p. 79)

material gain or some civic virtue. Could it, however, refer to ‘philosophic virtue,’ or to virtue as absolute value? This proposal seems to be in tune with the overall tone of the Digression, where philosopher’s virtues, like justice and piety, stand in stark contrast to those of a rhetor absorbed in legal practice. That would, however, again lead us to the Forms: “True justice is to be found only after an intellectual ascent to the intelligible world outside the cave.<sup>490</sup> For Plato true justice is a Form...”<sup>491</sup> Now, once we find ourselves in the transcendent realm, it is quite natural to suppose that Plato would bring into the picture the one Form on which all the rest depend – which he actually does by writing down its name. Even if it weren’t explicitly mentioned, at least since the *Republic* it is known that any Form, including the moral ones like Justice, is “[i]tself fully understandable only in the light of a yet higher entity, the Form of the Good ...”<sup>492</sup> Therefore, the assumption that the thing in question here is the Good itself can be all but unreasonable and unacceptable.

### I.3.2 The status of the *hypothesis* in 176a5

The next thing to be noted in the first part of the passage under scrutiny is Plato’s claim that the Good always has some opposite, and has it in a specific way, namely necessarily (*anankē*). But what does Plato mean by this opposition? Certainly not that human experience must include both the good and the bad, both joys and sorrows, both pleasures and pains. First, because I already tried to argue that Plato’s use of *to agathon* has deeper purport, and second, because such a statement would be rather trivial. Nor is he claiming that wherever there is virtue, there has to be vice. That statement, within the confines of Platonic philosophy, would simply be false. As Plotinus points out, there is an escape from the evils of the soul,<sup>493</sup> and his opinion is clearly traceable back to Plato’s writings, like, e.g., the creation story of the *Timaeus*, and thus easily confirmable as Platonic. It is not only that death, vice and other evils do not abide among the celestial gods,<sup>494</sup> but even the souls of the mortals are eligible for full redemption and re-

<sup>490</sup> The cave in question is, of course, Plato’s cave from the *Republic* VII.

<sup>491</sup> Sedley 2004, p. 76

<sup>492</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>493</sup> *Enn.* I.8.5.30

<sup>494</sup> The Demiurge, intent on the task to produce the four orders of creatures, first created the celestial gods and made them ‘living beings divine and eternal.’ See *Tim.* 40a-b, 41a-b

appropriation of their constitutional state of purity.<sup>495</sup> It can be also deduced from the *Theaetetus* itself that those who are true philosophers and look upon the divine paradigm live lives free of vice, and consequently, free of evil. This means that existence of virtue does not necessitate the presence of virtue's opposite, i.e. vice. Therefore, my assumption is that the opposite Plato is talking about has to be some kind of principle, taking in consideration the earlier claim that the Good was a principle, and Plato's statement that it has an opposite. The discussion of *what kind* of principle it is has to be postponed for another occasion. In what immediately follows, only a few hints will be given. At present, Plato leaves the issue open by not disclosing anything about the nature and the properties of that opposite, except for qualifying it adjectively with the indefinite pronoun (*ti*), meaning that it is a 'something.' Two points, however, have to be mentioned – the first one substantial, the other quasi-etymological.

a) The opposite (*hupenantion ti*) spoken of here is different from the evils described as indestructible. These, as it is obvious from the use of the plural (*ta kaka*), are some individual evils, and cannot be the proper opposite of *to agathon* Plato is referring to. This would be so regardless of whether *to agathon* is understood as *some good*, or *the Good*. In the first case, the evils cannot play the role of opposite of the good because they are many, while one single thing can have one opposite only, as already argued in *Protagoras* 322a-333b. In the second, because Plato seems to equate those evils with the opposites of justice, piety and wisdom (*Tht.* 176b1-3),<sup>496</sup> as aptly noted by Plotinus as well: *ta kaka autōi he kakia kai hosa ek kakias*.<sup>497</sup> Since the evils, which are moral insufficiencies, already have their appropriate opposites, i.e. the virtues, and since those opposites are not, as argued above, what Plato is trying to convey by his use of *to agathon*, the latter's opposite should be searched somewhere else.

---

<sup>495</sup> Even the souls which were deeply implicated in matter can rise above the cycle of repeated incarnation and be reinstated to their original position, provided in this life they manage to align the revolutions of their own circles with those of the circles of the Cosmic Soul. See *Tim.* 42c-d

<sup>496</sup> Evil is haunting mortal nature of necessity; "that is why one should try to flee from here to there as fastest as one can. Now flight means to become as similar to god as possible, while similarity is achieved by becoming just and pious, through wisdom" (*Tht.* 176a8-b2). This is the famous 'becoming like god' dictum. The purpose of becoming similar to god is to escape from the individual evils that infest our world, while the means is a life of justice and piety. These, however, are not just any kind of justice and piety – Euthyphro, for example, considered himself a pious person, although it turned out that he didn't even know what piety was – but justice and piety guided by wisdom. Since the escape is accomplished by becoming virtuous, it seems reasonable to assume that what is to be escaped from, the evils, are human wickedness, i.e. injustice, impiety, ignorance and the rest. That is actually explicitly stated a bit later on, when the account of the two paradigms is introduced (176e3-177a3).

<sup>497</sup> "For him, the evils are wickedness and those things that arise from wickedness" (*Enn.*1.8.6.13).

b) Plato's choice of the Greek term that we usually translate with the English word 'opposite' or 'contrary' seems to be deliberate and significant. He is not using the much more customary *enantion*, but combines it with the preposition *hypo*, in order to get *hypoenantion*. This compounded word, in the given context, could denote a notion of contrariety in which one member of the pair subsists on a lower level than the other, an opposite which is somehow subordinate or inferior. And indeed, while the opposites of warm and cold or pleasure and pain share equal ontological status, the same cannot be said of the Good and its opposite. The former is source of being and knowledgeability of the eternal Realities (*Rep.* 509b), while all that one can say about the latter is that it is coeternal with the Good (*hypoenantion tōi agathōi aei einai*), and that it has to lag far behind it in respect of its ontological weight. Weren't it so, Plato would be turned into some kind of Manichean dualist, a position for which there is not a trace of indication neither in the dialogues, nor in the reports of the unwritten teachings.

### **I.3.3 The status of *ta kaka* and their relation to the *hypoenantion***

At this point it is not immaterial to note that in the above quoted Levett-Burnyeat translation of the passage singular is used for *ta kaka*. The English sentence thus construed is bound to give the wrong impression that the evils and the opposite of the Good are one and the same thing. The same mistake is committed by Kennedy, but not by Cornford, McDowell, Chappell and Sedley, although they also seem to accept as true what I believe to be a 'wrong impression'. In Chappell's translation, the passage runs as follows: "But it is not possible for evils to be destroyed, Theodorus. There always has to be something opposite to the good." I am singling him out, because he adds a footnote to his translation: "Even Plato nods; this feeble untruism is unworthy of him. It is true that the *concept* of evil must always have content so long as the concept of good has. It does not follow that evil must actually *exist* so long as good does."<sup>498</sup> Had Plato really intended to say what Chappell in the last sentence claims he did, he would be guilty not only of untruism, but of inconsistency as well. An attempt was made earlier to show that Plato couldn't have thought what Chappell imputes to him, since that would contradict some of his emphatic claims elsewhere. Therefore, I believe that Plato's claim needn't be read as a lapse if one accepts the interpretation submitted in this text, according to which Plato

---

<sup>498</sup> Chappell 2004, p. 125

intends to impress upon his readers a metaphysical claim, which is that the Good as a principle necessarily has an opposite. He is *not* talking of any kind of relation between some particular good and evil, which would, besides everything else, be totally out of the context of the Digression.

Stern, who also holds that the evils are identical with the opposite Plato is bringing up in the passage, comments more extensively on the point, and takes the matter the furthest. He writes:

[E]vils cannot perish because there must always be something contrary to the good. If this is the case, then the existence of that which is good in itself must be dubious: that which is good is so only in relation to something else, specifically, in relation to evil. Without evil, good does not exist. But why must good exist only in relation to evil?<sup>499</sup>

Is Stern justified in raising this objection to the nature and the implications of Plato's contrariety? From a doctrinal point of view, not many people acquainted with Plato's philosophy would accuse him of actually upholding such an outrageous outlook. Stern takes the opposites Plato is talking about in the sense of strongly relative terms or entities, whose description does not only imply a relation to one another, but are also defined as relative, and cannot even exist independently of their respective correlative. This understanding could probably be applied with some claim to plausibility to Heraclitus' opposites. He is a philosopher who seems to be an adherent of unmitigated relativism on the matter of both perception and value-judgments. For him not only "the way up and the way down are one and the same" (DK B60), and "the sea is water purest and most impure" (DK B61), but even, according to Hippolytus' comment on B58, the good and the bad are one. Although Heraclitus, at least in the case of value-judgments, is taking a God's eye view,<sup>500</sup> his opposites are still highly inter-dependent, incomplete and insignificant without each other. "Members of pairs of correlatives, such as good and evil, or sickness and health, or justice and injustice, have significance only in relation to their opposites."<sup>501</sup> For Plato no such strong relativity is included in the concepts of the opposites, especially not so in the case of the positive values. While their imperfect instantiations on the

---

<sup>499</sup> Stern 2002, p. 283

<sup>500</sup> "To God, everything is beautiful, good and just, while people take some things to be unjust, some just" (DK B102).

<sup>501</sup> Green 1936, p. 101

material plain of course do have opposites, from the absolute perspective, as Forms, they are both independent and transcendent, while badness and worthlessness seem to be reduced to just various degrees of insufficiencies, having their cause in the primary insufficiency,<sup>502</sup> to which some attention will be given later. As a matter of fact, Plato does make use of the notion of strongly inter-dependent opposites, in one of the crucial passages of the *Phaedo*, namely in his first proof of the immortality of the soul (70c-72d). But that is an argument concerned with the phenomenon of change, does not include any value-concepts, and is moreover flawed in many ways. Plato's employment of the Cyclical argument gives no justification for Stern's objection that good cannot exist without evil, if the latter has to be a contrary to the former. Plato never claims that beauty cannot exist without ugliness, or life cannot exist without death. However, his objection could be used as a *reductio ad absurdum* argument against the position that appears to be generally accepted, and according to which the *hypenantion* of *to agathon* are *ta kaka*. Were it so, the road for Stern's challenge would be wide open. Yet, it is highly improbable that Plato would commit such a grave mistake as to bring in question 'the existence of that which is good', and make it good 'only in relation to evil'. It is especially dubious that such a slip could be made in a piece of writing where Plato is obviously advocating the superiority of some higher-rate goods, as opposed to the apparent goods, accepted as valuable only by the commoners. Therefore, it is much more plausible to suppose that the error is Stern's: that which is opposed to the Good are not the individual evils (*ta kaka*). They are just symptoms of the opposite, a confirmation that it must exist. The nature of the *hypenantion* is not disclosed yet, and will not be openly disclosed in this work.

### **I.3.4 The status of *anankē* in 176a6 and its relation to the *hypenantion***

In the two clauses on evil, Plato uses the word 'necessity' (*anankē*) twice. In its first appearance *anankē* adverbially modifies the clause 'there is always some opposite to the Good',<sup>503</sup> and turns it into a modal proposition. I hold that the reader is presented with a statement of *de re* modality, an assertion that the Good necessarily has the property of having an

<sup>502</sup> "[B]adness in all its varieties may prove to be definable merely in terms of deviation from the relevant good ideal – unlike a symmetrically related pair such as large-small or odd-even, each of which has its own intrinsic nature and is therefore not adequately definable in terms of its opposite's absence" (Sedley 2004, p.78, fn. 120).

<sup>503</sup> More precisely, it modifies the nominal predicate *hypenantion einai*.

opposite.<sup>504</sup> It is a strong assertion of metaphysical necessity: *the object in question* couldn't conceivably have lacked *the property in question*.<sup>505</sup> Another way to put it would be that there is no possible world in which the Good does not have an opposite, both of them, as it was argued, being principles.

The question that naturally imposes itself on a mindful reader is whether Plato's position is justifiable in the face of Aristotle's adamant claim in the *Categories* that there can be no opposite, or contrary, to substance,<sup>506</sup> granted that the Good is substance or even something above substance. Besides the question whether the Good can have an opposite at all, it is *a fortiori* dubitable why should it be having that opposite necessarily.<sup>507</sup> To these questions only highly tentative answers can be offered. As for the first one, Plotinus attempts to deal with it by amending what Aristotle offers as a definition of contraries or opposites: "things within the same genus, that are set furthest apart from each other" (*Cat.* 6a17-18).<sup>508</sup> He certainly acknowledges that Aristotle's definition is applicable to most of the pairs of opposites, which do belong to the same species or genus, like white and black, justice and injustice, pleasure and pain. Still, those that are to be considered opposites *par excellence* (*malista an eiē enantia*) are definable as simply "things furthest away from each other" (*Enn.* I.8.6.41-42),<sup>509</sup> without belonging to the same genus. Such are the contraries of the Good and its opposite. Plotinus' reasoning could be something like the following. The fact that the Good exists is taken as an axiomatic truth, while the presence of various goods things, like reason, soul, life, virtues, etc., is rather obvious. Everything good and noble has its origin in the Good and depends on it for its subsistence. However, it is equally obvious that there are bad things as well: passion, body, death, vice, etc. They have to have their origin either in something, or in nothing. But nothing comes from nothing, so they have to originate in something. Since that entity cannot be the Good, it has to be something else. Moreover, since the Good fathers goodness and excellence, that other something,

---

<sup>504</sup> That is to say that the modal operator does not range over the *dictum*, or the proposition as a whole, but over the *res*, or the thing the proposition is about. In other words, the claim is not that the proposition is necessarily true, but that a certain something necessarily possesses a certain property.

<sup>505</sup> See Plantinga 1969, p. 236

<sup>506</sup> "It is also characteristic of substances that none of them has an opposite. For, what would be a contrary to primary substance? Just as nothing is contrary to a particular man, neither man nor animal can have any contrary." (*Cat.* 3b24-27)

<sup>507</sup> "But how can anything be an opposite to this Good? For it is not a quality. Then, what absolute necessity is there that if one of the opposites exists, the other must exist as well?" (*Enn.* I.8.6. 21-23)

<sup>508</sup> *ta gar pleiston allēlōn diestēkota tōn en tōi autōi genei enantia horizontali.* See O'Brien 2006, p. 175

<sup>509</sup> *ta pleiston allēlōn apestēkota.*

being the originator of badness and depravity, cannot have anything in common with the Good, and has to be at the furthest remove from it. So, if the origin of good things and the origin of bad things do not belong to the same genus and are furthest away from each other, then they fit Plotinus' definition of opposites. Therefore, the Good does have an opposite.<sup>510</sup> The line of this argument seems straight and unproblematic.

The question why the Good must necessarily have an opposite is even more puzzling, since the modal operator seems to impose some kind of restrictive boundary on the Good's absolute independence, which shouldn't be put in doubt. At this point, it is rather difficult to decide on the question, but what seems certain is that the necessity spoken of here refers to the relation of the worlds of Being and Becoming. In order for the creation to unfold at all, it needs to be inferior to the uncreated realm. Otherwise, it would not be a creation, but an exact replica of the world of Being. But that is meaningless, since the latter already exists and has been existing since eternity. And in order for it to be inferior, it ought to owe its inferiority to something. The cause of that inferiority, without which the created cosmos simply wouldn't be there, is not disclosed until the *Timaeus*. The cosmos is a place of tension and shortcomings exactly because it is composed of contrary principles: "For mixed indeed was the generation of this cosmos, brought into being by combination of Reason and Necessity" (*Tim.* 48a1). I believe that the second principle spoken of in the *Timaeus* is identical with the opposite of the Good in the *Theaetetus* Digression. The discussion of the nature and the causal powers of this principle has to be postponed for later. For the time being, it is enough to reiterate that it could be identified with the *hypenantion* of the *Theaetetus* Digression, which represents the 'lowest point' of the world of Becoming, and is thus the opposite of the uppermost entity in the world of Being, i.e. the Good. It is also one of the two causes of the created cosmos, and in this way a necessary opposite of the Good, granted that the creation was prompted by the intrinsic nature of the higher reality.<sup>511</sup> In sum, since the world of Becoming was unfolded by necessity, and had to be made inferior to the world of Being, there necessarily had to be a cause of that inferiority as well. Thus

---

<sup>510</sup> To illustrate his point that even ordinary substances *could* be opposites, Plotinus gives a counterfactual example: if fire and water were not adhering in a common substrate, i.e. matter, but were independently constituted of the pairs hot-dry and wet-cold, they would be opposites, in the same way as the qualities that presently occur in them are.

<sup>511</sup> In the mythical language of the *Timaeus*, the sole reason for the unfolding of the visible cosmos was the Demiurge's goodness, which propelled him to organize the things in the best possible way (see 29e-30a).

the First and the Last are opposites, and furthermore necessarily so.<sup>512</sup> Now it is also clear why it is not possible that the evils should be destroyed. "Some things are less than others in comparison with the nature of good" (*Enn.* III.2.5.30), and the further they go, the lesser is their share in the good. At the bottom of the ontological ladder there is the *hypenantion*, which is furthest away from the 'nature of good'. It is thus ultimate depravation, and since many things partially receive their nature from this entity, they cannot but appropriate its depravity and imperfection, and are therefore *perceived* as evil. Despite that, this cosmos is 'the most beautiful of things born', as Plato's Timaeus is unambiguously declaring in *Tim.* 29a6. At the very end of the dialogue Timaeus repeats what he had said at the very beginning of his discourse, being even more resolute:

Having received all mortal and immortal living beings and having been filled with them, this cosmos has become visible living being embracing all visible entities, an image of the intelligible,<sup>513</sup> a visible god, greatest and most excellent, most beautiful and perfect, this Heaven single and only-begotten (*Tim.* 92c).

It seems that by this Plato is claiming that whatever is, is as it should be. Even badness, of necessity present in the world, somehow contributes to the overall beauty and perfection of the whole. Mortality itself is given its proper place in the grand picture, and is not something that Plato shuns away from as incompatible with the goodness of the creator and the beauty of the creation. Since the cosmos is made on the likeness of the most perfect model, the intelligible Living Being (30c-d), in order to be perfect and complete it has to contain all the orders of entities present in the paradigm (41b-c). However, these entities, being reflections of the eternal beings present in the paradigm, have to be lesser than the latter, and thereof their ephemerality. Archer-Hind writes: "The scheme of existence involves a material counterpart of the ideal world. To materiality belongs becoming and perishing: accordingly *aisthēta zōia*, the copies of *noēta zōia*, must, so far as material, be mortal."<sup>514</sup> Even the celestial gods are not immortal *per se*, although they are granted assurance of indissolubility by their creator (41a). The *hypenantion* of

<sup>512</sup> *ex anankē de einai to meta to proton, hōste kai to eschaton* – "As that which come after the first has to necessarily exists, so must the last" (*Enn.* I.8.7.21-22).

<sup>513</sup> Archer-Hind is virtually alone among the moderns in adopting the reading *eikōn tou poiētou* instead of *eikōn tou noētou*. For his arguments and counter-arguments see Archer-Hind 1888 pp. 344f, and Taylor 1928 pp. 646ff respectively.

<sup>514</sup> Archer-Hind 1888, p. 140

the *Theaetetus* Digression is a brute fact that cannot be circumvented. Furthermore, the thought that the world is made up of opposites is as old as Greek philosophy is. For Plato, the basic opposition is the one pointed out in the *Theaetetus*: *to agathon* and its *hypoantion*. Taylor adds that, in order to be perfect, the world has to contain all the pairs of opposites; mortality-immortality is just such a pair, moreover a very prominent one,<sup>515</sup> and hence the unblemished role of mortality in the cosmic drama. Therefore, the opposite of the Good is no positive Evil; it is a limiting factor, principle of imperfection that makes the world of Becoming what it is.

In the light of everything that was said, it seems reasonable to assert that in the first clause on evil in the Digression (*alla out' apolesthai ta kaka dynaton – hypoantion gar ti toi agathoi aei einai ananke*), Plato is discussing the origin of evil in its metaphysical aspect.

### **1.3.5 'Mortal nature' and the evils**

The second part of the passage on evil, namely: “Nor is it possible that they [the evils] are situated among the gods, but they prowl about the mortal nature and this place as a matter of necessity,” is rather straightforward. Plato’s claim that the evils do not abide among the gods does not require much comment. His theology, although at its face value contains many elements of the traditional religion, is nevertheless thoroughly reformed. By the end of book II and the beginning of book III of the *Republic*, as well as in the *Laws* 899d-907b he argues for the absolute purity and goodness of the gods, while in the Demiurge’s address to the gods (*Tim.* 41b-d) their immunity to death and injury is proclaimed. Thus, they will live forever beyond the reach of moral and physical evils.

‘The mortal nature’ spoken of here asks for some more attention. In this respect the above quoted Levett-Burnyett translation again goes somewhat off the mark: Plato is not talking of ‘human nature’, but of mortal nature. Kennedy, Cornford, McDowell have ‘our mortal nature’, which could also be misleading, since we conventionally count ourselves among human beings. Chappell is close to the original, with ‘this mortal nature’, although the demonstrative pronoun is absent from the Greek text. Sedley is most accurate, with the plain ‘mortal nature’. Stern dedicates few paragraphs to the passage on evil, and specifically comments on the phrase we are interested in this section. He, perhaps to a certain degree justifiably, points out that the evils

---

<sup>515</sup> Taylor 1928 p. 253

attached to the mortal nature represent the ungodly finitude and imperfection, of which death is the most ominous sign.<sup>516</sup> Then he goes on to say: “All living things are mortal and thus needy. But in associating the notions of good and evil with this neediness Socrates and his interlocutors have in mind specifically *human neediness*.”<sup>517</sup> He supports his last point by two textual references: 176a4, where Theodorus expresses his hope that if more people were receptive to the Socratic ideals, there would be much less evils *among humans*; 176a8-b2, where the advice to become as similar to God as possible by perfecting oneself morally is obviously applicable to human beings alone. Stern thus advances two closely connected claims, namely a) The evils Socrates is talking about stand for neediness or lack of self-sufficiency, most fully exemplified in mortality; and b) Socrates and his interlocutors are exclusively interested in human neediness. This claims call for a short comment.

First, although finitude, imperfection and suffering are by no means excluded from the extension of the term *ta kaka*, Socrates in the *Theaetetus* seems to primarily direct the readers’ attention to some other kind of badness. Wisdom, justice and piety are among the key words in the Digression, and the divergent understanding and application of these concepts is what makes the difference between the philosopher and the rhetor frequenting the courts of law. Those who stick to the mundane or civic variants of the above are not able to investigate Justice itself (175c3), nor become as just as possible (176c2), and thus sink into worthlessness and unmanliness (*oudenia te kai anandria*) (176c3), being overpowered by ignorance and wickedness (*amathia kai kakia*) (176c4). These unfortunate men and women are obviously the same persons who, turning themselves to the supremely unhappy pattern, remain confined to the place which is infested with evils (176e-177a). It seems that the evil which human beings experience is to a high degree based on moral imperfection, whose root, on the other hand, is lack of wisdom, i.e. ignorance. One of the lessons of the Digression is that by perfecting oneself morally through wisdom, one can even do away with mortality. Thus the neediness that characterizes us insofar as we are mortal, referred to by Stern as the real meaning of *ta kaka*, turns out to be a symptom of some more basic ‘force of evil’, which is, in the *Theaetetus* Digression, lack of virtue, and ultimately ignorance. This should suffice as a comment on Stern’s first claim.

---

<sup>516</sup> See Stern 2002, p. 283

<sup>517</sup> *ibid.*, italics added.

As for the second, according to which the neediness in question is exclusively human neediness, the aforesaid could be used as a further confirmation of its verity. Non-human animals are incapable of both moral and intellectual lapses and improvements. This being so, I still believe that the mortal nature spoken of in the passage on evil has broader meaning. The phrase *tēn thnētēn physin*, after all, simply does not mean ‘human’ or ‘our nature’. In the Platonic context it refers to the living entities inhabiting the sublunary region,<sup>518</sup> i.e. to the variety of winged creatures, of those who live in water, and of those who have feet and roam the planes and mountains (*Tim.* 40a1-2). These are the creatures endowed with mortal nature, and of them, human beings are but one species. Then, Plato’s usage of the phrase *tēn thnētēn physin* could mean that for him, unlike for e.g. St. Augustine, the problem of evil pertains to non-human animals as well. This would be so not only due to his acknowledgement of animal suffering, but primarily due to his acceptance of the doctrine of metempsychosis. He has already argued for the doctrine of metempsychosis – more or less directly in the *Phaedo*, indirectly in the *Meno* – and it served as a very useful background for presenting significant philosophical points. Such a function is shared by the myths in the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, the striking myth of Er in the *Republic X*, parts of Timaeus’ account of the secondary creation, etc. Therefore, there are three kinds of living entities who share the same mortal nature, because all of them experience death and badness, and all of them were, or will be conscious of it, once they attain to human form of life. Life of philosophy and moral improvement are, according to this picture, not restricted only to those presently embodied as human beings; save for the few extremely unjust and sinful souls eternally imprisoned in the Tartarus, everybody will sooner or later be given the chance to perfect their existence.

His analysis of *ta kaka* and *tēn thnētēn physin* makes Stern draw what seems to be a wrong conclusion on Plato’s understanding of evil.

For humans, evils are not only needs themselves, but our awareness of these needs. Evil is a condition known as such, a condition that therefore might be otherwise. ... In sum, evil is neediness of which we are aware, and good is that which we judge might answer to this condition of neediness.<sup>519</sup>

---

<sup>518</sup> Plotinus in *Enn.* I.8.6.5-10 writes that ‘mortal nature’ and ‘this place’ (*hē thnētē physis kai hode ho topos*) mean the earth, where there is injustice and disorder, as opposed to the heaven which is clean of evil.

<sup>519</sup> Stern 2002, p. 284

The assertion that Plato took neediness of which we are aware as evil, is indeed difficult to defend. At the contrary, it seems that he never considered human neediness and even mortality as true evil, but only as symptoms of bodily condition and ignorance. This, I believe, has been amply proven already in the *Apology* and *Crito* (what to say of the *Phaedo*), where Socrates is depicted first as taking heroic stand in the face of the greatest danger, and next as being not at all perplexed by his imminent death. Over and over again Socrates repeats that not death, but injustice and ignorance are to be feared. And it is really hard to see how would the awareness that it could be otherwise make mortality and its adjuncts into even gravest evils – it should be just the other way around. As for Sterns understanding of the evil's opposite, it is enough to say that the attempt to define the good or goodness as in any way relative to the bad is utterly non-Platonic.

### **I.3.6 Excursus: *Phaedo* 60b-c and the necessary coupling of pleasure and pain**

After these reflections on the purport of the phrase *tēn thnētēn physin*, we can now dwell for a short while on the rest of the clause where it appears, i.e. on Plato's assertion that the besetment with evils of the place where mortal creatures abide is a matter of necessity (*tonde ton topon peripolei ex anankēs*). The opening of Socrates' instructions to his companions in the *Phaedo* (60b-c), may serve as useful illustration of what Plato is intending to convey with this statement. On the morning of Socrates' last day, after assembling near the prison and entering his cell, Phaedo and the others find their master in the company of Xanthippe and their young child. Upon her departure from the prison, Socrates takes hold of his leg which has recently been freed from the shackle, and rubbing it, starts to ponder over the strong bond between the affections of pleasure and pain, which he extends to the point of mutual dependency, almost a conjointment brought about by necessity.

What a strange thing, my friends, said he, appears to be that which men call pleasant;<sup>520</sup> how wonderfully it is related to its seeming opposite<sup>521</sup>, the painful; while they are unwilling both to come to a man at the same time, if

---

<sup>520</sup> There are at least two reasons why the pleasant is qualified by the phrase 'which men call (so)'. The first one, identified by Rowe (1993, p.118f) and Gallop (1975, p. 76) is that the pleasant spoken of here is no more than relief from pain. Gallop claims that, in Plato, this understanding of the pleasant could be extended to most of the pleasures human beings experience. Relief from pain, however, is not positively pleasurable, and consequently the

somebody pursues one and catches it, he would altogether be forced to receive the other as well, as if the two of them were fastened together by the same tip (60b3-c1)

Socrates next highlights his claim by making a counterfactual appeal to traditional authority in composing fables.<sup>522</sup> had this peculiar phenomenon caught the eye of Aesop, he would have certainly composed a fable (*mythos*), to the effect that the deity, after failing to reconcile the two quarreling factions, joined their heads together, making it thus impossible for someone visited by the one not to be visited by the other as well. The purpose of the fable seems to be to provide some background information concerning the state of affairs antecedent to the present one, and to causally explain the arousal of the latter from the former. At this point a question may be raised about the relation between the factual claim concerning pleasure and pain, and the fable following it. Why would Plato use a fable to back up his claim, and what was it that he intended to convey to his readers by employing it?

The obvious reason for making use of a fable is the ease with which this form of discourse brings difficult points to the reader's attention. Plato does not hesitate to have recourse to myths, and employs them in various situations, although understanding their structure and purport poses serious challenges to interpreters. Betegh identifies four stages in the development of mythical narrative in Plato: 1) positing some initial state of affairs that calls for rectification; 2) introduction of a (benevolent) deity willing to rectify the situation; 3) application of divine power, somewhat constrained by various 'limiting conditions', to the defective situation; 4) a

---

pleasant is such only in the opinion of the ignorant, and not in real sense. The other would be that the bodily pleasures, even if granted the status of authentic experiences, are no more than illusion. In the words of the *Timaeus*, pleasure is "evil's most powerful lure" (69 d1), while in the *Republic* we read that "[p]leasures are neither entirely true nor pure, but are like shadow painting" (583 b3-4). Since it is also strongly dissociated from the goal of life, and thus the good (see *Phd.* 83b-e), it wouldn't be unreasonable to say that it is pleasant only in the minds of the people in general, whom Plato is holding in no high regard.

<sup>521</sup> The status of pain is not brought into question. Those who claim to be in pain are holders of true belief regarding their experience (see *Rep.* 584e-a). However, it is questionable whether it is really the opposite of the so called pleasant; hence the formulation 'seeming opposite'. That is curious. That pain and pleasure are opposites is stated in the *Republic* 583c2, and is in conformity with Aristotle's definition of opposites: "Things which stand furthest apart within the same genus" (*Cat.* 6.6a). Pleasure and pain, as defined in *Tim.* 64d, are both intense disturbances, which respectively come upon and depart from the subject, and thus fit well into Aristotle's definition. They wouldn't be opposites proper only in a very specific Plotinian sense, in which the Good and evil are said to be opposites in *Enn.* 1.8.6 – as things standing furthest apart from each other and *not* belonging to the same genus. But that would be a rather fanciful explanation. Rowe (1993, p. 119) offers a simple solution: if the pleasant is not really such, then pain is not a true opposite of it either.

<sup>522</sup> That the Phrygian slave, Aesop, holds some kind of authority or is somehow revered by Socrates is obvious from the episode of him versifying one of his fables, as a matter of what he takes to be a sacred duty (see *Phd* 61a-b).

functional description of the current state of affairs, for which the fable is meant to provide explanation.<sup>523</sup>

The Socratic fable in the *Phaedo* fits this paradigm nicely. The first of the above listed four stages corresponds to the constant tension between pleasure and pain, the second with the introduction of the unnamed god. The third, obviously, is represented by the god's direct intervention, while the limiting conditions disrupting the action of the divine agent are not openly disclosed, but they are probably represented by "the fact that pleasure and pain are, by their very natures, opposites."<sup>524</sup> So, because the god was unable to resolve the conflict (*epeidē ouk edynato...*), he had to resort to the second best option, which, for some reason, was to join them together by their heads. The fourth stage is represented by the present situation, which is that whenever a person experiences one of the opposites, the other inevitably follows.

The fable is only supportive of Socrates' primary account, which could stand on its own. It is, perhaps for a reason, associated with someone renowned for being a maker of *mythoi* as fictional stories, and has explanatory power in the sense that it possesses "[t]he required formal features of a genuine explanation without however being true".<sup>525</sup> Instead of providing factual causal explanation, it serves as an allegory, although a rather significant one. It could be meant to illustrate the close connection between pleasure and pain, and the fact that even a divine power would be incapable of eliminating from this world the defective state of being in pain, while Plato, of course, could remain uncommitted to the factuality of the discourse.

So, the allegory presents pleasure and pain as being in a state of war (*polemounta*), and the deity as desirous to resolve the dispute. How could have the good god reconciled the warring parties? In which way could have he stopped the war? What would a reconciliation brought about by a good deity mean if not subjugation and marginalization of pain? However, since that was not possible, they were juxtaposed and bound together.

Such an ordering is to be taken as a doing of a benevolent god, and it is natural to ask how it reflects his goodness. Perhaps by at least allowing for some orderliness – pain and pleasure now follow a regular pattern, human beings are not constantly harassed by their incessant attacks and should be aware of what to expect and what not. Otherwise, pains are unavoidable; they are infesting mortal nature as a matter of necessity, and even a god cannot do

---

<sup>523</sup> Betegh 2009, p. 84f

<sup>524</sup> *op.cit.*, p. 80

<sup>525</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 90

anything about it. Through the intervention of the unidentified deity, the situation was improved, as far as that was possible, though the calamity was not altogether dispelled. Since the god of the *Phaedo* fable was unable to reconcile the dispute of the warring parties (by perhaps silencing or eliminating pain), he produced the present state of affairs, where their necessary connectedness is represented through a mythical picture of Siamese-twin animal. This could mean that at least physical suffering (which is ordinarily taken to be a bad thing) is inherent to the nature Socrates is about to depart from. The god wouldn't allow it to prevail in the dispute and thus make existence on Earth unbearable, but even he is not capable of eliminating it entirely. This is, I believe, the moral that should be drawn from the fable: despite the presence of divine will and its intention to introduce sound order and harmony of beauty and goodness in the cosmos, there are, as of yet unidentified, factors of inhibition of the creative process, which prevent the full realization of the divine plan.

The same idea is fully explicated at the beginning of the creation story of the *Timaeus*. The good Demiurge initiated his work of fashioning the manifest cosmos moved by the desire to create an entity perfect and beautiful and good, as far as that was possible, or as far as its nature would allow (*Tim.* 29e-30c). Despite his best intentions, the innate imperfection of the material he used made the innumerable inconveniences that mortal creatures encounter unavoidable.

Still, the *Phaedo* account of the relation between pleasure and pain and the fable associated with it are far from being unproblematic, especially in the light of the real-life example Socrates gives. Even if we disregard the questionable status of 'the pleasant' and the nature of its opposition with pain briefly commented on above,<sup>526</sup> their inseparability remains "a curious moral for Socrates to draw from the state of his leg".<sup>527</sup> In what way exactly is the constant conjunction of pleasure and pain to be understood?

A possible approach to the issue, as also noted by Burnet,<sup>528</sup> could be the non-extravagant assumption, first put in writing by Heraclitus: "Illness made health pleasant and good, hunger – satiety, fatigue – rest" (*DK B111*).<sup>529</sup> This outlook does fit well with Socrates' example – the shackles used to cause him pain, but as soon as they were removed, pleasure ensued. Now, the

---

<sup>526</sup> See *supra*, fns. 520 and 521.

<sup>527</sup> Gallop 1975, p. 77

<sup>528</sup> See Burnet 1911, p. 14

<sup>529</sup> This 'Heraclitean' idea is not foreign to Plato either. He elaborates on it in *Rep.* 583 c-d, but only to dismiss the cessation of undesirable states as true pleasure. It conforms well with and straightforwardly explains Plato's reluctance to speak of the pleasant in the passage under discussion as pleasant in the real sense.

state of someone's limbs not being pressed hard by a metal device would not be normally considered as pleasurable. However, since in Socrates' case it had been preceded by the opposite state, a painful one, it might be legitimate for him to say that he was feeling pleasure. In other words, had not there been for the antecedent pain, the state Socrates found himself could not have been described as pleasurable either. Thus it seems plausible to say that pleasure naturally ensues after pain.

The reverse situation is more difficult to explain in the light of the example. Should we suppose that the state of pleasure Socrates was in should be necessarily succeeded by a painful one? It shouldn't be so – “[t]here is no likelihood that the pleasure he now feels in his leg will be followed by pain”.<sup>530</sup> But couldn't it be that the single example Socrates gives is not devised in such a way as to cover all the possible applications of the principle? He is there elucidating the alternation from pain to pleasure, and undoubtedly, he could have given an example of the reverse. In fact, it is well known that pleasure can be followed immediately by pain – the delight of having a sumptuous meal is often exchanged for the pain of overeating. Even the most intense sensual enjoyment human beings experience often ends up in moroseness – *post coitum omne animal triste*. It could be objected, however, that it is not generally so – those of moderate appetite often avoid the pitfalls of dissatisfaction and pain. Still, maybe the very cessation of pleasurable sensation could be interpreted as a kind of pain. Plato actually vouches for the plausibility of this proposal: “And when someone ceases to feel pleasure, this calm will be painful to him” (*Rep.* 583e1).

### **I.3.7 Back to the *Theaetetus*: alternative view on *anankē* in 176a8**

There is one major shortcoming in the utilization of the *Phaedo* myth as an illustration of Plato's point that mortal nature is beset with evils as a matter of necessity; it shifts the assumed focus of the *Theaetetus* Digression from evil as moral insufficiency to evil as physical suffering. But then again, although the predominant focus of the Digression is on the moral evil, the huge variety of inconveniences and suffering that human and non-human beings experience is by no

---

<sup>530</sup> Galop 1975, *ibid.*

means excluded from Plato's account. According to the interpretation submitted in this text, Plato first established the ontological basis for the existence of evils, which is the necessary presence of an entity or principle contrary to *to agathon*. Next, in the above quoted clause, he determines the precise *locus* of the evils – mortal nature and the sublunary region. The evils spoken of are mainly vice and misinterpreted so-called virtues, but pain and decrepitude are also not to be overlooked. They include all injustice and suffering we undergo and perpetuate, the broad scope of varieties of badness that are associated with mortal nature, and of which there is no escape as long as one is bound to the lower spheres of existence. In the preceding clause, Plato used the word *anankē* to impress upon his readers the point that it is not possible for the Good not to have an opposite (if the creation were to exist at all), and now (*out' en theois auta hidrysthai, tēn de thnētēn physin kai tonde ton topon peripolei ex anankēs*), his overt purpose is to convey that this mortal region, inhabited by human and non-human animals, can never conceivably be free of vice and suffering. Already in the next few sentences,<sup>531</sup> Plato also provides an outline of a possible solution to the problem of evil. This is a solution, to put it anachronistically, very much in the spirit of the Irenaean theodicies:<sup>532</sup> the presence of evils in our world may be seen as an impetus for purifying ourselves and leaving this mortal region once and for all. So, the evils are here to make us aware of the necessity to flee from here as soon as possible. The flight is, of course, not accomplished by spatial dislocation, but by becoming as similar to god as it is possible (*homoiōsis theōi kata to dynaton*), which is a task attainable through moral and spiritual self-perfecting. Here, as well as in the account of the two paradigms and the afterlife (176d-177a), Plato is exhorting his readers not to give in to moral weakness and 'be transformed from men into wolves' (*Rep.* 566a3-4) in this life, and lead perpetual future lives as 'evil persons associated with evils'<sup>533</sup> (*Tht.* 177a6). A developed human being should be able to make the right choice between good and bad, and the philosopher is there to help him or her make that choice. The presence of numerous evils, which Theodorus so bitterly regrets, serves as

---

<sup>531</sup> *dio kai peirasthai chrē enthēdeekēise pheugein hoti tachista. phygē de homoiōsis theōi kata to dynaton. homoiōsis de dikaion kai hosion meta phronēseōs genesthai* (176a8-b3).

<sup>532</sup> The basic tenets of Irenaean type of theodicy are that a) humans are created as imperfect, immature creatures who need to undergo moral and spiritual growth which became known as 'soul making' process; b) hence the original fall is not an act of sin against God, but a childhood mistake due to ignorance; c) the purpose of the world is to facilitate the human beings in developing perfect moral character, and the inclusion of evil and suffering is there to draw them closer to God. For a succinct exposition of St. Irenaeus' thought and his approach to the problem of evil, see Hick 2010, pp. 211ff.

<sup>533</sup> *kakoi kakois synontes*.

a reminder that the only alternative is lending one's ear to the philosopher's advice and working one's way up to the realm of higher reality. Hence the usefulness and the 'soul making' property of the internal and external badness, which almost everyone encounters on daily basis.

There is yet another, and indeed a very tentative way to understand the second usage of the word *anankē*, which this time appears in the phrase *ex anankēs*. According to this understanding, Plato's employment of the phrase *ex anankēs* as referring to the presence of evils in the world, is actually a clear anticipation of the esoteric philosophy of the *Timaeus*, and confirmation, as well as elaboration, of the thesis that the opposite of *to agathon* is something else than the individual evils. The word *anankē* is now used substantively – governed by the preposition *ek*, it may express origin or cause – so it means 'of necessity', 'by necessity', 'due to necessity', or 'by means of necessity'. The obvious intention of Plato is to once again confirm the truism that it is unimaginable that this world could be free of vice and suffering – they are necessarily bound to the mortal nature and the material sphere. This necessity is, however, derivative from the first kind of necessity, i.e. the one that dictates the existence of the Good's opposite. *To agathon* of the *Theaetetus*, as understood in this text, stands at the top of the ontological scale. Wherever there is a top, necessarily there is a bottom as well. At the bottom the subordinate opposite is situated, which, being an opposite, has to be producing effects contrary to those produced by the Good, in other words has to be responsible for the bad things. In the first part of the passage on evil it was denoted simply as *hypenantion*, but in the second Plato uses the term which will gain great significance in the *Timaeus* – *anankē*. In the modern translations of the *Timaeus* this word, in the appropriate context, is often capitalized, because it is taken to refer to the one of the two causes of material creation. Even in the *Theaetetus* 176a8, however fancifully and even outrageously Neo-Platonic it may sound, this is, linguistically, a rather legitimate reading of the *ex anankēs* phrase – the evils are haunting this world *due to Necessity*. This is an understanding not unheard of among modern scholars. In his notes to Plato's *Laws* 896d, where the soul is described as *aitia pantōn*, both of *tōn agathōn* and *tōn kakōn*, England writes: "Here is introduced the question of the origin of evil,"<sup>534</sup> only to dismiss soul as the true cause of evil. He does that by calling attention to *Timaeus* 48a, where the *planōmenē aitia*, i.e. *anankē* is, according to him, indicated as that which 'produces evil in the world of bodily existence'. He finds the same *anankē* in the *Theaetetus* passage on evil, which he quotes in full, and goes on to

---

<sup>534</sup> England 1921, p. 474

say: “Here, as in the *Timaeus* passage, *anankē* is named as the source of evil. This idea, that evil is confined to bodily existence, and our earth, is in full agreement with all that is said about evil in the *Laws*.”<sup>535</sup> So it seems that the further ‘esoteric twist’ in the Digression is not utterly improbable, and there could be a strong link between the rudiments of the theory of evil in the *Theaetetus* and its more developed form in the *Timaeus*.

---

<sup>535</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 475

## I.4 Summary

My main purpose in this chapter was to offer a more in-depth analysis of the passage on evil that appears, rather unexpectedly, in the not-less-striking Digression of the *Theaetetus*, obviously divergent from the general direction of the dialogue. That analysis was provided with the aim to establish several ideas important for the further treatment of the problem of evil in Plato. An attempt was made to establish the following major points:

First, that although not evident at a glance, Plato's doctrine of the Forms is present in the *Theaetetus* Digression and that its presence does not cause any strain to the main argumentative flow of the dialogue.

Second, that the word 'good' at 176a6 is referring to no less than Plato's highest entity – *auto agathon*. The main strategy of providing rationale for this interpretation was a type of *reductio* argument: all the other candidates for taking that position were shown to be inadequate.

Third, that *ta kaka* of 176a5 are not to be identified with the opposite of *to agathon* mentioned in the same line. Those evils are no more than instances of badness, be they moral deficiencies (which are specifically stressed in the *Theaetetus* Digression) or physical sufferings, and thus cannot stand as the opposite of *to agathon*. The latter is supposed to be a unified entity and the origin of all particular cases of goodness, and thus cannot have as its opposite particular cases of badness, which stand as contraries to the instances of the Good.

Fourth, a proposal was submitted that the *hypoantion* of 176a6, the subordinated opposite of *to agathon*, and the second *anankē* in the passage (176a8) *could* denote the same entity. In an attempt to envision the nature of the *hypoantion*, which, as it was argued, differs from *ta kaka*, an assumption was made that it could represent a possible early anticipation of the Timaeian *anankē*, the principle of imperfection.

The *Theaetetus* passage on evil could be thus interpreted as setting the stage or paving the way for a crucial doctrine which will be explicated in much greater detail in the *Timaeus*. Understood in this way, it assumes great importance for those who are inquiring into the Platonic causes of evil.<sup>536</sup>

---

<sup>536</sup> This interpretation does not presuppose a Unitarian reading of Plato. He could have had some basic ideas at the time when the *Theaetetus* was written, which were later subjected to a much more developed treatment; or, alternatively, he could have had an already ready-made doctrine of the causes of evil alone, which does not imply

# CHAPTER II The Platonic Theory of Evil in the *Timaeus* and the *Politicus*

## II.1 The origin of Evil in the *Timaeus*

### II.1.1 Necessity and the Errant Cause

A vital upshot of the foregoing discussion of the short *Theaetetus* passage on evil is that Plato, in the form of the bipolar correlatives of *tagathon* and its *hypoantion*, postulates two separate principles that serve as the basis of all good and evil. Our task in the present chapter will be to examine how a similar conception is assimilated to the metaphysics of the *Timaeus*, naturally placing a special emphasis on the cause of badness. In this dialogue, Plato's theory of the origin of evil acquires well-defined contours, although some scholars disagree on significant interpretative details related to it.

Up to 47e the *Timaeus*, 'except for a small part,'<sup>537</sup> assumed only one cause (*aitia*) of the construction of the cosmos, and two *genē* of all existence. The *aitia* was god's goodness (29d7-e1), or the inherent propensity of *nous* to produce order and beauty wherever and whenever possible, while the *genē* were Being and Becoming, i.e. the intelligible Ideas, eternal and undecaying on the one hand, and the sensible particulars, subject to permanent flux and thus bereft of substantiality, on the other (27d5-28a1). At 47e4, however, the cosmogonical role of another factor is evoked (with the mention of *ta di' anankēs gignomena*), and next, at 47e5-48a2, Timaeus explicitly ascribes the generation of the universe to the coming together of two causes, *nous* and *anankē*: *memeigmenē gar oun hē toude tou kosmou genesis ex anankēs te kai nou systaseōs egennēthē*. Similarly, at 48e2, Timaeus announces a new beginning (*archē*) for the construal of his ontology as well: besides the intelligible model (*paradeigma*) and its visible copy (*mimēma*), he will speak of an entity that mediates between these two and accommodates

---

that Plato's philosophy in general was not undergoing any modifications or passing through different phases of development.

<sup>537</sup> The exception was made in the course of the account of the mechanics of vision, with the introduction of the contributory causes (*synaitiai*), for the first time explicitly named as such at 46c7. Cf. Archer-Hind 1888, p. 165; Taylor 1928, p. 297; Cornford 1937, p. 160.

the latter, and which he calls Receptacle (*hypodochē*) and nurse (*tithēnē*) of all becoming (49a6).<sup>538</sup> So Plato now in his metaphysical scheme has two causes and three principles. As already mentioned, one of the causes and two of the principles have been introduced much earlier. These were the *nous*, symbolized by the Demiurge, the *paradeigma* and the *mimēma*. The new cause and the new principle, closely connected but not in every respect identifiable with one another,<sup>539</sup> are *anankē* and the Receptacle. We shall now turn to these novelties.

Throughout Timaeus' cosmological account it has been repeatedly stated that the benevolent purpose behind the creation could unfold only to a certain degree, that despite the best intention, the accomplished work was only 'as good as possible.'<sup>540</sup> From the very beginning of the first part of Timaeus' speech<sup>541</sup> it was also made clear that the Demiurge is laboring with some pre-existent material. That material was unruly and the principles of measure and beauty – and thus goodness – had to be imposed upon it from the outside: "So, wanting all things to be good and nothing bad, as far as that is possible, god took over all that was visible – which didn't keep its peace but moved in flawed and disorderly fashion – and led it from disorder to order, considering the latter in all ways better than the former" (30a2-6).<sup>542</sup> Now since nothing that is visible can be without fire, and nothing that is tangible can be without earth (31b), what the Demiurge took over and used as material for his creation were these and the rest of the four primary bodies, while they were still in their primordial state not only of disarray, but also of formlessness. So, the pre-cosmic chaos was constituted of those powers (*dynameis*) endowed with sensible qualities (52e1-2), but devoid of proportion and measure, and therefore displaying only traces (*ichnē*) of the elements proper (53a8-b2). These the god molded into the

---

<sup>538</sup> The triad *paradeigma*, *mimēma*, *hypodochē* is mentioned (in different order and with different wording) again at 50c7-d4 (*to ginomenon, to d' en ōi gignetai, to d' hothēn aphomoioiomenon phyetai to gignomenon/ mētēr, patēr, ekgonos*); 52a1-8 (*kata tauta eidos, deuteron genos – aisthēton, gennēton, ktī, chōra*); 52d3 (*on, chōra, genesis*).

<sup>539</sup> As Kalkavage seems to believe them to be by writing "[n]ecessity as an all receptive medium is the mysterious ground of cosmic *imaging*.", and "[n]ecessity as Space or *chōra* is the reason why everything in the realm of Becoming is defined in terms of *place* and has *room* to be." (Kalkavage 2001, p.31)

<sup>540</sup> The Demiurge desired all things to resemble his excellence as much as possible (*hoti malista – 29e3*), and to be as good as they can be (*kata dynamin – 30a3*). Cf. 30d2 – *malista*; 31c3 – *hoti malista*; 32b5 – *ēn dynaton*; 32d1 – *hoti malista*; 37d2 – *eis dynamin*; 40b3 – *hoti malista*, 42e2 – *kata dynamin*; 46c8 – *kata to dynaton*, etc., etc.

<sup>541</sup> 29d – 47e: *The Works of Reason*, as Cornford entitles this section of the dialogue.

<sup>542</sup> *boulētheis gar ho theos agatha men panta, phlauron de mēden einai kata dynamin, houtō dē pan hoson ēn horaton paralabōn ouch hēsychian agon alla kinoumenon plēmnelōs kai ataktōs, eis taxin auto ēgagen ek tēs ataxias, hēgēsamenos ekeino toutou pantōs ameinon.*

known earth, water, air and fire by means of shapes and numbers (53b4-5).<sup>543</sup> Thus informed and made as perfectly beautiful and good as possible (53b5-6), they were ready to be utilized by the creator, who appropriated them for his purpose and did the best he could with them. In fact, the primary bodies were turned into contributing or accessory causes (*synaitiai*), meant to complement and facilitate the work of the *prōtē aitia*, i.e. the *nous* personified in the form of the Demiurge: “Now all these things are among the accessory causes which the god uses as his servants in achieving the best as far as possible (*tēn tou aristou kata to dynaton idean apotelōn*)” (46c8-d1). The phrase ‘All these things’, as obvious from the preceding section on the generation of the organ of sight and the mechanics of vision (45b-46c), are the four elements, in this case represented by fire. Already in the next sentence Timaeus launches criticism on those who are of the opinion that the elements and their effects are not only accessory causes, but *de facto* the causes of all things. This comment refers back to the *Phaedo* 96b-99d, where the story of the young Socrates’ interest in physics, and especially in the problem of causation, is related. In Anaxagoras’ work Socrates found the information that Reason directs and causes everything: *nous estin ho diakosmōn te kai pantōn aitios* (91c1-2), and he expected to learn further that Reason is striving for the best, and that its causal activity could simply be explained by providing the reasons why it is for the things best to be as they are: *hoti beltiston auta houtōs echein estin hōsper echei* (98a8-9).<sup>544</sup> Instead, Anaxagoras used *nous* as some kind of *deus ex machina*, while for causation proper he relied on the material elements. With this, claimed Socrates, he remained unable to distinguish between the real cause (*to aition tō onti*) and that without which the cause would not be a cause: *aneu hou to aition ouk an pot’ eiē aition* (99b3-4). Plato’s Timaeus, unlike Socrates of the *Phaedo*, grants the elements a status of causes, but not on a par with *nous*; they are secondary and subservient to the purpose of Reason.<sup>545</sup> So these are the two types of causes. The first and primary, which have already been discussed in some detail in the *Timaeus*, are those who work with the aid of *nous* – like the Demiurge and the lesser gods – and are craftsmen

---

<sup>543</sup> The *eidē* are the geometrical shapes of the primary bodies that were bestowed upon them by the Demiurge, while the *arithmoi* are the numerical proportions according to which they were constructed (see Taylor 1928, p. 358). All those shapes have as their basis two kinds of right-angled triangles: the scalene and the isosceles. For a brief argument why exactly these two kinds are taken to be the ultimate constituents of the primary bodies’ shapes, see Zeyl 2000, p. lxvi.

<sup>544</sup> Which is exactly how causation is explained in the *Timaeus*.

<sup>545</sup> For a possible reason why the elements are admitted the status of causes in the *Timaeus*, but not in the *Phaedo*, see Broadie 2012, pp. 175f. Taylor (1928, pp. 291f and 302f) identifies the *conditiones sine quibus non* of the *Phaedo* with the *synaitiai* of the *Timaeus*; for a different position, see Johansen 2004, pp. 103-106.

of things beautiful and good: *hosai meta nou kalōn kai agathōn dēmiourgoi* (46e4). The second and subordinate are those which, bereft of thought and purpose, on each occasion produce chancy, disorderly effects: *hosai monōtheisthai phronēseōs to tychon atakton hekastote exergazontai* (46e5-6). Intelligent and ensouled causes always have primacy over the thoughtless. The former act for a purpose – which is to yield the greatest good possible<sup>546</sup> – while the latter are “moved by others and come to be movers of other things only out of necessity” (46e1-2), and thus, when left on their own, produce disorder.

It is true that the accessory causes are never left acting without the assistance of Reason, and the witness of this is the universe itself, which was created a god, greatest and best, most beautiful and perfect (68e3-4; 92c7-8). It is also true that when Timaeus speaks of a result *to tychon atakton*, that does not mean that the effects of the accessory causes are totally random in the sense of not being necessitated by their cause;<sup>547</sup> fire will burn and water will cool – the strong bond between a single cause and a single effect is not questioned. But since the elements are unintelligent, the outcomes of their working will remain non-sensitive to planning, and in this regard chancy – or better, non-teleological. But there is also something more to their chanciness and disorderliness than mere lack of purpose. According to Plato, they will inevitably deteriorate and eventually plummet into utter disorder and destruction, as would any group of phenomena moving and acting without the guidance of reason. Now, the fact that such a state of affairs is not actual and that the effects of the primary bodies’ operation are more or less predictable, does not justify Archer-Hind’s dismissal of any “blind force existing in nature,”<sup>548</sup> or Taylor’s claim that the randomness of the accessory causes simply means that they are “good or bad indifferently.”<sup>549</sup> After all, Plato’s Timaeus does explicitly and more than once refer to the primary bodies and their effects as something disorderly (*atakton*) and irrational (*alogon*): at 46e6 they are said to always produce something disorderly, while at 42c5-7 the four bodies are

---

<sup>546</sup> In the case of the organ of sight, as well as of the organ of hearing, which are discussed in the *Timaeus* (47a-e), the greatest good is the benefit of the soul. By observing the circuit of Intellect in heaven and by attunement with the help of right speech and music, the soul can stabilize its own circuits and achieve the state of internal concord.

<sup>547</sup> See Johansen 2004, p. 74

<sup>548</sup> Archer-Hind 1988, p. 162

<sup>549</sup> Taylor 1928, p. 293. For criticism of these two views, which, when all is done and said, allow for only one force in the Timaeian universe – that one being the force of the good – see Cornford 1937, pp. 163-165. Johansen is also partly susceptible to this criticism, because he fails to recognize the degenerative power of the elements and their inability to cause, by themselves, anything good. Instead, he writes: “The point about unintelligent causes, then, is not that they cannot bring about proportionality or order but that they are not, as we might put it, proportionality-producing causes” (2004, p. 75).

designated as massive unrestrained mob, turbulent and irrational, that needs to be subdued by reason.<sup>550</sup> And again, in the august opening of the second part of Timaeus' speech,<sup>551</sup> they are contrasted with *nous*, which works with a purpose and for the best, and are called the errant or wandering cause – *planōmenē aitia* (48a7).<sup>552</sup> Errant it is exactly because, unlike Reason, it is purposeless and unintelligent. It receives its principle of order from the outside, and is thus inherently chaotic. As such, it is prone, even bound, to produce disorder, unless Reason persuades it into obedience. Disorder and lack of measuredness are ugliness, and ugliness is badness, being the opposite of beauty, which is closely allied with the nature of the good. This is explained in the *Timaeus* 87c4-5: “all that is good is beautiful, and the beautiful is not ill-proportioned,”<sup>553</sup> and even more expressively in the *Philebus* 64e5-7: “The force of the good has taken refuge in an alliance with the nature of the beautiful. For measure and proportion manifest themselves in all areas as beauty and virtue.”

Therefore, it is not imprudent to say that there *is* a blind force in Plato's universe, which is indeed indifferent to the good and the bad – due to being devoid of consciousness and any purposeful directedness – but incapable of producing anything good and naturally prone to devolve into badness. Plato's designation of choice for that force is Necessity (*anankē*), an ‘umbrella term’ for the *sunaitiai*, the *planōmenē aitia*, and their effects, encroaching partly on the notion of *chōra* as well. At first glance, the term ‘necessity’ seems unhappily chosen. On the one hand, it is remindful of the goddess of Parmenides' poem and of Plato's Myth of Er, and

<sup>550</sup> *ton polyn ochlon ... ek pyros kai hydatos kai aeros kai gēs, thorybōdē kai alogon onta, logōi kratēsas ...*

<sup>551</sup> 47e-69a: *What Comes About of Necessity* (Cornford).

<sup>552</sup> Johansen (2004, pp. 93-95) is right in objecting against the opinion, ascribed to Grote and Cornford, that the wandering cause does not necessitate its effects, i.e. that it represents an utterly indeterminate, unpredictable force. But I believe that Cornford actually does not hold such a view, and that the real issue, both Cornford's and mine, is not whether the *planōmenē aitia* causally determinates its effect, but whether it produces disorderly results. This is put succinctly by Gregory (2008, p. xlvi), who distinguishes between two senses of chance and disorder:

“(1) An event might be said to occur by chance because there is no causal chain that leads to its occurrence, contrasting chance with causal determinism.

(2) An event might be said to occur by chance in the absence of design.” Plato in the *Timaeus* does not pay much attention to the first sense, but dwells on and draws important consequences from the second. That is recognized by Broadie (2012, p. 182): “But the disorderliness and the wandering do not mean chaos or total absence of determinate motions. The point, rather, is that the materials taken for use by cosmos-building Intelligence were astray and random in relation to the cosmic desideratum.” What I would add is only that this randomness and disorderliness is exactly the factor which allows for the presence of badness in the universe.

<sup>553</sup> *pan dē to agathon kalon, to de kalon ouk ametron.*

some scholars managed to confuse it at least with the latter.<sup>554</sup> On the other, the modern concept of necessity, be it logical, metaphysical or causal, implies fixed, unalterable, law-like behavior. It is Archer-Hind, steadfast in his panpsychism, who understands Necessity as natural law, having its origin in the regularity of the evolution of the *nous*, for which “[i]t is a necessary law ... to exist in the form of material nature.” So, according to him, Necessity “[s]ignifies the forces of matter originated by *nous*, the sum total of the physical laws which govern the material universe: that is to say, the laws which govern the existence of *nous* in the form of plurality.” It is thus not a force external to *nous*, but something devised by *nous* for a good end, and for an omnipotent person, its operation would be fully law-like and regular. The Necessity’s seemingly ‘wandering’ character is due solely to its inscrutability to us.<sup>555</sup> A contemporary scholar is of the opinion that Necessity “refers to the necessity by which cause brings about its effect”, and furthermore, that such cause necessitates its effect “in a regular and predictable manner.”<sup>556</sup> It is called ‘wandering’ *only* due to not being teleological.<sup>557</sup> Taylor, on the other hand, recognizes the weight of the attribute *planōmenē aitia*, and declares that, as such, Necessity should not be confused “with ‘scientific necessity’ or ‘the reign of law ... Thus it is not the ‘necessary’, but the ‘contingent’, the things for which we do not see any sufficient reason.”<sup>558</sup> Nonetheless, he disposes of *anankē* in the overall picture of the *Timaeus*’ universe in a rather similarly way as Archer-Hind did. *Anankē* is fully subservient to the good purpose of *nous*, and although we cannot always see ‘what the good of it is’, “if we could ever have complete knowledge, we should find that *anankē* had vanished from our account of the world.”<sup>559</sup>

However, as far as Plato himself is concerned, the term is actually appropriate. I do not believe that he envisioned his *anankē* to stand for any kind of law or necessity of the modern kind, including causal necessity. This does not mean that the cause will not strongly determine

---

<sup>554</sup> See *supra*, fn. 174. For a brief account of the differences between Necessity of the *Timaeus* and the *Republic X*, see Taylor 1928, p. 299. Necessity of the *Republic X* is not identical with Parmenides’ goddess either, although there are stronger affinities between them. Plato’s *Anankē* is a symbol of intelligent order and she presides over the affairs of the universe, while *Anankē* of Parmenides’ poem seems to have even broader function and jurisdictions. The latter is operational both on the plane of Reality (*DK B 8. 30-32*) and Appearance (*DK B 10. 6-7*). She is also the progenitor of the gods (*DK B 13*), and the principle and cause of motion and generation of all things (*DK A 37*). For the role and status of *Anankē* in Parmenides, see Henn 2003, pp. 85ff.

<sup>555</sup> Archer-Hind 1888, pp. 166f

<sup>556</sup> Johansen 2004, p. 98

<sup>557</sup> Broadie, in 2012, pp. 181-183, seems to be in broad agreement with Johansen on this matter.

<sup>558</sup> Taylor 1928, p. 300

<sup>559</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 301

its effect; but simply that the area of law-like behavior is reserved for the workings of Reason, which are always *epi to beltiston*. The purposeless, non-teleological events, even if strongly determined by their causes, are taken to be coincidental or chancy – and thus ‘wandering’ – in the sense of *standing in opposition to the ones induced by law*, which are always guided by reason, always pre-planned within the confines of an ordered system aiming for the good. This opposition between teleology and (what we would call causal) necessity as something coincidental, is very clearly explicated by Aristotle in the *Physics* II.8 and 9.<sup>560</sup> His conclusion is that a cause *par excellence*, i.e. the one that embodies the workings of natural laws, is the cause that operates for a purpose. An even more striking application of the term *anankē* to a blind force working without reason and producing chancy results is found in the Atomistic cosmology. Diogenes Laertius writes concerning Democritus: “all things arise due to necessity (*kat’ anankēn*), the vortex being the cause of the becoming of all of them, and this he calls ‘necessity.’”<sup>561</sup> That the operation of the vortex is wholly devoid of purpose and random, is clear from *DL*.IX.31-32, where Leucippus’ cosmogonical ideas are presented. The only regularity that attaches to it is the attraction of the like to like. Design is once again contrasted with necessity at *DK* A 39, where Plutarch reports Democritus to have said that the universe was not crafted for any purpose, but everything was fully predetermined by necessity (*prokatechesthai tēi anankēi panth’ haplōs*). So, taking the historical context in consideration, it is easy to conceive why Plato would apply the term ‘necessity’ to a force that is opposed to Reason, and in this sense irregular, chancy and ‘wandering’.<sup>562</sup> And since Timaeus repeatedly states that Necessity is a producer of

<sup>560</sup> “We must first explain why nature belongs to the class of causes which act for the sake of something (*tōn heneka tou aitiōn*); and then about the necessary (*peri tou anankaïou*) and its place in nature ... why should not nature work, not for the sake of something, not because it is better so (*mē heneka tou poiein, mēd’ hoti beltion*), but just as the sky rains, not in order to make the corn grow, but of necessity (*ex anankēs*)? (What is drawn up must cool, and what has been cooled must become water and descend, the result of this being that the corn grows),” etc. (*Phys.* 198b10-20). In II.8 Aristotle follows Plato in affiliating necessity with chance; in II.9 he states, again in agreement with Plato, that of the two constituents of everything, namely matter and form, necessity is in the former (200a13-14). Aristotle calls this necessity hypothetical, and that is the conditional necessity of *Met.* V.5.

<sup>561</sup> *DL*. IX.45

<sup>562</sup> Discussing the nature and meaning of the Timaeian *anankē*, Sallis (1999, p. 92), writes: “A clue to the appropriate sense is provided by a passage in the *Laws* in which *anankē* is linked with *chance*: as the Athenian is discussing fire, water, earth, and air (precisely that which Timaeus is about to discuss), he observes that the way they move and interact is according to chance from necessity (*kata tychēn ex anankēs*), as opposed to things that are determined by *technē* (*Laws* 889c). Thus, if one is to translate *anankē* as *necessity*, it must be insisted that this necessity is not the necessity of law ... It is rather a necessity that would operate outside the law ... this necessity would be an outlaw eluding the noetic supervision that determines the lawfulness of *poiēsis*, resisting the rule of *nous* even if responsive to its persuasion.”

disorderly effects, it is indeed inopportune to reduce it back to *nous* or nothingness, or simply deny its, to a degree, recalcitrant nature.<sup>563</sup> I also believe, contra Johansen (2004, p. 99), that the opposition and the irregularity of *anankē* has its origin in the nature of the primary bodies, which does not allow for complete ordering. More on this is to follow shortly.

So, Necessity is the subsidiary, non-teleological cause – second to the purposeful operation of *nous*, personified in the figures of the Demiurge and his emissaries<sup>564</sup> – which contributes to the creation of the universe. Besides its positive contribution – the Demiurge of the *Timaeus* needs not only his goodness and best intent, but necessarily also some material to work with<sup>565</sup> – Necessity also leaves a residue of disorder, which is in turn responsible for the occurrence of all kinds of badness in the universe. That the Necessity's part in the creation is not fully in compliance with the purpose of Reason is clear from the statements that god uses it to bring to completion the best, *so far as that is possible* (e.g., 46c7-8). Reason has to *override* Necessity by persuading it to lead *most*<sup>566</sup> of the things that come to be towards the best: *nou de anankēs archontos tōi peithein autēn tōn gignomenōn ta pleista epi to beltiston agein* (48a2-3); the present good and harmonious state of the universe is thus a result of the *defeat* of Necessity by the force of reasoned persuasion: *di' anankēs hēttōmenēs hypo peithous emphronos* (48a4-5). And the reason for the existence of this defiant aspect of Necessity is to be sought, as has already been hinted, in the primordial state of chaos from which it arose.

---

<sup>563</sup> For a thorough criticism of Archer-Hind's and Taylors view on Necessity, and useful discussion on many of the above points, see Cornford 1937, pp. 162-176

<sup>564</sup> These are the lesser gods, who work in perfect obedience and unison with the purpose of their maker and father. See 41a-d; 42e; 69c

<sup>565</sup> At 69a6 Timaeus uses the word *hylē*, which with Aristotle acquires the technical sense of material or matter. In the *Timaeus*, however, it stands simply for wood. The word is used in the simile of a builder and his material, which are to be compared with a maker of speeches and the information concerning the causes of creation already given. *Hylē* in this simile does not represent only the material, but both kinds of causes previously discussed – the divine and the necessary. A paragraph earlier the positive contribution of Necessity was underlined. The Demiurge used her as his servant while producing the good in all things born (68e3-5). There are, therefore, two causes, the necessary and the divine (*to men anankion, to de theion*), and while the divine is to be sought for attaining happiness, as far as human nature allows, the necessary is there for the sake of the divine, because it provides the frame and the facilities within which and through which the divine could be pursued (69a). This is a reference to the operation of the *synaitiai*, which make perception, and ultimately philosophical investigation, possible.

<sup>566</sup> But not all, as Cornford (1937, p. 162) remarks.

## II.1.2 The Receptacle and the primordial chaos

The chaos is something that confronts the Demiurge, something that is already given, a factor independent of his workings, a factor to which he ought to give meaning by ‘taking it over’ and ‘bringing it from disorder to order’ (30a). Now the whole point about Necessity is that it was born from this chaos through the process of ordering, but retained strong traces of the initial disorder.<sup>567</sup> As such, it remained inherently disorderly and naturally presented various restrictions to the good purpose of the Demiurge. Plato’s *Timaeus* makes this very clear, by asserting over and over again that the world was made only as good as it could be, and that Necessity had to be persuaded into compliance. The divine benevolence was partly checked by the unwilling and unwilling, but unavoidable, disposition of Necessity.

Before turning to the chaos out of which Necessity arose, it is imperative and essential to dedicate few words to the underlying entity in which the entire Becoming takes place. This is the third principle of the Timaeian ontology mentioned above, introduced in the dialogue with the commencement of the ‘second beginning concerning the all’ (48e2). Previously, two things only were distinguished – the model and its copy – and they were deemed sufficient, because the account was not dwelling on the *details* of material creation. But now, when the physical elements and their properties are about to be described, the *tertium quid* of the *Timaeus* must be paid due attention. Understanding this thing is not an easy task, because it is very hard to explain through speeches such a form difficult and obscure (49a3-4).<sup>568</sup> “What power, then, and what nature must one suppose it to have? This above all: that it is a receptacle (*hypodochē*) of all becoming, its wet nurse (*tithēnē*), as it were” (49a5-6).

*Timaeus* is bound to introduce this Receptacle, because he finds no other way to explain how the changing phenomena could have any stand in reality. Water, through condensation, becomes earth; earth melts and dissolves and passes into air, which in turn transforms into fire,

---

<sup>567</sup> Johansen is most probably right in his claim that Necessity arose only *after* the ordering of the primordial chaos, and that it is attached to the geometrical nature of the primary bodies, which had shape and proportion laid upon them by the Demiurge (see 2004, pp. 97f). He, however, understands *anankē* as strict causal necessity, does not recognize any irregularity in its operation, and thus explains it away as a possible cause of badness. With this I disagree.

<sup>568</sup> “The receptacle is probably the hardest and most philosophically challenging concept in *Timaeus*.” (Gregory, 2008, p. xlix).

and the other way around. All elements perpetually change into one another,<sup>569</sup> so how can anything be called by a specific name and identified as a particular stuff, if there is nothing that survives the change? In a world devoid of a subject of change, extreme Heracliteanism would be the only ontology possible. Besides, no discourse concerning this world would be viable, or even possible, and one would have no other option but to resort, whatever the issue is, to the Cratylean moving of the finger.<sup>570</sup> Plato, however, wishes to ascribe some reality to the Becoming, and therefore resorts to this hard-to-comprehend concept of the Receptacle. It becomes the foundation of Becoming, by receiving and ‘housing’ the reflections of the Forms of earth, water, etc. The Receptacle is that in which (*en hōi*) these copies of the eternal things always present themselves as becoming (*engignomena aei hekasta autōn phantazetai*), and from which (*ekeithen*) they perish (49e7-8). The latter continually change and pass from existence into non-existence, and therefore evade any precise description, but the same cannot be said of that “nature which receives all bodies” (*ta panta dexomenēs sōmata physeōs*) (50b6). Unlike the reflections, it is always the same (*tauton*), because it never departs from its own character, although constantly receiving diverse things with different properties. That is why it is appropriate to apply the words ‘this’ and ‘that’ to the Receptacle only (50a1-2).<sup>571</sup> This much

---

<sup>569</sup> Later Timaeus corrects this assertion by offering a more precise account: in actuality, only three of the primary bodies are capable of changing into one another; the particles of the fourth one can group only to form the same body again (54b-d). After a while, the reader is informed that earth is the body which never goes into another form, while the particles of fire, air and water, after they have been dissolved, may combine into any of the others (56d-e).

<sup>570</sup> The last few sentences refer to a much disputed passage of the *Timaeus*, i.e. 49c-50a. Two main interpretative currents are attached to it – the one nowadays known as the traditional, the other instituted by Cherniss in his “A Much Misread Passage of the *Timaeus*” (1954) – and they both propose different translations of the passage. These are mainly based upon the variant readings of a single sentence - *aei ho kathorōmen allote allēi gignomenon, hōs pyr, mē touto alla to toiouton hekastote prosagoreuein pyr* (49d4-6): “whatever we observe as always coming to be, sometimes here, sometimes there – like, for example, fire – such fire on each occasion should be spoken of as what is such (*to toiouton*), not as this (*touto*).” This rendering is in accordance with the ‘traditional translations,’ which implies the following interpretation: what we colloquially call ‘fire’ should not be considered to be some stabile or fixed ‘this’, but a ‘fire-like’ phase of an ever-changing phenomenon. On the other hand, the ‘Chernissian’ translations take *touto* and *to toiouton* as subjects of the sentence, and interpret it to mean that no ‘this’, i.e. a particular phenomenal manifestation of fire should be called ‘fire’, but only that which is always ‘such’, i.e. something that is out of the constant flux. The possibility to conduct a reasoned discourse on the physical world is thus reduced to nil. There is, however, no need here to take any sides, because both interpretations underline the fleeting nature of the phenomenal fire, water, etc., which is the crucial issue. For a neat comparison of the both translations of the entire passage, short discussion and further references, see Zeyl 2000, pp. lvi-lxix. For a more detailed analysis of the debate, see Sallis 1999, pp. 101-105.

<sup>571</sup> Broadie (2012, p. 188) writes: “To motivate postulating the Receptacle, Plato has to exhibit fire and the others as essentially qualifications, the terms for them as essentially adjectival. Once this is accepted, then the picture cannot be complete without postulating a subject which they qualify, a fundamental *this* on which they depend.”

being said, it is opportune to ask what the Receptacle ‘own character’ actually is. That is a difficult question indeed, as Plato’s *Timaeus* himself confirms. We are dealing with a nature most difficult to grasp (*dysalōtotaton*), altogether invisible and qualityless (*anoraton eidos ti kai amorphon*). Weren’t it such, it couldn’t have been properly called all-receptive (*pandeches*), because it would have transferred its own sensible properties on the copies that are instantiated in it. Being an entity invisible and in every other way non-sensible, the Receptacle must somehow partake of the intelligible, but it does so in a most perplexing way (*aporōtata*) (51a7-b2). An additional reason why should it ‘partake of the intelligible’ is its affinity, in a very limited sense, with the Forms: exactly like the unchanging Being, the Receptacle, designated also as Space (*chōra*), is always existent (*on aei*) and never admits of destruction (*phthoran ou prosdechomenon*).<sup>572</sup> Like the Forms, and unlike Becoming, ‘the third kind’ has separate existence independent of the Demiurge.<sup>573</sup> In opposition to the Forms, however, it is unintelligent and thus, in unison with Necessity, acts as a limiting factor to the Demiurge’s best intention. Being characterless and eternal entity, it is naturally not subject to opinion and not apprehensible by the senses (*doxēi met’ aisthēseōs perilēpton*), as the Becoming is. But it is not a proper object of intellection (*noēsis*) either, like the Intelligibles are. This third kind is graspable by some kind of intermediate faculty, which *Timaeus* calls ‘bastard reasoning’, without the aid of the senses (*met’ anaisthēsiās hapton logismōi tini nothōi*) (52a-b). So, *chōra* is neither sensible, because it is totally devoid of sensible properties, nor intelligible, because it is situated apart from the realm of Forms, although it shares the properties of subsistence and eternity with it. That is why its existence is graspable with great difficulty, in almost a dream-like state, and that is why *Timaeus* ascribes a special cognitive modus to this peculiar entity.

Plato does not give us much more as far as the nature of the Receptacle is concerned. One thing concerning this difficult concept is, nevertheless, clear: it is supposed to serve as the substratum of the things which are in constant flux, as that entity which grants them some stand in reality, be it a lower, second-grade reality. The question that remains is how does the Receptacle receive the world of change – as a molding stuff, or as space? The text seemingly

---

<sup>572</sup> This is the place where the Receptacle is for the first time named *chōra*, i.e. Space (52a8). For the richness of meanings of the Greek word and an opinion on the best rendering, see Kalkavage 2001, pp. 142f. For a much more detailed discussion, complete with an account of the usage of the term in other texts of the Platonic corpus, see Sallis 1999, pp. 115ff.

<sup>573</sup> But also of the Intelligible world: “There is no archetype of Space, which exists in its own right as surely as does the Form” (Cornford 1937, p. 193).

allows for both interpretations. In the gold analogy (50a4-b5), the Receptacle is represented by the gold itself, whereas the interchanging primary bodies by the different figures fashioned out of gold. But since these triangles, etc., are always liable to be melted and reshaped into each other, they, strictly speaking, do not have independent subsistence, and are better designated simply as gold. What role would the gold play here, if not of a *material* substratum, temporarily characterized by some additional properties? The same principle is in play with yet another analogy, that of the odorless oily substance which is to receive different scents in the process of perfume making (50e4-f) – the odorless stuff is the *material* substratum of the scents. And similarly for the lump of wax (*ekmageion*), or any soft, characterless material on which shapes can be introduced with the help of a seal or some writing implement (50ac2, 50e8-10) – with the obvious difference that in these cases the shapes are not fashioned out of the material, but impressed upon it. However, regardless of whether they are fashioned out of, or imprinted upon the stuff, what we are dealing with is some material substratum which receives the different forms.

On the other hand, Plato's Timaeus directly denominates the Receptacle as *chōra*, a term that has to be associated with the concept of space, or room. But how is this space to be understood, especially in its function as the Receptacle of Becoming, i.e. as *spatial* substratum? Certainly not as the void (*to kenon*) of the Atomists, which is almost completely absent from the Timaeian cosmos (58a-b), neither as the Aristotelian *topos*, which is also not a substratum at all, but 'the innermost motionless boundary of the containing body' (*Phys.* IV. 212a20). It is also not the modern 'boundless three-dimensional extent in which objects and events occur and have relative position and direction.' Timaeus' space is not just a medium through which the primary bodies move, neither affecting it, nor being affected by it. The *chōra* has to be a plenum filled with itself – call this 'itself' material, stuff, or whatever – if it is to serve as that in which the reflections of the Forms appear and from which they perish (49e7-50a1), and if it is to be something that can be shaken by the traces of the primary bodies in their irregular motions, and which can shake them in return (52e-53a). Sheer extension or empty space cannot perform such functions. This understanding of *chōra* as plenum not only allows for a neat explanation of how the reflections of the Forms enter it, move it and configure it in different ways (50c2-3), but also

obliterates the initial problematic distinction between stuff-like and space-like substratum.<sup>574</sup> With this being said, the scene for the appearance of the pre-cosmic chaos is set, and now we can finally turn to it directly.

### II.1.3 Necessity as the origin of evil

Plato's picture of the pre-cosmic chaos sets a striking opposition between the elemental forces present in the Receptacle and the intelligent action of the Demiurge which turns them into a proper building material for the creation of the universe. What the god was faced with was an undifferentiated mass in aimless and irregular motion: *kinoumenon plēmmelōs kai ataktōs* (30a4). None of its constituents existed in the form in which they would later become known to the physicists, "nor was there anything at all whatsoever that was worthy of the names we now use to name things, such as 'fire' or 'water' or any of the others" (69c1-2). Before the Demiurge intervened and arrayed the chaos, everything that comprised it was without ratio and measure (*panta taut' eichen alogōs kai ametrōs*), and the primary bodies were recognizable only through certain traces of themselves (*ichnē men echonta hautōn atta*) (53a8-b2). The pre-cosmic chaos is indeed "[n]on-progressive, a dead end."<sup>575</sup> This means that it lacks any inherent principle of order<sup>576</sup> and that, left on its own, it would never organize into anything at all, much less into something good. This is the state of affairs that obtains whenever god is absent from anything (*hapan hotan apēi tinos theos*) (53b3). Therefore, before the formation of the cosmic body, the

---

<sup>574</sup> The last two paragraphs contain only several sketchy thoughts on a complex matter, inspired by the approach of Donald Zeyl. For a more comprehensive, but still introductory treatment of the subject, see Zeyl 2000, pp. lxi-lxiii. For a fully developed account, see Zeyl 2010.

<sup>575</sup> Gregory 2008, p. xlili

<sup>576</sup> One minor exception to this is the principle of attraction of like to like. It is, of course, beyond its power to accomplish anything but vague grouping of the most similar traces together. Cornford (1937, p. 199) writes: "In the shaking of the Receptacle the blind mechanical principle that like tends to get together with the like is operating; and the effect would be that the different 'kinds' would drift or be thrust into different regions. That is the nearest approach to cosmic order that could result from the purposeless interplay of dissimilar and unbalanced qualities." Johansen (2004, p. 96), however, seems to take the matter too far when claiming that the "[t]alk of bringing together like with like is in the case of the pre-cosmos something of a retrojection from the condition of the cosmos. For there is no inherent likeness between pre-cosmic appearances ... the principle of like to like only gains proper purchase once it can operate on bodies with natures in the cosmos." Timaeus quite unambiguously says that the grouping happens *during* the shaking of the Receptacle, and *before* the arraying of the elements with the help of shape and proportion (53a-b). Besides, the early semblances of fire, water, etc. are described as diverse powers (*dynameis*), and it is the mutual interaction of these powers that causes the disbalance of the Receptacle and their separation and grouping in different areas (52e).

Demiurge had to configure the elements first, by means of shapes and numbers: *prōton deischēmatisato eidesi te kai arithmois* (53b1-5).<sup>577</sup> This ‘informing’ of the elements, however, was not carried out to the god’s utmost satisfaction. From their previous state of ugliness and badness, he made them only as beautiful and excellent *as that was possible: to de hēi dynaton hōs kallista arista te ex ouch houtōs echontōn ton theon auta synistanai* (53b5-6). And therefrom the limitations that Necessity imposes on the operations of Reason: its constituents are beset by vestiges of the initial lack of beauty and order. Therefrom also the need Necessity to be persuaded into compliance with the divine plan, through which persuasion its inherently wandering nature is being checked, not completely, but as far as possible.<sup>578</sup> *Nous* persuades Necessity because he has no unlimited power over her, and cannot compel her to fully follow his dictates and work jointly with him towards the best result.<sup>579</sup> In the case of the construction of the Cosmic Soul, the Demiurge could use some force in blending the ‘hard to mix Difference’ into union with Sameness, because even the intermediate kind of Difference has some affinity with *nous*, by partaking significantly in the nature of the intelligible.<sup>580</sup> The constituents of Necessity are different: “sensible, begotten, always swept along ... graspable by opinion involving perception” (52a5-7). The nature of Necessity is given as something radically different from *nous*, an irreplaceable element in the creation of the cosmos not liable to full subjugation: “As reason scores only a partial victory over necessity, there is some residual chance and disorder.”<sup>581</sup> And that is why Necessity remains an “irreducible factor confronting Reason and never wholly subordinated.”<sup>582</sup> The Timaeian creator-god found his material in a state of disarray, practically unusable. He took it over and made it better, made it as pliable to his purpose as possible, but could not cleanse it of all its negative properties. One example of the Necessity’s recalcitrancy is given in the passage 74e-75c, where the account of the construction of the

<sup>577</sup> See also 69b8-c2: *alla panta tauta* (i.e. fire, water, etc.) *prōton diekosmēsen, epeit’ ek toutōn pan tode synestēsato*.

<sup>578</sup> Few suggestion on what ‘Reason’s persuasion of Necessity’ practically means for Plato in the context of the *Timaeus* are given in Gregory 2008, pp. xlvii-xlix

<sup>579</sup> For a radically different approach to the issue of the persuasion of Necessity, see Johansen 2004, pp. 99ff and Broadie 2012, p. 183.

<sup>580</sup> ‘The intermediate kind of Difference’ is constituted of the indivisible, unchanging Difference, and the divisible Difference which becomes in the realm of the bodily (the same principle, *mutatis mutandis*, applies to Existence and Sameness). As an intermediate kind compounded of both the eternal and the generated, it serves as a proper ingredient of the Soul which needs to operate in both realms. For a very helpful discussion on the construction of the Cosmic Soul, see Cornford 1937, pp. 59-66.

<sup>581</sup> Gregory 2008, p. xlvii

<sup>582</sup> Cornford 1937, p. 173

protective swathe of bones and flesh over the marrow is given.<sup>583</sup> As Cornford notes, “Physical qualities occur in groups of concomitants,”<sup>584</sup> which often exclude or suspend each other. Thus thickness of the flesh and denseness of the bone provide immunity to injury, but go ill with sensitiveness, being bound to produce dullness. That is why the head is covered with minimum flesh and brittle bone – longevity is sacrificed for the sake of sensitiveness. Were the properties of hardness and acutely attentive sensation willing to coincide, we would have the best result conceivable – well protected and sensitive head. But since dullness is a concomitant of hardness, we have instead the best result possible – ill protected and sensitive head. The Demiurge “could not group physical qualities in such a way as to secure all the ends he desired.”<sup>585</sup>

All these statements underline the insufficiency of the material used in the creation, and in this way only should Necessity be pointed out as the cause of evil. She does not play that unholy role willingly – because she lacks any conscious element<sup>586</sup> – nor does she represent an independent principle of badness, as something inherently evil. Necessity is simply a limiting factor, the basis of all deficiency and depravity, principle of imperfection that makes our world what it is, i.e. something less than the world of Being, and consequently inhabited by entities perishable and prone to innumerable failings. Plato isolates *anankē* as the cause of evil (*kakopoion*), but not also as evil in itself (*kakon*). The cosmos, produced by the best of cause, is, overall, good and beautiful. There are no independent forces of evil in it. Still, it contains “faults inseparable from physical realization in space.”<sup>587</sup> So, the innate imperfection of the material of which the cosmos is built makes its residents experience various varieties of calamities and insufficiencies. This Necessity is inseparable from her basis, the Receptacle, or the *chōra*, upon which the building blocks of Necessity subsist and without which there could be no materiality. Necessity as materiality, or more precisely, corporeality (*sōmatoeides*), arises in an obscure way from the contact of two non-empirical factors. The first are the images of the Forms, described in the *Timaeus* as ‘suchnesses’ or qualities, while the second is the Receptacle, their substratum and an entity which is “neither body nor incorporeal, but potentially body.”<sup>588</sup> Necessity and the Receptacle should therefore, although distinct – the former being presented as a causal factor in

---

<sup>583</sup> For a brief discussion of this passage see *supra*, pp. 100f

<sup>584</sup> Cornford 1937, p. 175

<sup>585</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 176

<sup>586</sup> A point which Plutarch, apparently, denies when locating the origin of badness in the evil world soul.

<sup>587</sup> Guthrie 1978, p. 94

<sup>588</sup> Alcinous, *The Handbook of Platonism*, in Dillon 1993, p. 16

the Timaeian universe, the latter as a full-fledged entity and the ontological basis of the former – be viewed in unison. In the *Timaeus*, the *chōra-anankē* complex is responsible both for the insufficiencies, imperfections and disturbances that beset the universe,<sup>589</sup> and for the violent agitations of the soul.<sup>590</sup> It is therefore the necessary condition for the existence of badness, and in this way its principle. As a principle of badness, *chōra-anankē* is on the furthest remove possible from the principle of goodness operative in the universe, which is, in the *Timaeus*, identified as divine Reason. This principle of badness or evil is thus the Reason's *enantion*, and furthermore, having a lower ontological status and being to a significant degree subordinate to the latter, it could also be called its *hypoenantion*. So, I believe that it is reasonable enough to assume that there is a sufficient matching between the 'ontology' of the *Theaetetus* 176a-b and the cosmology of the *Timaeus*; the unidentified opposite of the Good in the *Theaetetus*, to which all responsibility for the world's evils has been relegated, is in the *Timaeus* unambiguously pinpointed as the material component of the cosmic compound, which we usually call by the name of Necessity.<sup>591</sup>

---

<sup>589</sup> As it will be confirmed in the *Politicus* myth.

<sup>590</sup> See *Tim.* 43a-44b

<sup>591</sup> This does not mean that Plato, while writing the *Theaetetus*, already had the *Timaeus* in mind. Such a supposition is not outrightly absurd, but it is also very well possible that Plato entertained some thoughts on the problem of evil that made him gradually move in the direction of forming something like a theory, which becomes for the first time apparent in the *Timaeus*, and which receives further confirmation in the *Politicus*.

## II.2 The origin of evil in the *Politicus*

### II.2.1 The myth of the *Politicus*

I have stated above (p. 169) that, in Plato's view, were the accessory causes – i.e. *anankē*, *planōmenē aitia*, or the bodily constituents of the universe – left on their own, they would inevitably deteriorate and eventually plummet into utter disorder and destruction. This idea is not expressed explicitly in the *Timaeus*, but it can be unproblematically deduced from the descriptions of the pre-cosmic conditions, and especially from 53b, where the chaotic behavior of the elemental traces is explained as a disposition ascribable to anything devoid of god's presence. A natural consequence of such a view would be the inference that god, or Reason, is the cause of order, and thus beauty and goodness, while the bodily nature is the cause of everything opposite to that.<sup>592</sup> This inference is strongly supported by another great myth related by Plato, namely the one that appears in the *Politicus* 268d-276e. With the *Politicus* myth, corporeality, or the Timaeian Necessity, is once again brought in the forefront as a cause of all badness in the universe.

It is nowadays a matter of general consensus that the *Politicus* belongs to the last chronological group of Plato's dialogues (including the *Timaeus-Critias*, the *Sophist*, the *Philebus* and the *Laws*), and there are some indications that it had been written before the *Timaeus*.<sup>593</sup> Dramatically it stands as the last dialogue of the trilogy comprised of the *Theaetetus*, the *Sophist* and itself, as it is obvious from Socrates' remark at 258a. There it is stated that his conversation with Theaetetus had taken place on the previous day, and that the Stranger from Elea held a conversation with the same young mathematician earlier that day (the *Sophist*), while for the present one (the *Politicus*) another discussant should be elected, namely the young

---

<sup>592</sup> Although inherently disorderly and ugly, the bodily nature also possesses the random tendency to adhere to form, to present itself to a formative factor, to submit itself to ordering. Still, because it is utterly unable to attain to proportion and seemliness on its own, it remains the principle of disorderliness which must be kept under control at all times, or else it could only deteriorate.

<sup>593</sup> See Brandwood's *Chronology of Plato's Dialogues* (1990), where he summarizes and examines the work done on Platonic stylometry, starting with its pioneer, Lewis Campbell. See also his article-length treatment of the subject in Brandwood 1992, especially pp. 113f.

Socrates.<sup>594</sup> For an unheeding reader, Plato's *Politicus* is a rather tiring piece of writing which professes to track down the true statesman through a series of seemingly endless divisions. This dialogue, however, offers more than an elaborate exercise in the diairetic method of definition, although the enterprise seems to be undertaken with the main aim to educate the readers in this method and thus help them become "better dialecticians in relation to all subjects" (285d5-6).<sup>595</sup> It contains important insights into Platonic ethics and, especially, political theory. Probably most prominent among these are the conclusions that the real statesman ought to be nurturer of the souls of his subjects,<sup>596</sup> that he, in order to be genuine, have to embody the seemingly contradictory virtues of manliness and moderation and weave them into the fabric of the *polis* (310e-311c), and that, since ideal monarchy is hardly possible, "the sovereignty of law is the *succedaneum* for an actual theocracy"<sup>597</sup> (293c-d and 297d-e).<sup>598</sup> Of special significance for us are, of course, the cosmological themes and their implications, which are advanced in the first major digression of the dialogue,<sup>599</sup> i.e. in the well known myth of the *Politicus*.

As a continuation of the *Sophist*, the *Politicus* sets out to define its subject, this time the science or art of the statesman, through application of the method of division. The initial *diairesis* ends up with defining the statesman as 'the expert in human-herding' (266e). This definition is, however, declared incomplete (267d), because it overlooks the numerous rivals that might aspire for the position of rearers of human beings: merchants, farmers, millers, bakers, gymnastic trainers and doctors (267e-268a). Unlike in the case of a proper herdsman, who provides for all the necessities of his flock, including entertainment (268b), the ruler of people has to depend on his subjects for many of the functions that a herdsman of non-human animals performs singlehandedly. The former, therefore, cannot be singled out as the sole caretaker of the human beings, and the result of the *diairesis* is thus proven to be faulty. However, instead of undertaking a further division, by which the statesman and his art would be fully and adequately isolated, the Stranger announces a new starting point which will lead the discussion to its goal by

---

<sup>594</sup> Kenneth Dorter (1994) puts the *Parmenides* first in the series, and designates this loosely taken tetralogy as 'Plato's Eleatic dialogues'.

<sup>595</sup> See Guthrie 1978, p. 163. Cf., however, Taylor 1949, p. 393

<sup>596</sup> See Ferrari 1995, p. 396

<sup>597</sup> Taylor 1949, p. 403

<sup>598</sup> For a book-length exposition of the structure of the dialogue and careful step-by-step analysis of the text, see Miller 2004. The Introductions of Skemp (1952), Ostwald (1992) and Rowe (1995) are also worth noting.

<sup>599</sup> The second one being the digression on paradigm, and on the true standard of proportion and the mean (277a-287b).

a different road (268d). This different road is a great tale (*megas mythos*), related by the Stranger and meant to somehow dispel the obscurities and set the issue of definition straight. This is a rather surprising move, because it is not easy to see how a mythical tale would correct or supplement what is supposed to be a logical method of division. And indeed, the relatively extensive myth accomplishes little as far as straightening the immediately preceding argument is concerned. The myth doesn't need to show that the argument's result is inadequate,<sup>600</sup> because that was already clearly stated by the Stranger. Nevertheless, it does profess to explain *why* the definition arrived at is inadequate: in their search for the statesman the Stranger and young Socrates were led astray because they neglected to acknowledge that the actual statesman is, after all, a fallible human being; what the division revealed was a god, the true shepherd of the human herd who used to tend us in a bygone age (274e-275a).<sup>601</sup> This is, however, an accomplishment meager and disproportionate to the complexity of the myth and its alleged status of a 'new beginning' and 'fresh route' in the process of defining the statesman. It is therefore apposite to suppose that the myth has a purpose, or purposes, independent from the rest of the dialogue.<sup>602</sup> Such a purpose, and a very prominent one indeed, is to turn the reader's attention to the problem of evil and its causes: ours is a world where goods are mixed with evils, and where the latter predominate. In the same vein, and in accordance with the Timaeian doctrine,<sup>603</sup> the

<sup>600</sup> This is what Guthrie (1978, p. 182) takes to be one of the two main lessons of the myth.

<sup>601</sup> Campbell (1867, 'Introduction to the Statesman', p. xxxvi) believes that the main purpose of the myth is to expose as mistaken the idealization of unlimited monarchy and theocracy. Sayre (2006, pp. 25f) holds that the drawing of the distinction between divine and mortal ruler is crucial, because with its help is done the work of distinguishing the statesman from the merchant, farmer, etc, which is "the avowed purpose of the myth."

<sup>602</sup> The Stranger himself seems to confirm this by saying: "We took upon ourselves an astonishing mass of material in the story we told, so forcing ourselves to use a greater part of it than necessary" (277b4-6). Scholars have responded in various ways to the challenge of locating the alternative purposes of the myth. Rowe, for example, writes: "Over and above its function in the argument, it is a story told for its own sake ... It also serves to provide us both with an account of the world-order to which the microcosm of individual human communities or cities belongs, and with a response to the democratic myth of the origins related by Protagoras in the dialogue Plato names after him" (1995, p. 11). For a reading of the myth as a subtly devised *logos* with two purposes separate from the main argumentative flow, see Miller 2004, pp. 36f. For a different take on the whole issue, see Ferrari 1995. He claims that "[t]he myth acquires its full importance only when considered in terms of the complete dialogue ... the relation in which it stands to the complete dialogue is that of foundation to edifice ..." (p. 391). The fundamental point that the myth makes is "that humans are technological animals" (ibid.), "the response of human reason to necessity is embodied in technology" (p. 392).

<sup>603</sup> Provided the *Politicus* is later than the *Timaeus*, and not earlier, as suggested by Brandwood (see fn. 593). But the issue of chronology is not very pertinent here; the cosmologies of the *Timaeus* and the *Politicus* share so many common ideas, especially on the issues of corporeality and the origin of evil, that it is plausible to suppose that Plato, while writing one of these dialogues, had the other in mind. For a brief discussion of the similarities and differences between the *Timaeus* and the *Politicus* myth and further references on the issue, see *infra*, pp. 188f, fns. 608, 611.

source of evil is unambiguously located in materiality, or the bodily nature. Understandably, our interest will be focused on this aspect of the tale.<sup>604</sup>

The myth is introduced by a preamble, in which three seemingly separate mythical motifs are evoked (268e-269c). The first one refers to the quarrel between Atreus and Thyestes and the subsequent reversal of the course of the sun and the other stars effected by Zeus in favor of Atreus. The second is the well known tale of the ‘golden age,’ which the souls enjoyed during the rule of Cronus,<sup>605</sup> while the third is the equally famous image of the earth-born people.<sup>606</sup> In his own tale, the Stranger promises to weave together and clarify these traditional motifs, by pointing out the single unifying condition (*pathos*) due to which they all arise (269b-c). The condition in question turns out to be the periodic reversal of the universe’s rotation: sometimes it is under god’s direct care and guidance and it moves in a circle in a certain direction, i.e. from west to east, while at other times, when the allotted measure of revolutions is completed, god retires and the universe rotates in the opposite direction.<sup>607</sup> The backward movement is attached to the universe of necessity, and it is due to its corporeal nature, which cannot remain permanently self-same and unchanged. One should not, therefore, think that the universe is itself responsible for both courses of turning, nor that god is behind both of the opposed revolutions,

---

<sup>604</sup> Some other important insights that are to be gained with the help of the myth, besides those already mentioned, are that a) all human beings – and especially the ruler – imperfect as they certainly are, should nevertheless emulate god if they wish to live a life of social harmony and peace; b) no amount of social harmony and harmless pleasures will make one’s life worth living and truly happy if devoid of philosophy.

<sup>605</sup> For an information on the historical treatment of the golden age in the Greek literature, see Vidal-Naquet 1978.

<sup>606</sup> For a short background of the stories and few references to pre-platonic literature and Plato’s dialogues where some of them also appear or are hinted at, see *op. cit.*, pp. 136f. For a detailed account of the Hesiodic ‘age of Cronus’ and its significance within the context of the *Politicus* myth, see Miller 2004, pp. 41ff.

<sup>607</sup> The interpretation of the universe’s forward and backward revolutions has become a debated issue. The traditional view on the revolutions in the myth envisages two alternating eras, one of which is tagged by Plato as ‘the age of Cronus’, the other as ‘the age of Zeus’. During the former, the universe rotates in the eastward direction, during the latter, which is the present age, it moves in another, i.e. the opposite direction. The alternative interpretation, initially proposed by Lovejoy and Boas (1935), developed by Brisson (1995) and defended, with modifications, by Rowe (1995), assumes that there are three cosmic periods: during both the age of Cronus and the age of Zeus, the universe moves from east to west – the direction with which we are familiar; the opposite revolution takes place in the brief intermediate period, which starts with the god’s abandoning of the universe’s helm and ends when the universe gains enough self-possession to be able to return to the normal course of rotation (see Rowe 1995, pp. 13, 189f, 191f). Carone (2004 and 2005, pp. 124ff), goes a step further and claims that not only the rotation is uniform in both Cronus’ and Zeus’s age, but also that in both periods god is supervising and taking care of the universe. This is not the place to offer any comments on this issue, but I have to acknowledge my allegiance with the traditional interpretation. The alternative one, e.g., implies that the era of the earth-born people takes place in the intermediate period of reverse rotation; that is, however, a period of intense turmoil and destruction, during which it is hard to conceive that anything productive could be taking place. As for Carone’s view, despite her best efforts to prove the opposite, it remains in stark contrast with the textual evidence.

nor again that two gods in spirit of enmity are leading it in the opposite directions. The matter of fact is that at the time when god is its guardian, the universe partakes in life of immortality and blessedness, but when god withdraws, it changes course and moves backwards under its own power (269c-270b).<sup>608</sup> The immediate results of such cosmic reversal are catastrophes of huge proportions, affecting both human and animal life, but also curious reversal of biological processes: the direction of aging changes and the living creatures (except for the plants) grow younger instead of older and vice versa, depending on the period. In the one when the people start off as old men and end their lives as babies falling on the ground and disappearing into it, they also take birth or emerge from the earth, not needing any human agent to parent them (270b-271c). The time during which god is in full control of the universe is also known as the age of Cronus, when *daimones* appointed by god tend the living beings as herdsmen, when the earth provides all necessities of life spontaneously, and therefore the human race has no need of agriculture, nor of any other craft or art. Furthermore, since the human beings are earth-born, they know of no families or organized communities. As a consequence of these conditions, they have no use of political constitutions and political organizations of any kind, which would normally regulate their behavior and provide protection. Their standard of happiness, however, should not be measured against the amount of leisure and merriment they enjoy, but the sole criterion should be whether they utilize these advantages to practice philosophy and pursue wisdom (271c-272d). When the time appointed for the duration of the age of Cronus runs out, god, followed by his deputies, leaves the helm of the universe and retires to his observation-post. Then the cosmos, propelled by its innate desire (*symphytos epithymia*), embarks on the reverse course and suffers great disturbances; after a while it manages to stabilize itself. The age of Zeus begins, and the universe for some time rotates smoothly, remembering the instructions of its craftsman and father (*dēmiourgos kai patēr*). But later on forgetfulness unavoidably sets in, and the cosmic processes start to deteriorate, until the universe almost plunges into the ‘boundless

---

<sup>608</sup> God’s turning his back on the universe and abandoning it completely is rather striking; the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*, after completing his duty of primary creation, also retires and remains residing in his own proper abode (42e5-6), but never truly relinquishes the reins and allows his creation to suffer radical upheavals. This brings us to the issue of the ‘historicity’ of the cosmological account in the *Politicus*, on which a broad consensus seems to have been reached: the literal reading of the myth is scarcely possible. In accordance with their general methodological approach to the Platonic myths, already the Neoplatonists advanced a non-literal interpretation of the *Politicus* (see Dillon 1995). This trend was preserved by most of the modern scholars, From Campbell (1867), to Rowe (1995). For some good arguments against the literal interpretation, see Carone 2005, pp. 147ff.

sea of dissimilarity' (*tēs anomoiotētos apeiron onta ponton*).<sup>609</sup> Seeing its condition and desiring to deliver it from utter destruction, god again takes the reins of the universe in his hands and sets everything in order, and renders the universe ageless and immortal once again (272d-273e). As for the investigation into the nature of the kingly craft and the statesman, only one part of the myth is relevant to it. It concerns the reversal of the coming to be and the direction of growth from the previous to the present model, or the passage from the age of Cronus to the age of Zeus. In the former, the human beings were under full control of the divine herdsmen and thus careless, while in the latter, i.e. the present period, they started facing the possibility of destruction from the inimical forces of nature and the other creatures that had gone wild. That is why the gods bestowed the gifts of fire (Prometheus) and the crafts (Hephaestus and Athena) upon them, and that is why human beings developed the ability for political organization. This account is meant to expose the greatest mistake in defining the statesman as the expert in human herding, because he was thus inadvertently mistaken for the shepherd of the previous period, who indeed provided full care for the human herd, and who, besides belonging to another age, was a god and not a mortal (273e-275a).

## II.2.2 To *sōmatoeides* in the *Politicus* myth

With the contents of the myth thus outlined, we can now turn to the problem of presence of badness in the universe and its cause. This issue is evoked in two separate passages, which are very important for the understanding of Plato's stance on evil. The first one appears close to the beginning of the tale:

This universe the god himself (*autos ho theos*) sometimes accompanies, guiding it on its way and helping it to move in a circle, while at other times he lets it go, when the circuits have completed the measure of the time allotted to it; then it revolves back in the opposite direction, of its own accord, being a living creature (*zōon on*) and having had intelligence assigned to it (*phronēsin eilēchos*) by the one who fitted it together in the beginning. This backward movement is inborn in it from necessity (*ex anankēs emphyton*), for the following reason ... Remaining permanently in the same state and condition, and being permanently the same (*to kata tauta kai hōsautōs echein aei kai tauton einai*), belongs only to the most divine things of all (*theiotatois*), and by its nature body is not of this order (*sōmatos*

---

<sup>609</sup> For the substitution of the *topon* of the MS tradition for *ponton*, see Rowe 1995, p. 195 and Dillon 1995, pp. 365f

*de physis ou tautēs tēs taxeōs*). Now the things to which we have given the name of ‘heavens’ and ‘cosmos’ certainly have a portion of many blessed things from its progenitor, but on the other hand it also has its share of body (*kekoinōnēke ge kai sōmatos*). In consequence it is impossible for it to be altogether exempt from change, although as far as is possible, given its capacities, it moves in the same place, in the same way, with a single motion; and this is why it has reverse rotation as its lot, which is the smallest possible variation of its previous movement (269c4-e4).

The set of ideas that can loosely be called ‘Plato’s theory of evil’ presented in the *Politicus* are complementary to those already exposed in *Timaeus*. Starting with the two entities around which these ideas are intertwined, it is easily noticeable that the deity and the universe of the *Politicus* have many features in common with those of the *Timaeus*,<sup>610</sup> although they are also distinguished by some important differences.<sup>611</sup> As in the *Timaeus*, god is here the one who fits and puts the universe together (*synarmosias*, 269d1; *syntheis*, 273b7), its progenitor (*gennēsas*, 269d9), the universe’s orderer (*kosmēsas*, 273d4), and, most characteristically, its *dēmiourgos kai patēr* (273b1-2);<sup>612</sup> he is the bestower of intelligence, and all that is good to the universe (269d1; 269d8, 273b8). The god of the *Politicus* is not omnipotent in the Timaeian sense – he operates on a coeval corporeal substance.<sup>613</sup> The cosmos, like in the *Timaeus*, is a living creature,

<sup>610</sup> For the main common features see Rowe 1995, p. 188

<sup>611</sup> Nightingale (1996, pp. 76ff) holds that “the myth in the Statesman conflicts in fundamental ways with the cosmology of the *Timaeus*” (p. 77), but this could be an exaggeration. Of the opposite opinion is Adam (1891), who believes that the myth can and should be squared with the *Timaeus* story, as well as that it provides significant insights into Plato’s cosmology. This short and provocative article tries to bring the cosmologies of the two dialogues closer both on linguistic and argumentative basis. Here it is not possible to critically examine the views of Nightingale and Adam, and that interesting task has to be left for some other time. For an overview of both the similarities and the differences between these two dialogues, see Campbell 1867, pp. xxxvii-xxxix, and Dorter 1994, pp. 192-194. However, it should be noted that the most striking differences, like the god’s abandonment of the universe, the latter’s reverse rotation and its sliding to the verge of total destruction, probably do not have any serious cosmological import, but are mythical pictures meant to push forward an important philosophical idea. I take them to be a ‘practical application’ of the Timaeian notion that the bodily nature devoid of the Intellect’s supervision can only deteriorate, to the point of decomposition. This would mean that the issue of the origin of evil is high on Plato’s agenda in the *Politicus* myth. A significant addition of cosmological import, however, is the characterization of the Demiurge as somebody who always turns itself by itself (*auto heauto strephein aei*, 269e5). No self-moving Demiurge is mentioned in the *Timaeus*. Robinson (1967, pp. 58ff) attempts to explain this particular *autokinēsis*, but he, like Taylor, takes the Demiurge to be the *aristē psychē*, not a separate *nous*. The *Politicus* myth thus provides support to this particular understanding of the Demiurge, considering that the identification of the self-moving entity with a soul is in conformity with the account of the soul in the *Phaedrus* and the *Laws X*.

<sup>612</sup> For the first of the two appellations, see also 270a5

<sup>613</sup> Robinson’s claim (1967, p. 58), however, that he is also “subject ... to *anankē* and *themis* and *heimarmenē*,” is exaggerated. All three terms he lists apply to the cosmos, not to the *Politicus*’s Demiurge (see 269d3, 269e7, 272e6).

ensouled<sup>614</sup> and intelligent (269d1). But unlike in the *Timaeus*, its intelligence is not constant, but fallible and prone to succumb to forgetfulness. This innate imperfection of the world is symbolized by its backward movement, which is installed into it by necessity (*ex anankēs*), which inevitably brings to mind the Timaeian Necessity. As the latter in the *Timaeus* was understood to be a consequence of materiality, so the necessary backward movement in the *Politicus* is a product of two conditions, which are in fact opposite sides of the same coin. The first one is the world's separateness from the most divine Forms<sup>615</sup> – the only permanent, stable, self-same entities, while the second is its share in the corporeal nature, which contributes the unwanted, but unavoidable feature of disorderliness and proneness to change. This proneness to change (*metabolē*), as it will become clear later, is in fact nothing else but proneness to deterioration, even disintegration, which is the state of affairs that would obtain if, *per impossibile*, the *planōmenē aitia* of the *Timaeus* were left to act on its own, without the guidance of *nous*, or, as Timaeus puts it poetically, which obtains ‘whenever god is absent from anything’ (53b3). The reverse rotation of the cosmos thus stands as a symbol of the inborn and ever-present element of disorderliness in the world,<sup>616</sup> while its cause is unambiguously identified as the world's participation in the corporeal (*sōmatōeides*). Plato makes it quite clear that this ‘share of body’ is something bad, when he contrasts it with the world's partaking of the many blessed things (269d8-9), which it receives from another source, namely the progenitor. So, again as in the *Timaeus*, all the goodness that the universe possesses comes from a divine source, while the responsibility for the badness is relegated to corporeality.<sup>617</sup>

A more detailed description of the mythical effect of the corporeal element, i.e. the reverse revolution of the universe, is launched at 272e. In the passage that follows, Plato brings

---

<sup>614</sup> This is not stated in the text, but from the *Timaeus* we know that it is impossible for intellect (*nous*) apart from soul to be present in anything (30b), hence a living being, if it possesses intelligence (*phronēsis*), it also needs to have a soul.

<sup>615</sup> On the interpretation followed here – as against the second interpretative option mentioned in n. 611 above – ‘the most divine things’ of 269d5-6 are the Forms and not the Demiurge: first, because in referring to them plural number is used; second, because they are static, while god in the *Politicus* is described as an entity in self-induced motion (269e5).

<sup>616</sup> Dillon (1995, p.365), referring to Proclus' interpretation of the myth, writes: “[t]he ‘reverse revolution’ ... is simply the irreducible refractoriness of the material element in the universe, very much like the disorderly motion of the *Timaeus*.” The disorder in the *Politicus* myth comes in degrees; at the beginning, the world in reverse is still quite orderly. In course of time, however, pulled by the ‘gravitational force’ of the corporeal element, it tumbles into utter chaos and draws close to destruction. That is when the god must intervene and reestablish order, and thus also the universe's divinity and immortality (272e-273e).

<sup>617</sup> “All the world's good derives from [god]; all its evil is to be attributed to the presence of the bodily element in it, and to its forgetfulness of his instructions” (Robinson 1967, p. 58).

to life the hypothetical state of absence of god, and thus, through a pictorial form, shows how the *sōmatoeides*, closely connected with the Timaeian *anankē*, is responsible for everything that is bad and unwanted in the universe. The story starts with the god's temporary retirement from his duties of guardianship. After the cosmic *kybernētēs* had let go of the steering oars and withdrew to his observation-post (*periōpē*), the universe was left on its own. As a consequence, fate and innate desire (*heimarmenē te kai symphytos epithymia*)<sup>618</sup> made it revolve in the opposite direction.

And as it turned about and came together with itself, impelled with opposing movements, both the one that was beginning and the one that was now ending, it produced a great tremor in itself, which in its turn brought about another destruction of all sorts of living things. After this, when sufficient time has elapsed, it began to cease from noise and confusion and attained calm from its tremors; it set itself in order, into the accustomed course that belonged to it, itself taking charge of and mastering both the things within it and itself, because it remembered so far as it could the teachings of its craftsman and father. At the beginning it fulfilled his teachings more accurately, but in the end less keenly; the cause of this was the bodily element in its mixture (*toutōn de autōi to sōmatoeides tēs synkraseōs aition*), its companion since its origins long in the past, because this element was marked by a great disorder (*ataxia*) before it entered into the present world-order. For from the one that put it together the world possesses all fine things (*para men gar tou synthentos panta kala kektētai*); from its previous condition (*para de tēs emprosthen hexeōs*), on the other hand, it both has from itself from that source everything that is bad and unjust (*hosa chalepa kai adika*) in the heavens, and produces it in its turn in the living things. So while it reared living things in itself in company with the steersman, it created only slight evils, and great goods; but in separation from him, during all the time closest to the moment of his letting go, it manages everything very well, but as time moves on and forgetfulness increases in it, the condition of its original disharmony (*tēs palaias anarmostias pathos*) also takes greater control of it, and, as this time ends, comes to full flower. Then the goods it mixes in are slight, but the admixture it causes of the opposite is great, and it reaches the point where it is in danger of destroying both itself and the things in it. It is for this reason that now the god who ordered it, seeing it in difficulties, and concerned that it should not, storm-tossed as it is, be broken apart in confusion and sink into the boundless sea of unlikeness (*tēs anomoiotētos apeiron onta ponton*), takes his position again at its steering-oars, and having turned round what had become diseased and been broken apart in the previous rotation, when the world was left to itself, orders it and by setting it straight renders it immortal and ageless (273a-e4).

---

<sup>618</sup> 272e6. 'Fate' here is again closely related to the non-providential, non-teleological cause of the *Timaeus*, i.e. *anankē*. This is confirmed by the ancient commentators. See Plutarch 1026b3-4: "[n]ecessity ... which by most people is called destiny (*anankēn, hēn heimarmenēn hoi polloi kalousin*), and Proclus (in Dillon 1995, p. 369). The 'innate desire' is not an irrational drive of the World-Soul, as Robinson seems to understand it. As the quoted passage which follows will make it clear, it does not represent any psychic faculty at all; the expression is a metaphor for the causal influence of the bodily element, which stands in opposition to the *phronēsis* of the World-Soul (cf. Rowe 1995, p. 194).

After the elaborate mythical layers of this passage are stripped off, its message remains clear and uncontroversial: the good things in the universe are from its creator, while everything bad and unjust is due to the disorderly condition which preceded the stage of divine intervention and ordering of the world (273b6-c2). This condition represents the original state of the world, i.e. the state in which it remains after one, by the process of abstraction, eliminates the element of Reason from it. Disorder is, however, a property, and not a free-floating one; it belongs to the irrational corporeal element (*sōmatoeides*), which enters into the constitution of the cosmos only after being subdued and ordered by the benevolent deity (273b4-6). Furthermore, the disorderliness of the corporeal element can never really be ‘cleansed’ out of the world, but remains inseparable from it and bears the responsibility for its falling away from the ideal standard which Reason is trying establish. The world’s ‘forgetfulness of the teachings of its craftsman and father’ (273b1-3, 273c6) is actually a symbol of its share in the recalcitrant nature, which needs constant supervision, and which is contributed by the bodily element. Were the Reason-principle to relinquish control, the powers of disorder and disharmony would gradually take over the entire universe, and bring it to the point of utter disarray, ugliness, and ultimately destruction. Decadence is thus the nature of corporeality, and it is always prone to infect anything it comes close to with the same trait. To illustrate this point, Plato in the *Politicus* imagines a picture of the world from which the Reason-principle or god has withdrawn; such a world ceases to be a cosmos, disintegrates and sinks into ‘the limitless sea of unlikeness’ (273d6-e1).

This ‘unlikeness’ (*anomoiotēs*) is the state of the world furthest removed from the state of order into which the Demiurge brought the universe long time ago. In other words, it represents the original chaos of the *Timaeus*, or the great *ataxia* of the *Politicus*, present before the world was turned into a *cosmos*. Here the unlikeness, symbolizing constant change and ultimate instability (comparable with the dissolution of the geometrical shapes given to the primary bodies by the Timaeian Demiurge), is also the last stage on the world’s degenerative course which the latter follows whenever ‘god withdraws from it.’ However, being supremely benevolent, god never actually retires. Instead, by his constant presence he gives the cosmos its goodness and immortality. Regarding the images of the chaos and the sea of unlikeness in the *Timaeus* and the *Politicus*, Cornford, following Proclus, writes the following: “If we discount

these mythical devices, both myths present a picture as it would be if the works of Reason were abstracted, and the one may be used to illustrate the other.”<sup>619</sup> The chaos and the unlikeness are thus permanent features of corporeality. Being inherently disorderly and decadent, it stands in opposition to the providential care and the teleological directedness of Reason.<sup>620</sup> Corporeality is therefore the prime source of all evils, and the instigator of the *athanatos machē* between the forces of good and bad (*Laws* 906a-b), which rages within the universe and which engulfs within its currents the individual creatures as well, who have a share both of the nature of Reason and of the bodily nature. God, or Reason, is therefore, not responsible for the evils that infest his creation. Plato has been claiming this and advising that some other cause of the evils should be sought since the *Republic* 379c; that cause, which has been murkily suggested in the *Theaetetus* and elaborated in the *Timaeus*, is now strongly confirmed in the *Politicus*. The *hypenantion* that stands opposed to the Good in the *Theaetetus* and the *anankē* of the *Timaeus* are *to sōmatoeides*, the prime cause of evil which spreads its influence both to the world and to its inhabitants, i.e. both to nature and the individual soul.

To reiterate, this is not to say that corporeality is an active force of evil which independently strives to undermine the benevolent intentions of the Reason-principle, or even overcome this force of the good; there are no traces of Manichean dualism in Plato’s cosmology and theology. It is the source of evil simply as a limiting factor, as an unavoidable *datum* by whose very existence the overall goodness of the creation is flawed. The factual state of affairs in the world is that it is a complex of the bodily and of the ideal, and any such complex produces far lesser results than the world devoid of the bodily, as well as numerous disturbances which absolutely lack from the ideal nature.

---

<sup>619</sup> Cornford, 1937, p. 207

<sup>620</sup> It is significant that the ‘see of unlikeness’ is qualified as limitless (*apeiron*). This term calls to mind, and rightly so, the *Philebus* passages (16c-d and 23c-26d) where the limit and the limitless (*peras kai apeiron*) are posited as two basic kinds which underlie everything that now exists in the universe (*panta ta nyn onta en tōi panti*, 23c3). Aristotle understood the unlimited as a synonym for the Indefinite Dyad (987b25-27), which is, according to him, the Platonic material principle (988a10-15) and the source of evil (*tou kakōs aitian*, 988a14). The source of good is the One, which is also the formal cause of the world. Theophrastus followed Aristotle in his understanding of the basis of Platonic ontology, and wrote that, according to Plato (and the Pythagoreans), in the Dyad reside “the infinite and the disordered and, in general, all shapelessness as such” (*kai to apeiron kai to atakton kai pasa hōs eipein amorphia kath’ hautēn*, *Met.* 11b3-5). Although the teaching of the two causes of the sensible world, namely the Forms (and their source, the One), and the Indefinite Dyad (or the Great and the Small) is usually referred to as belonging to Plato’s *agrapha dogmata*, it could very well be, at least to a certain extent, deduced from the *Philebus*. For an overview of the modern interpretations of limit and the limitless in the *Philebus* and his own insights on the issue, see Sayre 2005, pp. 95-117.

### II.3 Does Plato propose a conflicting theory of the origin of evil in the *Laws X*?

The foregoing understanding of the Platonic cause of evil, as attractive and well-founded as it may sound (at least within the context of the *Timaeus* and the *Statesman*), still has to answer a serious challenge in order to be deemed acceptable. The challenge is posed by two explicit and closely connected claims found in Plato's later dialogues. The first one is the verdict of the *Laws* that soul is the cause of everything (*tōn pantōn aitia*, 896d8), and therefore also responsible for the existence of all sets of opposites, including the good and the bad (*tōn te agathōn aitian einai psychēn kai tōn kakōn*, 896d5-6). The second is the famous dictum of the *Phaedrus* 245c9 and the *Laws* 896b3, according to which soul is the cause of all motion (*archē kinēseōs*).<sup>621</sup> The former claim seems to contradict our conclusion, strongly supported by the offered textual evidence, that bodily nature is responsible for the existence of evils; the latter is very hard to square with the apparent lack of any psychic instigator of the precosmic disorderly motion in the text of the *Timaeus*, and the unambiguous statement that the cause of the degenerative motion in the acosmic period of the *Politicus* is the corporeal element. These are, however, hardly separable, because corporeality is the cause of evil, both on micro- and macrocosmic level, *qua* something which is in disorderly motion.<sup>622</sup>

Now, there are several ways to circumvent this problem. The first one is to say that Plato changed his opinion on the matter of the source of evil. But this is hardly a viable option, since both views (if there are indeed two different ones) are expressed in writings which belong to the group of the late dialogues, and it is indeed strange that Plato would introduce such a consequential alteration on such a significant problem in a relatively short time-period and without even acknowledging it as an alteration. The second is plainly to admit that Plato was inconsistent on the issue of the cause of evil and disorder: in the *Timaeus* and the *Statesman* it is physical, in the *Laws* psychical. This stance is easily acceptable, and in fact embraced by quite a

<sup>621</sup> Even more significantly, at 896b1 the soul is said to be the cause of all *change* and motion in all things (*metabolēs te kai kinēsōs hapasēs aitia hapasin*).

<sup>622</sup> Cf. *Tim.* 43a-d, 48a, 53b; *Plt.* 269d, 273a-b. Vlastos (1939, p. 79) is resolute: "Thus the cause of evil is disorderly motion."

few scholars.<sup>623</sup> Still, it would be much neater and more economical, in accordance with the bids of the Occam's Razor principle, to dismiss the contradiction, which is the third way around the issue. Several attempts have been made in this direction. Some authors have tried to read the *Laws* onto the *Timaeus* and attach the principle of evil and disorderly motion to a psychic principle, i.e. to the World Soul. Parts of this interpretative current are the strategies which attribute the badness and the disorder to a) an evil World Soul,<sup>624</sup> b) the irrational part of the World Soul,<sup>625</sup> c) the inadvertent setting off of unwanted effects in the material plenum by the motions of a perfectly rational Soul.<sup>626</sup> Others have tried to project the *Timaeus* on the *Laws*, by somehow merging the 'bad soul' of the *Laws X* with the Timaeian Necessity.<sup>627</sup> Finally, there are some attempts to solve the contradiction by seeking a compromise, like the proposal that both the bad soul of the *Laws X* and the disorderly motion of the *Timaeus-Statesman* are nothing but symbols of the factor of irrationality, present both in men and in the universe.<sup>628</sup> Besides these strategies that try to marry the *Timaeus-Statesman* with the *Phaedrus-Laws*, we have the interpretation which dismisses the latter by excluding the problem of evil from the agenda of the *Laws X*, as well as confining the scope of the autokinetic doctrine in general to the organized cosmos only.<sup>629</sup>

My purpose in this section is not to perform the Herculean task of providing final dissolution of the contradiction concerning the sources of disorderly motion and evil, nor to analyze and criticize all the existing interpretations; but I do hope to show how it is highly improbable that Plato could have meant that cosmic evil had a psychic source, and thus strengthen the theory of *to sōmatoeides* as the source of evil, which naturally imposes itself on the reader of the *Timaeus* and the *Statesman*.

---

<sup>623</sup> E.g. by Meldrum 1950, Mohr 1981, and Parry 2002. Nightingale 1996 also takes that the responses to the problem of evil in the *Timaeus* and the *Laws X* are irreconcilable, but she partly steps out of the customary matter-soul dichotomy and views the issue from a theodicean stand-point.

<sup>624</sup> Most famously advocated by Plutarch (*De an. procr.*, *De Iside*), and relatively recently by Clegg 1976, who holds that the pre-cosmic soul is purely appetitive. This view is also, I believe wrongly, attributed by Mohr (1981, p. 200) to Dodds (1945). Lewis in the *Laws* 896e finds an unequivocal statement of "[t]hat grand defect in Plato's theology ... the doctrine of two uncreated principles or souls, one good ... the other evil" (1845, p. 207). He, however, believes that Plato was inconsistent, and posited a bad soul as the source of evil only in the *Laws*, while elsewhere his mind wavered on the issue (p. 212).

<sup>625</sup> Cornford 1937, pp. 203ff, esp. 205. The same view is also, very briefly, stated in Morrow 1950, pp. 162f

<sup>626</sup> Cherniss 1954.

<sup>627</sup> England 1921, II. 474f

<sup>628</sup> Dodds 1945.

<sup>629</sup> Vlastos 1939, Easterling 1967.

In order for this aim to be accomplished, two closely connected steps must be undertaken: the first, and much easier one, is to demonstrate that Plato does not recognize any wholly or partially bad cosmic soul; the second to try and explain the origin of the disorderly motion of the material elements in the *Timaeus* without having recourse to any kind of psychic principle.

The notion of evil or irrational World Soul was postulated and defended by Plutarch. He takes Plato's definition of the soul as self-moving motion<sup>630</sup> (*De an. procr.* 1013C), his statements that the soul is the principle<sup>631</sup> and initiator of all change and motion<sup>632</sup> (1013C, 1013F), and argues from them, in conjunction with the pre-cosmic disorder of the *Timaeus*, to the existence of a cosmic soul devoid of reason (*psychēs ouk echousēs logon*, 1014B). Plutarch's argumentation is complex and not unreasoned,<sup>633</sup> but definitely unsupported by the text of the *Timaeus* itself.<sup>634</sup> He, however, finds an unambiguous confirmation of his view in the *Laws* X,<sup>635</sup> and expressly calls this newly-discovered entity "disorderly and maleficent soul" (*psychēn atakton kai kakopoion*, 1014E).<sup>636</sup> Cherniss rightly remarks: "In fact, the passages of the *Laws* envisage no such evil 'world soul' as Plutarch reads into them and lend no support to the identification of evil soul or of soul at all with the 'necessity' or with the 'divisible being' of the *Timaeus*."<sup>637</sup> Still, if the statement of the *Laws* 896d that soul is the cause of everything, including good and evil, is to be taken seriously, then Plato must have meant that the evil "is caused either by a Bad Soul, or by discordant elements in the Good Soul."<sup>638</sup> Now, the proposal that Plato included some kind of Evil Soul within his cosmological scheme is highly improbable. There is no trace of such an entity in the *Timaeus*, and the very concept of a rival to the

<sup>630</sup> *tēn dynamenēn autēn hautēn kinein kinēsīn* (*Leg.* 896a1-2).

<sup>631</sup> *pēgē kai archē kinēseōs* (*Phdr.* 245c9).

<sup>632</sup> *metabolēs te kai kinēseōs hapasēs aitia* (*Leg.* 896b1).

<sup>633</sup> See Karamanolis 2010, 4.1

<sup>634</sup> He even, against all odds, manages to affirmatively quote the *Politicus* myth (1015A, 1015C-D), although it directly refutes his cause (see the section on the *Politicus* above).

<sup>635</sup> *Leg.* 896d-897d. The crucial places are 896d5-6: *tōn te agathōn aitian einai psychēn kai tōn kakōn*; 896e4-6, where two or more (*mian ē pleious; pleious*) souls are postulated as being in charge of the universe's affairs – in any case not less than two, one of which is given to beneficent actions, the other to the opposite (*tēs te euergetidos kai tēs tanantia dynamenēs exergazesthai*); and 897d1, where a *kakē psychē* is explicitly mentioned.

<sup>636</sup> See also 1015E and *De Iside* 370F.

<sup>637</sup> Cherniss 1976, p. 187, n. f. See also England 1921, II.475f

<sup>638</sup> Meldrum 1950, p. 71. He also acknowledges a third option, namely that the responsibility for badness lies upon human souls (*ibid*, n. 40). This would be my preferred choice, but then the evil in question would not be cosmic, and, strictly speaking, the souls would not be human, but embodied non-divine souls in general.

benevolent sovereign of the universe is outrightly rejected in the *Politicus*.<sup>639</sup> Even the context of the *Laws X* is not in favor of such a reading. As evident from the argument given at 896d-898d, “an evil kind of soul was a mere *hypothesis*, which Plato posed as an alternative to the good soul in the beginning but just in order to reject it.”<sup>640</sup> Furthermore, Plato in the *Laws X* asserts that the souls that manage the motion of the orbits are gods (899a7-9); these gods are eminently good (*Rep.* 379a9-b1; *Leg.* 898c6-8, 900d-e); nothing good is capable of producing anything evil (*Rep.* 379b2-4); it follows that no divine soul can be the cause of evil.<sup>641</sup>

And what about the idea that Plato could be ascribing the responsibility for the disorderly motion and evil to a partially bad, or irrational, cosmic soul? Again, such a proposal is given neither in the *Timaeus*, nor in the *Laws X*. The World Soul in the *Timaeus* is essentially rational,<sup>642</sup> while from the *Laws X* we learn of a soul associated with lack of reason (*anoia*, 897b3), but only to be assured that such a soul is distinct from the good soul (897b8-c1), which in fact rules the cosmos.<sup>643</sup>

So, it seems that Plato does not recognize bad or irrational cosmic soul. Obviously, this does not mean that there are no bad or irrational souls at all. We know from the *Republic* that every man’s soul has a share in appetite and spirit (435bff), and that these irrational parts, especially the appetitive – likened to a ferocious beast – are ordinarily much stronger than the

<sup>639</sup> One should not think that two gods are in charge of the alternate motions of the universe: *mēt’ au dyo tine theō phronounte heautois enantia strephein auton* (27a1-2).

<sup>640</sup> Carone 2005, p. 175. See also Jirsa 2008, p. 248, n. 29. The argument, in brief, states the following: A) At least two souls must be in charge of the universe, one good, the other bad (896e4-6); B) If the motion of the heavens is akin to the motion of Reason, then a good soul is in charge, if it is disorderly and random, then a bad soul (897c4-d1); C) But the motion of the heavens is of the same nature as the motion of Reason (897e4-898b4); D) Therefore, a completely virtuous soul leads and supervises the orbit of the heavens (898c6-8). For a detailed account of the argument, see Mayhew 2008, pp. 138-148.

<sup>641</sup> Somebody may object that there still might exist some other divine entities, apart from the good ones, and that they could be the cause of evil. But wouldn’t the phrase ‘evil divine soul’ sound self-contradictory to Plato? And what could these supposed entities be? Besides the cosmos itself, the celestial gods and the Demiurge, Plato recognizes several groups of divine, or semi-divine beings: the Olympian and the chthonic gods – which are both equally good and deserving of worship (*Leg.* 717a-b, 828c-d) – and the *daimones* and heroes. The heroes are also worthy of worship (*Leg.* 717b4) and therefore good, but besides that, they are not powerful enough to influence cosmic events. As for the *daimones*, they play the role of intermediaries between gods and humans (*Sym.* 202e-203a, *Epin.* 984e-985a), keep the formers’ company (*Phdr.* 247a), and should also be worshiped (*Leg.* 717b3) and “highly honored in our prayers” (*Epin.* 984e3). Therefore, the objection that some other super-human or divine entities, besides the gods, could be the cause of badness on a cosmic scale does not seem to have firm standing.

<sup>642</sup> At 36e4-5 the World Soul is said to lead an unceasing intelligent life for all time (*apaustou kai emphronos biou pros ton sympanta chronon*), and at 36e6-37a1 that it shares in reason and attunement (*logismou de metechousa kai harmonias*).

<sup>643</sup> For a thorough rebuttal of the irrational-part-of-the-soul view, most famously held by Cornford, see Vlastos 1939, Meldrum 1950, Carone 1994, pp. 283-286 and 2005, pp. 177f.

rational one (588c-d); so much so, that if a person becomes absorbed in his appetites and ambitions, he may succeed in making his entire soul mortal, as far as that is possible (*Tim.* 90b1-4). However, if the bad soul Plato is evoking in the *Laws X* refers indeed to the individual, conditioned souls, then “it is hard to understand how he says of them that only they lead ‘all things in heaven and earth and sea’ (896e8–9) – or, as the Athenian will say afterwards (897b7–8), are ‘in charge of heaven and earth and the whole revolution.’”<sup>644</sup> A simple answer to this problem is offered by England: when Plato writes about soul being the cause of good and evil, being in charge of the revolution of heavens, etc., what he has in mind is “‘soul’, ‘psychic force’ – not ‘a soul’.”<sup>645</sup> This means that Plato is not referring to any particular kind of soul, but to ‘soul’ in general. A particular soul, namely the World Soul, is behind the orderly revolution of the cosmos; other divine souls lead the stars and the planets on their equally orderly course; all of them are prudent and full of virtue (897b8-c1), i.e. fully rational. And there is yet another *genos* of souls, which encompasses the individual, non-divine souls. It is them who are prone to be afflicted by the disease of *anoia*.<sup>646</sup> They are in charge of the microcosm, of their own revolutions and the immediate environment, and they are responsible for the appearance of good and evil in that particular sphere.<sup>647</sup> The soul which is responsible for the bad things mentioned at 896d thus becomes the individual soul, while the scope of the badness remains limited to the humans and their immediate environment.

Now we can turn to the second step, i.e. to the material interpretation of the chaotic period. As far as the pre-cosmic disorderly motion of the *Timaeus* is concerned, there is little doubt that the text does not posit any psychic force behind it; the real problem is how to

---

<sup>644</sup> Carone 2005, p. 173

<sup>645</sup> England 1921, II.476

<sup>646</sup> See *Tim.* 86b. From the *Timaeus* 34a we learn that rotary motion is characteristic of reason, while the six rectilinear motions are called wandering; and in the *Laws* 898b the non-rotary motions are explicitly associated with *anoia*. But from the *Timaeus* 43a-44b it is clear that these motions are manifested *only* in the embodied individual soul, when it is disturbed by the inflow of sense-data. They are so violent that the soul’s “processes of rational thought are thrown out of gear” (Cornford 1937, p. 148, n. 1. See also Johansen 2004, pp. 142f). Therefore, the bad, irrational soul of the *Laws X* can only be the embodied non-divine soul.

<sup>647</sup> Cf. Carone 2005, pp. 173f, 178-188. I disagree with her contention that human failings also have cosmic consequences. It is based upon the wrong premise that soul must be the cause of all evil; since it is not an Evil Soul or an irrational element within the Good Soul, it has to be human. There is, however, no need to make such a supposition; it is a fact that for Plato men are responsible for moral evil, but the higher order evil, or its cause, may be safely delegated to materiality, or to the effects of Necessity. Chilcott (1923) also believes that the individual souls are the cause of all evil there is, and reads this theory even onto the *Timaeus*. He is, however, able to do that because he discards not only the physical or natural, but also the metaphysical evil, on the strength of the acceptance of Archer-Hinds panpsychic interpretation of the dialogue.

reconcile the idea of that spontaneous bodily stir with the *Phaedrus*' and the *Laws*' concept of the soul as the originator of all motion. From the *Timaeus* 30a-b we learn two important things about the primordial chaos: a) that it involves errant and disorderly motion (*plēmmelēs kai ataktos kinēsis*, 30a4-5); b) that it is unintelligent, or devoid of reason (30b). And since reason appears only in soul (30b3), it is also soulless. Now, from the claim that reason appears only in soul it does not follow that every soul necessarily has reason; the possibility that there exist a soul or souls devoid of reason is both conceivable and argued for, and thus the option that the disorderly motion could be caused by an irrational soul remains open. Nevertheless, this proposal is hardly a viable one, and so for several reasons. First, it is not even hinted at in the text of the *Timaeus*. Second, in the preceding few paragraphs it has been briefly argued that Plato would not recognize a cosmic soul devoid of reason, and would associate *anoia* only with the individual, non-divine souls. And I think it is clear that the individual souls cannot be responsible for the pre-cosmic disorder of the *Timaeus*. Third, it is hardly dubitable that even an individual soul can be completely devoid of reason; it seems that, for Plato, reason or intelligence is an essential property of the immortal soul.

Furthermore, Plato in the *Timaeus* makes rather unambiguous observation on the cause of primordial chaotic motion. At 52d he enumerates the three things which had been there even before the universe came into being – namely Being, Space and Becoming<sup>648</sup> – and then focuses on the second, giving also an explanation of the motion which takes place within it. “But because it<sup>649</sup> was filled with powers that were neither alike nor evenly balanced,<sup>650</sup> there was no equipoise in any region of it; but it was everywhere swayed unevenly and shaken by these things, and by its motion shook them in turn” (52e1-5). So, the pre-cosmic motion is explained as being caused by the interaction of the elemental traces and the Receptacle,<sup>651</sup> without a mention of any kind of psychic interference.<sup>652</sup> Besides, at 48a the *planōmenē aitia* is qualified as something in whose

---

<sup>648</sup> This Becoming (*genesis*) is obviously not to be identified with the sensible world of conventional reality, simply because it does not exist yet. Meldrum (1950, pp. 65f) takes it to be synonymous with *kinēsis*. In this sense, it could be interpreted as the principle of motion and change, including coming and going out of existence, operational in the pre-cosmic state of the world.

<sup>649</sup> The *chōra*.

<sup>650</sup> The traces of the primary bodies.

<sup>651</sup> More precisely, it is initiated by the traces in disbalance and then transferred to the Receptacle, which, once put into motion, acts reciprocally by moving them in return.

<sup>652</sup> For an elaboration of this view and a short commentary on 52e1-5, see Parry 2002, pp. 295-299. For a defense of the concept of purely mechanical cause of motion in the *Timaeus*, see Vlastos 1939, pp. 77ff. For a well-argued

nature is to cause motion (*pherein pephyken*, 48a7).<sup>653</sup> Therefore, it is safe to assume that Plato did not envision any psychic origin of the disorderly motion in the *Timaeus*.<sup>654</sup>

As for the attempt to reconcile the purely mechanical cause of disorderly motion found in the *Timaeus* with the *archē kinēseōs* doctrine of the *Phaedrus* and the *Laws*, all I can do at this stage is to side with Vlastos (1939), Hackforth (1959),<sup>655</sup> Esterling (1967), et al., who claim that the priority of soul over all motion is applicable only to the stage of the organized universe. The pre-cosmic chaos is excepted from the scope of the *archē kinēseōs* doctrine as a radically different state of affairs, since it is devoid of soul. As succinctly put by Hackforth: “‘Chaos’ is outside Plato’s purview ... and we may fairly take him to mean that soul, being the necessary presupposition of all movement that occur in the universe, is coeval with the universe.”<sup>656</sup> Those who argue along these lines are able to make some steps toward the harmonization of the Timaeian mechanical pre-cosmic motion and the notion of the soul as self-motion and the spring of motion in everything that moves, as advocated in the *Phaedrus* and the *Laws*.

This view, which is far from self-evident, understandably has its own critics; the most thoroughgoing one, to the best of my knowledge, is Richard Mohr. He, in his commendable 1980 article,<sup>657</sup> levels several serious objections against the attempts to reconcile the three dialogues in question. These objections are far from being unfounded or easily refutable; still, there could be a way around them, and here I shall try to offer only a sketch of some possible answers.

---

thesis that the same causal principle is applicable to the degenerative motion of the *Politicus* myth, see Mohr 1981.

<sup>653</sup> As it is very well known, this kind of motion produces chancy and disorderly effects. Such irrational motion is fully manifested in the primordial chaos, but also retained, to a degree, after the fashioning of the cosmos. That inevitable residue is the prime cause of evil in the world and in the soul. Discussing the pre-cosmic state of the world described at 30a, Hackforth (1959, p. 20) writes: “And we ask, to what, if soul is ruled out, is the motion here spoken of due? There can be only one answer: it is due to those mechanical, blind forces, the *aitiai monōtheisai phronēseōs*, which later (46e) are said to produce their various random unordered effects (*to tychon atakton hekastote exergazontai*.” It should be noted, however, that, strictly speaking, the *synaitiai* or the *planomenē aitia* operate not in the pre-cosmic chaos, but within the ordered cosmos.

<sup>654</sup> If this assumption is acceptable, it would also undermine Cherniss’ thesis that all positive evil (negative evil being the sheer insufficiency of the corporeal world as compared to the world of Forms) is caused by the motions of soul. According to him, bad or ignorant souls produce evil by intentional motions, while both bad and good souls (including the fully rational World Soul) inadvertently cause some evil as well. Even while performing virtuous and demiurgic activities, the latter unintentionally set the secondary causes in motion, which by nature have share in randomness and irrationality, and thus are bound to produce some amount of disorder (in Cherniss 1954).

<sup>655</sup> With a qualification: he does not think that the *Phaedrus* and the *Laws* are conformable with the *Timaeus* on the issue of the originator of all motion; but he does believe that this inconsistency on Plato’s side has no bearing on the problem of pre-cosmic motion, because the chaos is soulless.

<sup>656</sup> 1959, p. 21

<sup>657</sup> “The Sources of Evil Problem and the *archē kinēseōs* Doctrine in Plato,” reprinted in Mohr 2005, ch. VIII.

Basically speaking, Mohr challenges the interpretation which limits the scope of the *archē kinēseōs* doctrine in three ways. His first objection is methodological; Vlastos and his followers, writes Mohr, use the argument from economy: the *Phaedrus* and the *Laws* make no mention of the pre-cosmic motion because the argumentation and the context do not demand it.<sup>658</sup> However, “a minimum requirement for the success of an argument from silence is that the doctrine which is claimed by such an argument to be implicit in a text ... must be found explicitly stated somewhere in the Platonic corpus.”<sup>659</sup> Unfortunately, Plato nowhere states that soul is the prime mover only in the organized world, and thus the argument does not have a firm standing. Now, it is a fact that Plato is not explicit about the limitation of the *archē kinēseōs* doctrine; but it is also a fact that the pre-cosmic motion in the *Timaeus* and the degenerative motion of the *Statesman* are not caused by a soul, and this is almost as good as saying that there exists a motion independent of any psychic force.

The other two objections are based upon the textual evidence found in the *Phaedrus* and the *Laws*:

First, I) among the very motions which Plato claims to be caused by soul in the *Phaedrus* and *Laws* are included the very motions by which he characterizes the pre-cosmos in the *Timaeus*. Second II) the existence of non-physically caused motions would destroy the force of both the argument for immortality in the *Phaedrus* and the argument for the existence of autokinetic soul in the *Laws X*.<sup>660</sup>

In order to establish his first point, Mohr claims that the secondary motion of the *Phaedrus* (*to allo kinoun kai hyp' allou kinoumenon*, 245c5-6), is also found in the *Timaeus* (*hosai hyp' allōn men kinoumenōn hetera de kata anankēs kinountōn gignontai*, 46e1-2), and that it is equivalent to the motion in the pre-cosmic chaos.<sup>661</sup> Now, he is certainly right in noting that the secondary motion – the one that can cause motion in others, but is moved by something else – is plainly present in both passages quoted above; he is also right in saying that such a motion is in the *Timaeus* described as causing chancy and disorderly effects, and that it is

---

<sup>658</sup> Mohr 1980, pp. 41f

<sup>659</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>660</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 43. In what follows I will focus only on the arguments that pertain to the *Phaedrus*, and skip over those dealing with the *Laws*, because both are rather similar.

<sup>661</sup> *ibid.*

contrasted “with (rational) psychic causes.”<sup>662</sup> But he is wrong in equating it with the pre-cosmic chaotic motion. The accessory causes of the *Timaeus*, which produce the secondary motions, are distinct from the constituents of the chaos and their motions: the former’s results are partly disorderly because they retain some vestiges of the original chaos, but they become secondary causes in the first place by being ordered, to the degree that the pre-existent material allows for ordering. The motions of the original chaos are random and disorderly to the utmost degree, so much so, that they cannot produce anything. Therefore, the secondary motions of the *Phaedrus* that Mohr found in the *Timaeus* as well are not equivalent to the “causes that operate in the pre-cosmos,”<sup>663</sup> and thus his claim that the pre-cosmic motions of the *Timaeus* are included among the motions caused by soul in the *Phaedrus* and the *Laws* does not stand.

Mohr’s second worry is that “the presence of non-physically caused motions would destroy the argument for the immortality of the soul”<sup>664</sup> (in the *Phaedrus*). His reasoning proceeds as follows: the self-moving (*to hauto kinoun*, 245c7) is the source and principle of all motion (*pēgē kai archē kinēseōs* 245c8-9); but an *archē* has no beginning (*archē ageneton*, 245d1); therefore, the self-moving soul has no beginning. Furthermore, the text (245d8-e2) dismisses the possibility that the universe could start moving again in the hypothetical case of perishing of the self-moving principle of motion. All these points show that the argument for the eternity of the soul fails if we allow for a non-psychic motion in the pre-cosmic period.<sup>665</sup> I believe that Mohr’s second objection from textual evidence is also non-conclusive. The argument seems to involve the *petitio principii* fallacy, because it assumes the non-existence of that which it is supposed to disprove, namely the pre-cosmic state, characterized by processes of a *radically different order* than the ones operating within the ordered universe. After all, 245d8-e2 denies that new motion could arise in the heavens which were brought to a halt by the hypothetical destruction of the self-moved mover, not that no motion was possible *before* the organization of the heavens, i.e. in the pre-cosmic period. This view, if acceptable, could also shed some light on the disparate statements concerning the soul as unborn on the one hand, and as something that came into being and is the oldest of all things on the other, present in both dialogues that expound the *archē kinēseōs* doctrine (*Phdr.* 245d1-4 and *Leg.* 892c2-7, 895b3-7,

<sup>662</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>663</sup> *ibid.* Plainly stated, there are no causes in the pre-cosmos; the causal processes are introduced after the ordering of the elemental traces.

<sup>664</sup> *op. cit.* 45

<sup>665</sup> See *op. cit.*, pp. 44f

896b2-3, 896c1-2 respectively).<sup>666</sup> In conjunction with the non-psychically caused chaotic motion and the created soul of the *Timaeus*, this seeming inconsistency could provide some support to the claim that the absolute priority of soul “merely denotes the supremacy of the soul’s teleological action *within the created universe*.”<sup>667</sup>

Clearly, nothing of what was said above is sufficient to bring the *Timaeus*, *Phaedrus* and the *Laws* in perfect concord; considering the dialectic spirit of Plato’s philosophizing and the dialogue form in which he chose to express his thoughts, that might very well not be possible, or even necessarily desirable. Still, what is important for us is that the textual evidence and its interpretation offered here shows how hardly dubitable it is that the origin of evil in the *Timaeus-Politicus* is non-psychic, and that, despite the appearances, even in the *Laws X* the soul is not the preferred candidate for that unholy role.

---

<sup>666</sup> See *Tim.* 37a1-2, where the World Soul is described as *aristē tōn gennēthentōn*, and also the entire story of the Soul’s construction (34c-37a). Mohr’s argument against the non-physical chaotic motion may just as well be used against the begotten soul of the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*. In these cases, apparently we should either not allow that the soul is a self-moving motion (because it has a beginning), or if it is, that should not, by Mohr’s lights, guarantee its continued, everlasting presence (because it has started moving). It is uncertain whether Mohr would like to commit himself to these views, especially in the face of Plato’s unambiguous statements that the soul is both self-moved and eternal, and *Timaeus*’ claim that even some composite entities shall never suffer dissolution, due to the good will of their maker (*Tim.* 41a-b).

<sup>667</sup> Vlastos 1939, p. 81

## II.4 Summary

The three main sections of this chapter were respectively dedicated to the inquiry into the Platonic origin of evil in the *Timaeus*, the *Politicus* and in the *Laws X*. In the first, a short analysis of the main concepts associated with the problem of evil was attempted. These were the closely interrelated concepts of Receptacle/Space, the primordial chaos, and Necessity. Our investigation led us to the conclusion that the Receptacle is an eternal, qualityless substratum, vaguely conceived as a plenum filled with itself. The primordial chaos is an effect of the disorderly motion of the elemental forces, i.e. the vestiges of the primary bodies in the Receptacle, which are, in themselves, reflections of the Forms of the four main elements on the all-receptive substratum of the Receptacle. Necessity, also known as the *planōmenē aitia* and *synaitia*, arises within the Receptacle, after the Demiurges' intelligent ordering of the chaos. It represents the power and influence of corporeality, which, born from the original disorder, retains strong traces of its insufficiencies and transfers them onto the creation. Being thus inherently mindless and prone to slip into disarray, it provides the basis for the imperfections that make the world of Becoming lesser than the Intelligible world, and in this way is to be identified as the origin of all badness or evil.

In the second section, the focus was placed on the *Politicus* myth. The veridicality of the above conclusion on the Platonic origin of evil was further supported by the examination of the myth, where a theory very similar to the Timaeian is presented. The main difference is one of terminology; *to sōmatoeides*, or corporeality, and not *anankē*, now plays the main role. However, within the confines of the *Timaeus* and the *Politicus* these terms are almost interchangeable, with Necessity representing the same bodily nature, only in its causal aspect.

In the third section an attempt was made to show that the passages on ontological and causal priority of the soul in the *Phaedrus*, and especially in the *Laws X*, need not be read as implying a psychic origin of evil. The theories affirming the existence of a maleficent or partly irrational World Soul are in clash with the textual evidence and some important Platonic postulates; the bad soul(s) mentioned in the *Laws X* are the individual non-divine souls. It was also argued that the pre-cosmic motion of the *Timaeus* has purely mechanical source, and that the *archē kinēseōs* doctrine should be limited to the created cosmos.

Thus the main thread of the discussion regarding the origin of evil conducted in the preceding two chapters – starting with the analysis of the short *Theaetetus* passage and going through the *Timaeus* and the *Politicus* – led us to the conclusion that, for Plato, *to sōmatoeides* is the *archē kakōn*. This conclusion is not seriously challenged by the ideas presented in the *Laws* X, and therefore Plato’s reflections on the origin of evil may be considered consistent.<sup>668</sup>

---

<sup>668</sup> The theory of the disorderly bodily nature as the Platonic cause of evil was embraced by his associate Aristotle and the latter’s disciple Theophrastus (see *supra*, fn. 620), as well as, many centuries later, by Leibniz (*Theodicy* I.20). Its eminent modern advocate is Vlastos (1939). Hoffleit (1937) holds that Plato in general embraced ‘the material theory’ of the cause of evil, but that it was contradicted in the *Laws*, by the notion of ‘an evil soul’ (pp. 48, 52). A similar stance (as far as ‘cosmic evil’ is concerned) is taken by Green (1948, p. 311). Aside from the advocates of both this and the psychic theory of the origin of evil stands Wood (2009), who argues that Plato recognizes only moral evil. Moral evil is clearly due to the failures inherent in human nature, and Wood therefore denies that there is any *archē kakou* (in the metaphysical sense) in Plato’s philosophy. He, however, arrives at this conclusion by misinterpreting the source of disorderly motion in the *Politicus* and the *Timaeus*, to the point of practically deleting the *sōmatoeides* and the *chōra* out of consideration and reducing them to “otherness, difference, relative non being” of the *Sophist* (p. 374). Broadie also claims that, for Plato, “the only truly bad things are moral evil and such non-moral conditions that promote it” (2001, p. 6). Nevertheless, she does not expressly deny that there is something external which accounts for the presence of badness in the soul, but only that Plato pays any attention to the problem of physical evil (but cf. Lewis 1845, p. 208).

## CONCLUSION

Plato's theodicean reflections and comments on the origin of evil exist in a form of brief, scattered remarks. The most extensive continuous piece of writing that may be interpreted as being dedicated to theodicy are the two Stephanus pages in the *Laws* X (903b-905c); and yet, many fail to perceive it as such. Therefore, Plato's contribution in this field has been largely neglected. To the best of my knowledge, presently we do not have a single monograph in English dedicated to Plato's theodicy, and often it has even been doubted that there exists such a thing as Platonic theodicy. As far as his thoughts on the origin of evil is concerned, although the significant number of papers and book chapters written on the subject have sparked a lively debate, again there is not a single monograph in English which deals with the subject.

I hope that in the three chapters that comprise Part One of this thesis it has been made clear that by putting together the passages unsystematically scattered through Plato's dialogues of the Middle and the Late period, a rather sophisticated theodicy may be pieced together. In Chapters I.2 and II.2 we saw how Plato's reformed theological outlooks made him voice his protest against two primitive religious ideas: a) that god is dispenser of both good and evil, and b) that god is envious of the mortals' achievements. I took the rebuttals of these two misconceptions as the starting point of my investigation of Platonic theodicy. And in fact, they mark the beginning of the theological speculations in two of the three dialogues crucial for the construction of his defense of god's goodness – the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*. In Chapter I.2 we also saw how Plato's protest against the first misconception above was embedded into his discourse on pedagogy, and how this train of thought led him to the formulation of the first rudiments of theodicy in his corpus. I tried to offer some arguments that 379c should be viewed as a theodicean account, although rather incomplete. Plato there defends god's goodness on purely logical grounds, by establishing that he is a being incapable of producing evil. He, therefore simply cannot possibly be responsible for the badness that human beings experience, and the source of the latter must be sought somewhere else. Next, in Chapter I.3 we turned our attention to the intriguing Myth of Er, related by Socrates in book X of the *Republic*. It was shown that the theodicy of the Myth of Er picks up from where it stopped in book II of the *Republic*. The *theos anaitios* dictum is a reiteration of the *pollōn de anaitios* of 379c4. Here,

however, Plato makes a significant step forward and locates the cause of the troubles that the embodied beings undergo; while previously it was only affirmed that god is not implicated (*tōn de kakōn all' atta dei zētein ta aitia, all' ou ton theon*, 379c6-7), now it is made clear that *aitia helomenou*: the responsibility is upon the chooser, i.e. the moral agent. In the same chapter, I argued that the principle of personal responsibility is not canceled by the influence of the cosmic laws of orderliness (personified in the goddess Anankē) and the occasional inexplicable random occurrences (*tychē*). Their undeniable presence notwithstanding, the individual faculty of free choice-making remains the decisive factor in the process of molding one's character and creating one's future. I also argued extensively that the acts of choice are indeed free, and that the agent is indeed responsible for them. My main strategies for accomplishing these goals were to demonstrate that a) Plato in the Myth of Er, despite the appearances, is not a determinist, and b) that his endorsement of the theory of metempsychosis neither implies an infinite regress of moral responsibility nor endangers the persistence of personal identity over different lifetimes. Thus, from the examination of the relevant passages of the *Republic's* closing myth a very significant theodicean strategy emerged, which may be labeled as 'the free choice defense'. Through it, Plato absolves god from the responsibility for the individuals' tribulations by ascribing it to their own free, but unwitty, choices.

Chapter II of Part One was dedicated to the Timaeian theodicy. In II.3.2 we witnessed the reemergence of the free choice defense, with which both the Demiurge and the created gods were declared guiltless and the individual agents' responsibility was reaffirmed. This is, however, not everything that Plato in the *Timaeus* has to offer on our subject. In Chapter II.3.1 I argued that certain passages of the *Timaeus* may be interpreted as expressing the so-called Principle of Plenitude. Basically speaking, the Principle of Plenitude professes to provide an answer to the question 'why does the creation contain not only immortal gods or *daimones*, but also many fallible mortal creatures?' Plato, in his version of the Principle, falls back on the well-known Platonic tenet that the reason for the existence of the sensible world has to be found in the intelligible world. And since as a paradigm of the created cosmos he postulates a wonderful intelligible entity encompassing various kinds of living entities, the variegatedness of this world is explained on the basis of model-copy relationship: the sensible copy abounds with living beings because they are already contained in the intelligible paradigm. Thus, god must not be blamed for populating the world not only with gods, but also with humans and many lowly life-

forms. In Chapter II.3.3 we touched upon *anankē*, the limiting factor which, practically speaking, prevents god from creating a world as good as he would want to. Instead, we have the actual one, which is only as good as it is possible. The innate imperfection of the sensible world is thus due to *anankē*, the underlying cause of all evil. Its workings are directly responsible for the occurrences of physical insufficiencies and sufferings, and indirectly of moral depravity, by being the necessary reason for the emergence of ignorance within the soul. Now, since *anankē* for Plato is a factor coeval and independent from god, he is in a position to divert the responsibility for the badness experienced by the embodied souls from god to *anankē*. This strategy is not available to the later orthodox theists, since in exchange for ‘solving’ the problem of evil, it sacrifices god’s omnipotence. Plato, however, seems to have no qualms about accommodating into his theology a deity omnibenevolent and omniscient, but not omnipotent.

In Chapter III.3 we saw how the free choice defense remains Plato’s favorite strategy in the *Laws X* as well; over and over again he emphasizes that the elevation and degradation of the soul, for the most part, depends on its own desires, willings and actions. The souls are being delegated to the company of vicious or virtuous persons on the basis of their merit. Therefore, nobody should challenge and blame god for the difficulties he or she is experiencing; these are all earned well by the activities performed in their past lives. In the same chapter it was also pointed out that Plato in the *Laws X* employs yet another strategy, which attempts to justify god in the face of the often-attested thriving of the unjust and suffering of the just. It was labeled as the Justice-in-the-afterlife-solution. Plato’s intention here is to persuade his readers that the transgressions of the wicked will not pass unnoticed; both they and the virtuous will receive their just deserts in the next life. Despite the appearance, this claim should not be understood as a mere article of faith; it is actually an upshot of the extended demonstration that the gods exist, that they are good, and not neglectful of human affairs. Still, the overarching theodicean strategy of the *Laws X*, as I argued in Chapter III.2, is the so-called Aesthetic solution. The Aesthetic solution attempts to establish the absolute goodness of god by interpreting all instances of evil as seemingly dissonant tones, which nevertheless perfectly blend with and contribute to the beauty of the wonderful universal symphony. *Sub specie dei*, the universe is perfectly good, and any part of it which we would characterize as bad contributes, in its own humble way, to the perfection of the whole.

In the light of the above interpretation, the Platonic theodicy, far from being non-existent, is actually rather complex and varied. I am convinced that Plato's work exerted strong influence on the later efforts in this field, starting with the most comprehensive theodicies of the Ancient world, i.e. the Stoic,<sup>669</sup> and especially the Plotinian one.<sup>670</sup>

Every theodicy is inseparably connected with the questions of the origin and status of evil, and should not be considered apart from them. Thus, Part Two of this thesis was dedicated to the problem of the ontology of evil. My main aims there were to demonstrate that Plato has an internally consistent theory of evil and that it is what the commentators sometimes call 'the material theory'. Although the motif of personal responsibility was a thread woven through the entire discussion of Plato's theodicy, one should not assume that therefore the cause of evil also somehow lies in the individual soul. As a matter of fact, in Chapter II.3 I argued that no soul, individual non-divine, divine, or cosmic, is the cause of evil, while the badness in the individual non-divine soul is there only derivatively, due to its contact with the bodily nature. My main aim in Chapter I was to show that the *Theaetetus* passage on evil (176a-b) tells more than it at a first glance seems to. According to the interpretation advanced there, Plato in the *Theaetetus*,

---

<sup>669</sup> Of the six strategies that comprise the Stoic theodicy (see Long & Sedley 1987, p. 332), at least three are clearly interpretations or developments of what Plato said. These are: a) the claim that the bad must be present in the world, because it is connected with the good as a kind of 'Heraclitean opposite'. This is partly based upon an interpretation (a wrong one, as I surmised) of Socrates' 'Aesopian myth' in the *Phaedo* 60a-c (see SVF II. 1169); b) the Stoic Aesthetic theme (see *The Hymn of Cleanthes* 18-21, and SVF II.1182), quite possibly inspired by the Platonic one in the *Laws*; c) the strategy according to which some evils are unavoidable concomitants of purposive working aimed at a higher good. In expounding this strategy, Chrysippus as an illustration uses the brittle-bone-of-the-skull example of the *Timaeus* 75b-d (SVF II. 1170). Furthermore, Chrysippus evokes the spirit of Plato's heritage even more explicitly, when according to Plutarch, while discussing the presence of badness in the world, he says: *poly kai to tēs anankēs memichthai* (SVF II. 1178).

<sup>670</sup> Plotinus's debt to Plato is undeniable and clearly acknowledged by the philosopher himself. As far as the problem of evil is concerned, Plotinus inherited and elaborated on most of the Platonic solutions we delineated here. First, he relegated the responsibility for the existence of all evil to matter (*hylē*), which is a concept very close to the Timaeian *chōra*, while the whole theory is an overstatement of the *Theaetetus-Timaeus-Politicus* doctrine, as presented in this thesis. Second, Plotinus recognized the freedom of choice and personal responsibility both of the sinner and the sufferer, much as Plato had done. Men are doers who act of themselves, and that is why they are responsible for their action. Weren't they free to act, they would not have erred either (see *Enn.* III.2.10.9-12). But since they are free to choose and act, "whatever anyone does that is unhealthy, he does it himself and it is an act which goes against the providence of the doctor" (III.3.5.53-55). Third, he follows Plato in explaining the diversity and inequality of the world in accordance with the Principle of Plenitude. Since the source of existence is in the multitude of the Intellect, inequality is not a sign of injustice; one should not demand equal gifts in things which are not equal by nature (III.2.3.40, see also III.3.3.9-21). Finally, a clear elaboration of Plato's Aesthetic solution is also a part of Plotinus' theodicy: "And it is not proper for anyone to speak ill of this universe as not being beautiful or the best of all things which have body" (III.2.3.1-2). "He who blamed the whole because of the parts would be quite unreasonable in his blame; one must consider the parts in relation to the whole, to see if they are harmonious and in concord with it" (III.2.3.9-12).

intentionally or non-intentionally, sets the scene for the Timaeian doctrine of a principle of imperfection and disorder, from which ultimately all badness stems and on which it depends. I argued that the principle in question is the subordinate opposite (*hypenantion*) of *tagathon*, brought up at 176a6, and that this *hypenantion tōi agathōi* should not be identified with *ta kaka* of 176a5, which are particular instances of badness and whose base the *hypenantion* is. I also argued that the word *anankē* of 176a8 may be interpreted as referring to the same entity as the word *hypenantion* does, i.e. the principle of evil. With this, a strong bond between the *Timaeus* and the *Theaetetus* is established. Chapter II.1 was dedicated to the question of the origin of evil in the *Timaeus*. An attempt was made to elucidate the concepts of *anankē* or *planōmenē aitia*, and *hypodochē* or *chōra*. *Anankē* arises out of the chaotic *chōra* after the ordering by number and proportion of the elemental traces, but itself retains vestiges of the primordial chaos. I argued that *chōra*, as an ontological principle, and *anankē*, as a causal principle, combine to form the notion of materiality or corporeality, which is the cause of all evil in the created universe.<sup>671</sup> In Chapter II.2 the strong affinity between the theories of evil in the *Timaeus* and the *Politicus* myth was underlined. The examination of the myth's two passages directly connected with the issue of the origin of evil (269c-e and 273a-2) showed that the only difference regarding this matter between the *Timaeus* and the *Politicus* is one of terminology; Plato's term of choice is now *to sōmatoeides*, not *anankē*. These two, however, as far as their application to my investigation into the Platonic cause of evil is concerned, are to be taken as synonymous. Thus in Chapters II.1 and II.2, in conjunction with the rejection of the psychic theory of the origin of evil as given in Chapter II.3, I attempt to show that Plato relegates the blame for the presence of badness to the bodily nature, or corporeality. It should be noted, however, that Plato does not recognize Absolute Evil; his *sōmatoeides* or *anankē* is not an evil principle in the sense of evil-in-itself, but a principle of evil simply as something inherently imperfect and insufficient. Finally, Plato's identification of the origin of evil with corporeality also serves as yet another way of absolving his omnibenevolent, but not omnipotent, god from the responsibility for the all-pervading badness in our world, as it was argued in Chapter II.3.3 of Part One of this thesis.

---

<sup>671</sup> For reasons of simplicity of expression, throughout the text the term *anankē* was used to denote the origin of evil in the *Timaeus*.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adam, J. "The Myth in Plato's Politicus". *The Classical Review* 5 (1891), pp. 445-446

----- *The Vitality of Platonism and Other Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911

----- *The Republic of Plato*, "Perseus Digital Library". Crane, G. R. (ed.)

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/collection?collection=Perseus:collection:Greco-Roman>

Adams, M. M. and Adams, R. M. (eds.). *The Problem of Evil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990

Allan, W. "Divine Justice and Cosmic Order in Early Greek Epic". *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 126 (2006), pp. 1-35

Annas, J. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981

----- "Plato's Myths of Judgment". *Phronesis*, 27 (1982), pp. 119-143

Archer-Hind, R. D. *The Timaeus of Plato: Edited with Introduction and Notes*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1888

Armstrong, A. H. (ed., tr.). *Plotinus: Enneads*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969-1988

Baracchi, C. *Of Myth, Life and War in Plato's Republic*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002

Barnes, J. (ed.). *The Complete Works of Aristotle, the Revised Oxford Translation, vol. I & II*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984

Beal, E. F. "Hesiod's Treatise on Justice: 'Works and Days' 109-380". *The Classical Journal*, 101 (2005/2006), pp 161-182

Betegh, G. "Tale, Theology and Teleology in the *Phaedo*". in Partenie, C. (ed.) *Plato's Myths*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009

----- "What Makes a Myth Eikos? Remarks Inspired by Myles Burnyeat's Eikos Mythos". in Mohr, R. D., Sattler, B. M. (eds.). *One Book the Whole Universe: Plato's Timaeus Today*. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2010

Bledsoe, A. T. *Theodicy; or Vindication of the Divine Glory*. New York: Carlton & Phillips, 1854

Bloom, A. *The Republic of Plato*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York: Basic Books, 1991.

Bobonich, C. "Persuasion, Compulsion and Freedom in Plato's Laws". *The Classical Quarterly*, 41 (1991), pp. 365-388

----- *Plato's Utopia Recast*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002

Bostock, D. *Plato's Theaetetus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988

Brandwood, L. *The Chronology of Plato's Dialogues*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990

----- "Stylometry and Chronology". Kraut, R. (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992

Braumbaugh, R. S. "Colors of the Hemispheres in Plato's Myth of Er (Republic 616e)".

*Classical Philology*, 46 (1951), pp. 173-176

Brisson, L. *Plato the Myth Maker*. Naddaf, G. (ed., tr.), Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998

----- *How Philosophers Saved Myths: Allegorical Interpretation and Classical Mythology*.

Tihanyi, C. (tr.), Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004

Broadie, S. "Theodicy and Pseudo-History in the *Timaeus*". *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 21 (2001), pp. 1-28

----- *Nature and Divinity in Plato's Timaeus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012

Burnyeat, M. F. *The Theaetetus of Plato*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1990

----- "Eikos Mythos", in Partenie, C. (ed.) *Plato's Myths*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009

Butler, E. P. "Plato's Gods and the Way of Ideas". *Diotima: Review of Philosophical Research*, 39 (2011), pp. 73-87

Calhoun, G. M. "Homer's Gods – Myth and Marchen". *The American Journal of Philology*, 60 (1939), pp. 1-28

Campbell, L. *The Sophistes and Politicus of Plato: a Revised Text and English Notes*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1867

Carone, G. R. "Teleology and Evil in 'Laws' 10". *The Review of Metaphysics*, 48 (1994), pp. 275-298

----- “Reversing the Myth of the *Politicus*”. *Classical Quarterly* 54 (2004), pp. 88-108

----- *Plato’s Cosmology and its Ethical Dimensions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005

Carpenter, D. A. “Embodying Intelligence: Animals and Us in Plato’s *Timaeus*”. in Dillon, J., Zovko and J. (eds.). *Platonism and Forms of Intelligence*., Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008

----- “Embodied Intelligent (?) Souls: Plants in Plato’s *Timaeus*”. *Phronesis*, 55 (2010), pp. 281-303

Chappell, T. *Reading Plato’s Theaetetus*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004

Chatterjee, S. and Datta, S. *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1984

Cherniss, H. “The Philosophical Economy of the Theory of Ideas”. *The American Journal of Philology* 57 (1936), pp. 445-456

----- *Aristotle’s Criticism of Plato and the Academy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1944

----- “A Much Misread Passage of the *Timaeus* (*Timaeus* 49C 7-50 B5)”. *The American Journal of Philology* 75 (1954), pp. 113-130

----- “The Sources of Evil According to Plato”. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 98 (1954), pp. 23-30

----- (tr.). *Plutarch. Moralia*, vol. XIII: part 1. Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1976

Chilcott, C. M. “The Platonic Theory of Evil”. *The Classical Quarterly*, 17 (1923), pp. 27-31

Clegg, J. S. “Plato’s Vision of Chaos”. *The Classical Quarterly*, 26 (1976), pp. 52-61

Collobert, C., Destree, P. and Gonzales, F. J. (eds.). *Plato and Myth: Studies on the Use and Status of Platonic Myths*. Leiden: Brill, 2012

Cooper, J. M. “Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge (‘Theaetetus’ 184-186)”. *Phronesis*, 15 (1970), pp. 123-146

Cooper, J. M. and Hutchinson, D. S. (eds.) *Plato. Complete Works*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997

Cornford, F. M. *Plato’s Theory of Knowledge*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co. Ltd., 1935

----- *Plato’s Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997 (1937).

Davies, B. *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993

Dickie, M. "The Place of *Phthonos* in the Argument of Plato's *Phaedrus*". in Rosen, R. M. and Farrel, J. (eds.). *Nomodeiktes: Greek Studies in Honor of Martin Ostwald*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993.

Didot, A. F. (ed.) *Plato: Platonis Opera*, Vols. I-II. Paris: Institutum Francie Typographo, 1856

Diels, H. and Kranz, W. (eds.). *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. Zürich/Berlin: Weidmannsche Verl, 1964

Dihle, A. *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity*. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982

Dillon, J. *Alcinous: The Handbook of Platonism, Translated with Introduction and Commentary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993

----- "The Neoplatonic Exegesis of the *Statesman* Myth". in Rowe, C. J. (ed.). *Reading the Statesman: Proceedings of the III Symposium Platonicum*. Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 1995

----- "Plato's Myths in the Later Platonist Tradition". in Partenie, C. (ed.). *Plato: Selected Myths*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004

Dobs, H. H. "The Problem of Evil. A Modern Solution". *The Journal of Religion*, 4 (1931), pp. 554-569

Dodds, E. R. "Plato and the Irrational", *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 65 (1945), pp. 16-25

Dodds, M. (tr.) *Aurelius Augustine. The City of God*, Vol. I. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913

Dombrowski, D. A. *A Platonic Philosophy of Religion: A Process Perspective*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2005

Dorter, K. *Form and Good in Plato's Eleatic Dialogues: The Parmenides, Theaetetus, Sophist and Statesman*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994

Easterling, H. J. "Causation in the *Timaeus* and *Laws X*", *Eranos*, 65 (1967), pp. 25-38

Ekstrom, L. W. "Volition and the Will". in O' Connor, T. and Sandis, C. (eds.), *A Companion the Philosophy of Action*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

England, E. B. (ed., tr.) *The Laws of Plato*, Vols. I-II. Manchester: University Press, 1921

Ferrari, G. R. F. "Myth and Conservatism in Plato's Statesman". in Rowe, C. J. (ed.). *Reading the Statesman: Proceedings of the III Symposium Platonicum*. Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 1995

----- “Glaucon’s Reward, Philosophy’s Debt: The Myth of Er”. in Partenie, C. (ed.) *Plato's Myths*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009

Finkelberg, M. “Patterns of Human Error in Homer”. *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 115 (1995), pp. 15-28

Finley, M. I. *Politics in the Ancient World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983

Fletcher, W. (tr.), *The Works of Lactantius*. in Roberts A. and Donaldson, J. (eds.). *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers*, vol. VII. Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1871

Frede, M. *A Free Will: Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought*. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011

Gallop, D. *Plato: Phaedo, Translated with Notes*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975

Gerber, D. E. *Greek Elegiac Poetry*. Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999

Green, W. C. “Fate, Good and Evil in Pre-Socratic Philosophy”. *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 47 (1936), pp. 85-129

----- *Moirai: Fate, Good and Evil in Greek Thought*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948

Gregory, A. "Introduction". in *Plato. Timaeus and Critias*. Waterfield, R. (tr.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Grube, G. M. A. "The Gods of Homer", *Phoenix*, 5 (1951), pp. 62-78

Guthrie, W. K. C. *A History of Greek Philosophy V: The Later Plato and the Academy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978

Hackforth, R. "Plato's Theism". *The Classical Quarterly*, 30 (1936), pp. 4-9

----- "Platonic Forms in the Theaetetus". *The Classical Quarterly*, 7 (1957), pp. 53-58

----- "Plato's Cosmogony (Timaeus 27dff)". *The Classical Quarterly*, 9 (1959), pp. 17-22

Halliwel, S. "The Life-and-Death Journey of the Soul: Interpreting the Myth of Er". in Ferrari, G. R. F. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007

Hansen, M. H. *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes: Structure, Principles and Ideology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991

Harrison, T. *Divinity and History: The Religion of Herodotus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000

Henry Cary (tr.). *The Histories of Herodotus*. New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1904

Herman, A. L. *The Problem of Evil and Indian Thought*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1976.

Herrmann, F. G. "Phthonos in the World of Plato's Timaeus". in Konstan, D. and Rutter, N. K. (eds.). *Envy, Spite and Jealousy: The Rivalrous Emotions in Ancient Greece*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003.

Hick, J. *Evil and the God of Love*, 3<sup>rd</sup> reissue. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010

Hicks, R. D. (tr.) *Diogenes Laertius: Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, Vols. I-II. London: William Heinemann, 1925

Hiriyanna, M. *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, 1<sup>st</sup> Indian ed. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993

Hoffleit, H. B. "An Un-Platonic Theory of Evil in Plato". *Journal of Philology*, 58 (1937), pp. 45-58

Hume, D. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and Other Writings*. Coleman, D. (ed.).  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007

Inwood, M. "Plato's Eschatological Myths". in Partenie, C. (ed.) *Plato's Myths*, Cambridge:  
Cambridge University Press, 2009

Irwin, T. H. "Recollection and Plato's Moral Theory". *The Review of Metaphysics*, 27 (1974),  
pp. 752-772

----- "Who Discovered the Will," *Philosophical Perspectives*, 6 (1992), pp. 453-473

Jirsa, J. "Plato on Characteristics of God: Laws X. 887c5-899d3", *Rhizai*, V.2 (2008), pp. 239-  
259

Johansen, T. K. *Plato's Natural Philosophy: A Study of the Timaeus-Critias*. Cambridge:  
Cambridge University Press, 2004

Johnson, R. R. "Does Plato's 'Myth of Er' Contribute to the Argument of the 'Republic'?"  
*Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 32 (1999), pp. 1-13

Kahn, Ch. H. "Plato's Theory of Desire". *The Review of Metaphysics*, 41 (1987), pp. 77-103

----- “Discovering the Will: From Aristotle to Augustin”. in Dillon, J. M. and Long, A. A. (eds.) *The Question of “Eclecticism”*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1988

Kalkavage, P. (tr.). *Plato: Timaeus*. Newburyport: Focus Publishing, 2001.

Kant, I. “On the Miscarriage of All Philosophical Trials in Theodicy”. in Wood, A. W., Di Giovanni, G. (trs.&eds.). Immanuel Kant: *Religion and Rational Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996

Karamanolis, G. "Plutarch", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2010 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/plutarch/>>.

Kennedy, B. H. *The Theaetetus of Plato: with Translation and Notes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1881

Keping, W. “Plato’s Poetic Wisdom in the Myth of Er”. *Front. Philos. China*, 4 (2009), pp. 282-293

Konstan, D. “Before Jealousy”. in Konstan, D. and Rutter, N. K. (eds.). *Envy, Spite and Jealousy: The Rivalrous Emotions in Ancient Greece*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003.

Lang, M. *Herodotean Narrative and Discourse*. Cambridge, MA: Martin Classical Lectures, 28, 1984

Lanzillotta, L. R. "The So-Called Envy of the Gods: Revisiting a Dogma of Ancient Greek Religion". in Bremmer, J. N., et al. (eds.), *Myths, Martyrs, and Modernity : Studies in the History of Religions in Honour of Jan N. Bremmer*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010.

Leibniz, F. G. W. *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*. Farrer, A. (ed.), Huggard, E. M. (tr.), Charleston: BiblioBazaar, 2007

Lewis, T. *Plato Contra Atheos*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1845

Liddell, H. G., Scott, R. and Jones, H. S. *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9<sup>th</sup> edition with supplement. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996

Long, A. A. and Sedley, D. *The Hellenistic Philosophers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987

Lovejoy, A. O. *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936

Mackie, J. L. *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments For and Against the Existence of God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982

----- "Evil and Omnipotence", in Adams, M. M. and Adams, R. M. (eds.). *The Problem of Evil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990

Manin, B. *The Principles of Representative Government*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997

Marchant, E. C. and Todd, O. J. (trs.) *Xenophon: Memorabilia, Oeconomicus, Symposium Apology*. Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923

Mayhew, R. *Plato: Laws 10. Translation with Commentary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008

----- “The Theology of the Laws”. in Bobonich, C. (ed.). *Plato’s Laws: A Critical Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010

McCloskey, H. J. “God and Evil”. *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 39 (1960), pp. 97-114

McDowell, J. *Plato: Theaetetus, Translated with Notes*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973

McPherran, M. L. “The Gods and Piety of Plato’s Republic”. in Santas, G. (ed.) *Blackwell Guides to Plato’s Republic*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006

----- “Virtue, Luck, and Choice at the End of the Republic”. in McPherran, M. L. (ed.) *Plato’s Republic: A Critical Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010

Meldrum, M. "Plato and the Arche Kakon". *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 70 (1950), pp. 65-74

Menn, S. *Plato on God as Nous*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995

Miller, M. *The Philosopher in Plato's Statesman, together with "Dialectical Education and Unwritten Teachings in Plato's Statesman"*. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2004

Mohr, R. D. "The Sources of Evil Problem and the *archē kynēseōs* Doctrine in Plato". *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science*, 14 (1980), pp. 41-56

----- "Disorderly Motion in Plato's 'Statesman'". *Phoenix*, 35 (1981), pp. 199-215

----- "The Relation of Reason to Soul in Plato's Cosmology: *Sophist* 248e-249c". *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science* 16 (1982), pp. 21-26

----- "Plato's Theology Reconsidered: What the Demiurge Does". *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 2 (1985), pp. 131-144

----- "Plato's Final Thoughts on Evil: Laws X 899-905". *Mind*, 87 (1987), pp. 572-575

----- *God and Forms in Plato*. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2005

Morgan, M. L. "Plato and Greek religion". in R. Kraut (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Morrison, J. S. "Parmenides and Er". *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 75 (1955), pp. 59-68

Morrow, G. R. "Necessity and Persuasion in Plato's Timaeus". *The Philosophical Review*, 59 (1950), pp. 147-163

----- "Plato's Gods". *The Rice University Studies*, 51 (1965), pp. 121-134

Mueller, G. E. "Plato and the Gods". *The Philosophical Review*, 45 (1936), pp. 457-472

Naddaf, G. "Introduction". in Brisson, L. *Plato the Myth Maker*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998

Nails, D. "The Dramatic Date of Plato's Republic". *The Classical Journal*, 93 (1998), pp. 383-396

Nelson, S. "The Justice of Zeus in Hesiod's Fable of the Hawk and the Nightingale". *The Classical Journal*, 96 (1997), pp. 235-247

Nightingale, A. W. "Plato on the Origins of Evil: the Statesman Myth Reconsidered". *Ancient Philosophy*, 16 (1996), pp. 65-91

O'Connor, D. K. "Rewriting the Poets in Plato's Characters". in Ferrari, G. R. F. (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007

Owen, G. E. L. "The Place of the *Timaeus* in Plato's Dialogues". *The Classical Quarterly*, 1/2 (1953), pp. 79-95

Parry, R. D. "The Soul in the Laws X and Disorderly Motion in *Timaeus*". *Ancient Philosophy*, 22 (2002), pp. 289-301

Partenie, C. (ed.). *Plato: Selected Myths*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004

----- *Plato's Myths*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009

----- "Introduction". in Partenie, C. (ed.) *Plato's Myths*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009

Peterson, M. L. (ed.) *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992

Plantinga, A. "De Re et De Dicto". *Nous*, 3 (1969) pp. 235-258

----- *God, Freedom and Evil*. New York: Harper and Row, 1974a

----- *The Nature of Necessity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974b

Platt, A. "Plato, Republic 614 B". *The Classical Review*, 25 (1911), pp. 13-14

Rèmillard, A. "A Herodotean Reading of Solon". *Hirundo: The McGill Journal of Classical Studies*, 8 (2009-2010), pp. 11-20

Richardson, H. "The Myth of Er (Plato, Republic, 616b)". *The Classical Quarterly*, 20 (1926), pp. 113-133

Ritter, C. *The Essence of Plato's Philosophy*. Alles, A. (tr.), New York: The Dial Press, 1933

Robinson, R. "Forms and Error in Plato's Theaetetus". *Philosophical Review*, 59 (1950), pp. 3-30

Robinson, T. M. "Demiurge and World Soul in Plato's Politicus". *The American Journal of Philology* 88 (1967), pp. 57-66

Rowe, C. J. (ed.). *Plato: Phaedo*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993

Sallis, J. *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato's Timaeus*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

Saunders, T. J. "Penology and Eschatology in Plato's *Timaeus* and *Laws*". *The Classical Quarterly*, 23 (1973) pp. 232-244

Sayre, K. M. *Plato's Late Ontology: Riddle Resolved*. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2005

----- *Metaphysics and Method in Plato's Statesman*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006

Schofield, M. *Plato: Political Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006

Sedley, D. "Platonic Causes". *Phronesis*, 43 (1998), pp. 114-132

----- "Three Platonist Interpretations of the *Theaetetus*". in Gill, C. and McCabe, M. M. (eds.), *Form and Argument in Later Plato*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996

----- "The Ideal of Godlikeness". in Fine, G. (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Philosophy, Plato 2: Ethics, Politics, Religion, and the Soul*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999

----- *The Midwife of Platonism: Text and Subtext in Plato's Theaetetus*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004

Sedley, D. (ed.), Long, A. (ed., tr.). *Plato: Meno and Phaedo*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011

Segvic, H. "No One Errs Willingly: the Meaning of Socratic Intellectualism". *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 2000, pp. 1-45

Senc, S. *Grčko-Hrvatski Rječnik za Škole (II. izd.)*. Zagreb: Naprijed, 1988

Shapiro, S. O. "Herodotus and Solon". *Classical Antiquity*, 15 (1996), pp. 348-366

Shorey, P. (tr.). *Plato: The Republic*, Vols. I-II. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1937

Singer, M. G. "The Concept of Evil". *Philosophy*, 79 (2004), pp. 185-214

Sobel, J. H. *Logic and Theism: Arguments For and Against Beliefs in God*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003

Sorabji, R. "The Concept of the Will from Plato to Maximus the Confessor". in Pink, T. and Stone, M. W. F (eds.), *The Will and Human Action: From Antiquity to the Present Day*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Steel, C. "Does Evil Have a Cause? Augustine's Perplexity and Thomas's Answer". *The Review of Metaphysics*, 48 (1994), pp. 251-273

Stern, P. "The Philosophical Importance of Political Life: On the 'Digression' in Plato's 'Theaetetus'". *The American Political Science Review*, 96 (2002), pp. 275-289

Stewart, J. A. *The Myths of Plato*, London: MacMillan and Co., 1905

Swinburne, R. "Omnipotence". *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 3 (1973), pp. 231-237

----- *Providence and the Problem of Evil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998

Tarrant, H. "Literal and Deeper Meanings in Platonic Myths". Collobert, C., Destree, P. and Gonzales, F. J. (eds.), *Plato and Myth: Studies on the Use and Status of Platonic Myths*. Leiden: Brill, 2012

Taylor, A. E. *Plato, the Man and His Work*. London: Methuen, 1926

----- *A Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928

----- "The 'Polytheism' of Plato: An Apologia". *Mind*, 186 (1938), pp. 180-199

Thayer, H. S. "The Myth of Er". *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 5 (1988), pp. 369-384

Thomas, Ch. J. "Plato". in O' Connor and T., Sandis, C. (eds.), *A Companion the Philosophy of Action*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Thompson, W. H. *The Phaedrus of Plato, with English Notes and Dissertations*. London: Whittaker and Co., 1868.

Tschempelik, A. *Knowledge and Self-Knowledge in Plato's Theaetetus*. Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2008

Vardy, P. *The Puzzle of Evil*. London: Fount, 1992

Vidal-Naquet, P. "Plato's Myth of the Statesman, the Ambiguities of the Golden Age and of History". *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 98 (1978) pp. 132-141

Vlastos, G. "The Disorderly Motion in the Timaios". *The Classical Quarterly*, 33 (1939), pp. 71-83

van Inwagen, P. *The Problem of Evil*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006

von Arnim, H. F. A. (ed.). *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, Vols. I-III. Leipzig: Teubner, 1903-5

Vorwerk, M. "Maker or Father? The Demiurge from Plutarch to Plotinus." In Mohr, R. D. and Sattler, B. M. (eds.). *One Book the Whole Universe: Plato's Timaeus Today*. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2010.

Walsh, P. G. (ed., tr.). *Cicero: The Nature of the Gods*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.

Waterfield, R. *Plato: Timaeus and Critias, a New Translation, with an Introduction and Notes by Gregory, A.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Wood, J. L. "Is There an 'Arche Kakou' in Plato?". *The Review of Metaphysics*, 63 (2009), pp. 349-384

Wood, R. J. "The Demiurge and His Model". *The Classical Journal*, 63 (1968), pp. 255-258

Zeller, E. *Plato and the Older Academy*. Alleyne, S. F. (tr.), London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1888

Zeyl, D. J. (tr.). *Plato: Timaeus*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000.

----- "Visualizing Platonic Space". in Mohr, R. D. and Sattler, B. M. (eds.). *One Book the Whole Universe: Plato's Timaeus Today*. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2010

