

ABSTRACT

ARRINGTON OGLESBY BROWN III

ἀθάνατος ψυχή, θνητός ἄνθρωπος: An Examination of the Human Condition in Plato's *Timaeus*
(Under the Direction of DR. ERIKA T. HERMANOWICZ)

This paper examines the *Timaeus*, a metaphysical dialogue of Plato, in an effort to determine the physical underpinnings of morality and rationality. By first analyzing the story of creation and determining the sources of flaws within the universe, this paper focuses on the rational and irrational motions present within the universe. These motions include the divine and ordered revolutions of Reason, but also the chaotic and random motions of Errant Cause. Both of these sources of motion are able to impact the human soul, causing either rational and thus “good” motion, or disordered and imperfect motion. Ultimately, humans must struggle to maintain rational motions within their souls so that they may be better able to utilize reason.

INDEX WORDS: Plato, *Timaeus*, Soul, Motion, Reason, Necessity, Errant Cause, Imitation, Metaphysics

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE HUMAN CONDITION IN PLATO'S *TIMAEUS*

by

ARRINGTON OGLESBY BROWN III

A Thesis Submitted to the Honors Council of the University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Arts in LATIN, GREEK and CLASSICAL CULTURE

in the CLASSICS DEPARTMENT

with HIGH HONORS

Athens, Georgia

2010

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By

ARRINGTON OGLESBY BROWN III

Approved:

Dr. Erika T. Hermanowicz

Dr. Erika T. Hermanowicz

6 May, 2010

Faculty Research Mentor

Approved:

Dr. Nicholas Rynearson

Dr. Nicholas Rynearson

6 May, 2010

Reader

Approved:

Dr. David S. Williams

Dr. David S. Williams

6 May, 2010

Director, Honors Program

Approved:

Dr. Pamela B. Kleiber

Dr. Pamela B. Kleiber

7 May, 2010

Associate Director, Honors Program

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INTRODUCTION

As a metaphysical dialogue, the *Timaeus* tries to explain reality through a mixture of scientific and philosophical beliefs held during the first half of the 4th century B.C.E.¹ Central to the text is the belief in an ethereal realm of divine perfection. Ordered, immortal, and entirely rational, this world does not fit well within the cumbersome physical cosmos of humankind. Nevertheless, it is the duty and purpose of man to overcome his mortal nature and strive for divine reason.

Within the confines of this paper I will attempt to clarify exactly why and how humans are able to be successful in this endeavor. Starting with the nature of the cosmos as it is presented in the *Timaeus*, I will discuss the impediments preventing humans from using and achieving reason. These obstacles originate on the celestial scale as the forces of Necessity and Errant Cause, both of which are inherent to corporeal existence. After describing these phenomena, I will discuss the concepts of training and discipline as positive faculties. By examining several sections of the text, I hope to demonstrate that humans have a limited ability to imitate their superiors in order to overcome the burdens of their mortal bodies. Finally, I will compare the plight of humans with the example of the “World Soul,” or soul of the universe, in an effort to once again highlight the negative aspects of corporeal existence. Ultimately I hope to show that,

¹ Owen (1953), provides an overview of and argument against the traditional dating of this dialogue.

through a rigorous system of bodily training and philosophical discipline, humans have the potential to alter their existence for the better.

Finally, it is important to note the experimental nature of this text. The body of the dialogue is given through voices other than Plato's own, in his usual attempt to preserve some degree of anonymity. This particular text focuses on the opinions of Timaeus, a fairly non-descript aristocrat and thinker, rather than utilizing the normal Platonic mouthpiece, Socrates. Readers may assume that information presented in the *Timaeus*, and thus examinations of this text, will be difficult and hard to conceptualize, but ultimately worthwhile in an effort to understand Plato's overarching system of ethics.

THE ERRANT CAUSE & NECESSITY

τί τὸ ὄν ἀεί, γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον, καὶ τί τὸ γιγνόμενον μὲν ἀεί, ὄν δὲ οὐδέποτε;

“What is that thing existing always, but which never has a beginning, and what is that which is always coming into being,² but which never is?” (27 D-28A)³

Timaeus’ initial account of creation is both hurried and ambiguous, yielding an incomplete picture of the true Platonic cosmological model. Yet through a series of progressive and rational inquiries, Timaeus reaches some pivotal points that form the foundation of the entire dialogue. That which is becoming (γιγνόμενον),⁴ he says, is apprehensible “through the use of disordered perception” (μετ’ αἰσθήσεως ἀλόγου). Furthermore, those things which become must

ὑπ’ αἰτίου τινὸς ἐξ ἀνάγκης γίνεσθαι· παντὶ γὰρ ἀδύνατον χωρὶς αἰτίου γένεσιν
σχεῖν.

“become, out of necessity, due to some cause: for it is impossible for anything to have a beginning without a cause.” (28A)

From this brief assertion, two points are established. First, humans (and all objects possessed of visible, tangible bodies [28C]) fall under the category of “becoming.” Second, their

² Whittaker (1969). An overview of several manuscript discrepancies, including this particular instance. If the ἀεί is authentic (as I will assume in this paper) it implies that there was no true creation of matter, but rather an ordering of the cosmos. Counter claims presume that the ἀεί was added later for balance with the previous sentence, and that it is uncertain whether or not matter is permanent.

³ All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. The text is taken from the 2005 Loeb Classical Library edition, edited by Jeffrey Henderson.

⁴ Cornford (1952), pg 26, translates as “what is everlastingly in a process of change,” rather than something with a beginning or end.

state of becoming must originate from a source.⁵ Timaeus implies that identifying and describing this source is nearly impossible for the limited capabilities of Humans. Nevertheless, because the universe is very beautiful, or perhaps the most beautiful⁶ of all tangible objects, it must have had an eternal model that was perceived by the higher reasoning powers of a Divine Architect.

Timaeus describes how this deity

βουληθεὶς (γὰρ ὁ θεὸς) ἀγαθὰ μὲν πάντα, φλαῦρον δὲ μηδὲν εἶναι κατὰ δύναμιν,

“[having] wished that all things be good, but that nothing be bad as far as his power allowed,”

and he furthermore asserts that

θέμις δ' οὐτ' ἦν οὐτ' ἔστιν τῷ ἀρίστῳ δοῦν ἄλλο πλὴν τὸ κάλλιστον

“it neither was nor is just, regarding the best (of all entities), that he do anything except the best possible thing.” (30A)

From here, the discourse proceeds to describe the preference of divine reason to the irrational, and thus the importance of the immortal and invisible soul within the human body.

In light of this series of statements, one wonders how the forces of irrationality, imperfection and possibly evil⁷ exist within the universe. Still more unbelievable is the potentiality of human agency to overcome these hindrances. Before this issue can be addressed,

⁵ Johansen (2004), pg 71, argues that Plato allows for the possibility of causes of existence other than the Divine Architect, although when the Divine Architect is the cause the result can either be beautiful (based on an eternal model) or ugly (based on a tangible model).

⁶ Proclus II (2008), pgs 186-8. It is unclear exactly why the cosmos is the most beautiful of all objects, but it depends greatly on the nature of the eternal paradigm (the most beautiful of all forms) and the nature of the Divine Architect (the best of all creators) working in combination. It is important to note, however, that the cosmos resembles both the paradigm and the creator [29E].

⁷ Chilcott (1923), pgs 30-31, argues that the soul has two components, the same and the other, that yield the ability to freely chose between either aspiring to the ideal forms (good action) or not (not so good, perhaps even bad, action). Proclus II (2008), pgs 238-40, describes a twofold system in which the Divine Architect (acting with unlimited power) creates entities that are good, and these creations have individual (limited) capacities for acting upon that good.

however, one must ascertain the sources of irrationality within the realm of becoming as well as the numerous impediments working against human reasoning. If the cause of human existence is a Divine (and perhaps faultless) Architect who practices his art perfectly and looks to an ideal model for inspiration, where do flaws arise?

One easily recognizable source of imperfection is the natural disparity between an ideal form and a physical imitation. Plato is fairly explicit in describing the limitations of both a “copy” (εἰκόν) as compared to an ideal “paradigm” (παράδειγμα), and more generally the transient⁸ realm of becoming as compared to eternal being (οὐσία). Timaeus first depicts the relationship through an analogy to sources of knowledge:

ὅτιπερ πρὸς γένεσιν οὐσία, τοῦτο πρὸς πίστιν ἀλήθεια,

“Inasmuch as being compares to (possessing) a beginning, in such a manner truth compares to belief (or faith),” (29C)

and again, comparing Reason (νοῦς) to an opinion of the truth (δόξα ἀληθής):

τὸ μὲν γὰρ αὐτῶν διὰ διδαχῆς, τὸ δ' ὑπὸ πειθοῦς ἡμῖν ἐγγίγνεται: καὶ τὸ μὲν αἰεὶ μετ' ἀληθοῦς λόγου, τὸ δὲ ἄλογον: καὶ τὸ μὲν ἀκίνητον πειθοῖ, τὸ δὲ μεταπειστόν: καὶ τοῦ μὲν πάντα ἄνδρα μετέχειν φατέον, νοῦ δὲ θεοῦς, ἀνθρώπων δὲ γένος βραχύ τι.

“Of these, the one (Reason) arises in us through discipline (or teaching), but the other (opinion) arises due to persuasion; and the one is always in the company of true principle, but the other is without worth; and the one is unmoved by persuasion, but the other is vulnerable to persuasion; and of the one it should be said that many man partake, but of the other (only) the gods and some small class of humans.” (51E)

⁸ Cornford (1952), pg 29. The ever ceasing and random change of “becoming” ensures that Natural Philosophy must always incorporate elements of myth, and cannot deal with exact laws or principles.

Even without any explicit discussion of the differences between “copies” and “paradigms,” and also between “becoming” and “being,” Timaeus implies that tangibility,⁹ and thus corporality, is by nature a flawed state of existence.

This first cause of “evil,”¹⁰ then, is integrally tied to the becoming nature of humans and the physical cosmos. Men are flawed in that they are material copies, and hence imperfect replicas of a divine model. To be clear, the problem is not one of morality,¹¹ but rather of imperfection¹² and deviation from the source. Men aspire to be what they cannot be, but they ought not to be faulted for either their hopeless aspirations or their ontological limitations.¹³ Further inquiries into the disparity between paradigm and copy, as well as the generally defective nature of cosmic material, resound throughout philosophical and religious debate, and ultimately are of little consequence to the aims of this paper. The flawed becoming nature of the human form¹⁴ is not subject to change, and any attempt (including the efforts of training and discipline) to alter the nature of human existence without altering human form would be ineffective. It is suffice it to say that the “animal” of man is, and will always be, unable to rival the model or ideal animal.

⁹ Proclus III (2008), pgs 46-54, is adamant that while Fire possesses a superior degree of visibility and Earth a higher degree of stability and thus touch, all of the elements are intermixed (literally and in terms of their effects) and thus Fire is not the only visible element and Earth is not the only source of tangibility.

¹⁰ Cherniss (1954), ascribes the title “negative evil.” Within Cherniss’ system there also exists “positive evil,” caused purposefully by the soul according to its knowledge or ignorance, and “incidental evil,” caused by the clash between rational order and secondary causes of motion.

¹¹ Cherniss (1954), pg 29. “For negative evil, whether the cause be considered the existence of space itself or the reflection that is an immediate consequence of its existence, nothing and no one is responsible.” Morality implies choice and in this particular instance, humans have none.

¹² Cherniss (1954), pg 24. “Since no copy or reflection can be identical with its model or original, all phenomena must fall short of the reality of the ideas, and all must therefore be something less than perfect.”

¹³ Here, a critical distinction must be drawn between the inherent flaws of becoming and the more intricate failings of the soul when influenced by external material and motion, which will be addressed at a later time.

¹⁴ Identified as a combination of souls within body.

Compounding the problems of corporality, however, is the concept of Receptacle (ὑποδοχή), or the “wherein” (τὸ ὃ ἐν ᾧ γίγνεται) and “nurse” (τιθήνη) for all entities of becoming and the flawed material that constitutes these entities. Receptacle is both formless and intangible,¹⁵ and thus represents neither a paradigm nor a copy, but rather a unique third type of existence. Nevertheless as the container of becoming, Receptacle has a great deal of (often negative) influence on all tangible entities, including human beings.

Timaeus hesitantly tiptoes through an explanation of what exactly constitutes Receptacle, warning of the difficulty of this topic:

τρίτον δὲ τότε μὲν οὐ διειλόμεθα, νομίσαντες τὰ δύο ἔξιν ἰκανῶς: νῦν δὲ ὁ λόγος
ἔοικεν εἰσαναγκάζειν χαλεπὸν καὶ ἀμυδρὸν εἶδος ἐπιχειρεῖν λόγοις ἐμφανίσαι.

“But at that time before we did not distinguish a third (type of existence), having considered the two (others types) explain things sufficiently; But now it seems worthwhile to pin down a difficult and obscure type of existence (and) to attempt to explain it with words.” (49A)

Textual descriptions of the Receptacle are ambiguous to say the least, but Timaeus is adamant that understanding exactly what constitutes Receptacle is fundamental to an accurate perception of the universe. Receptacle contains boundless spatial capacity, but has itself no trace of shape or form.¹⁶ However, there is an immediate and explicit association between Receptacle and Plato’s elemental atoms,¹⁷ and Timaeus hints that describing Receptacle

¹⁵ Cornford (1952), pgs 185-188, claims that the Receptacle is itself invisible and formless, but possesses a degree of permanence in structure that differentiates it from the entities of “becoming” that are formed within it. This does not necessarily mean that Platonic atoms are permanent, and in fact Plato seems to assert the opposite.

¹⁶ Demos (1936), pg 541. “The receptacle is the *container of events*; it is itself nothing, a void in which events thrive and perish.”

¹⁷ Consisting of Fire – tetrahedron, Air – octahedron, Water – icosahedron, and Earth – cube (55D-E).

χαλεπὸν δὲ ἄλλως τε καὶ διότι προαπορηθῆναι περὶ πυρὸς καὶ τῶν μετὰ πυρὸς ἀναγκαῖον τούτου χάριν.

“is difficult, but especially since it is a necessary advantage in and of itself to address the problems concerning fire and those (elements) which accompany fire.” (49B)

Atomic forms are fluid, ever grading into one another,¹⁸ and giving rise to disordered motions.

Furthermore, these atoms are subject to the wear-and-tear of time and physical collisions.

However, atoms are the corporeal and ordered results of the Divine Architect and thus must constitute mere entities of becoming housed within Receptacle.

While the true composition of Receptacle is mysterious, Plato himself seems to repeatedly urge for a non-material emphasis:

δέχεται τε γὰρ αἰεὶ τὰ πάντα, καὶ μορφήν οὐδεμίαν ποτὲ οὐδενὶ τῶν εἰσιόντων ὁμοίαν εἴληφεν οὐδαμῇ οὐδαμῶς,

“For what always receives everything (i.e. Receptacle), never and in no place did it assume any shape similar to those entering (it),” (50C)

and again,

διὸ καὶ πάντων ἐκτὸς εἰδῶν εἶναι χρεὼν τὸ τὰ πάντα ἐκδεχόμενον ἐν αὐτῷ γένει.

“Wherefore it is fitting for that entity receiving every type of form within itself to be exempt from those forms.” (50E)

Contending that Receptacle is explicitly “not stuff or matter”¹⁹ may be an insufficient, although not wholly untenable, conclusion.²⁰

¹⁸ Morrow (1950), pg 152. Most atoms are able to intermingle due to the fundamental triangular forms that pervade each of the elemental structures. This process proceeds on a hierarchical scale, with fire

¹⁹ Morrow (1950), pg 152

²⁰ This is the view that I espouse, but it has little influence on the purposes of this paper.

It is tempting to interpret descriptions of the Receptacle as analogous to Aristotelian “prime matter,”²¹ a sub-atomic source for all the products of becoming. Moreover, words such as χώρα and ἔδρα have broad definitions ranging from “void” to “occupied space,” but translations such as “intangible substance”²² are equally valid. A strong textual argument for such an interpretation may be derived from the so called “gold example” (50 A-C). In this analogue Timaeus’ describes an array of infinitely dissimilar shapes (analogous to the products of Becoming), each molded out of gold. Because of the variable and unstable nature of these shapes which are “on the verge of non-existence,”²³ they are more easily described in terms of their permanent, yet malleable, material. Gold, like Receptacle, has very few predetermined formative qualities of its own for a good reason: so that it may form any number of different copies without excessively deviating from the underlying paradigm of those copies.²⁴ Yet regardless of the degree of materiality comprising Receptacle, it is the existence of physical imbalance and erratic motion contained within this composition that is truly important, for herein lies a primordial source of irrationality and imperfection.

Timaeus' description of the pre-heavenly universe, that is the universe before the arrival and influence of the Divine Architect, is particularly expressive of this point. What he describes is the opposite of a cosmos. It is instead chaos: seemingly ἄλογος and ἄμετρος, but certainly not ἀκίνητος. It is difficult to reconcile the irregular disharmony of pre-cosmic existence with the Aristotelian postulation of a sole "Prime Mover." Caused by the effects of liquification and

²¹ See Dean-Jones (2000), pg 102

²² Johansen (2004), pg 128. A markedly Epicurean translation. Cf. (52A-B).

²³ Mohr (1978), pg 248

²⁴ Mohr (1978), pg 248

ignification, and also the influences of earth and air, these unbalanced elemental motions are in fact more reminiscent of Pre-Socratic philosophical beliefs.²⁵ It does, however, appear that the random turmoil of Receptacle eventually provided some sort of pre-cosmic, albeit purposeless, organization:

διὰ δὲ τὸ μὴθ' ὁμοίων δυνάμεων μήτε ἰσορρόπων ἐμπίμπλασθαι κατ' οὐδὲν αὐτῆς ἰσορροπεῖν, ἀλλ' ἀνωμάλως πάντῃ ταλαντουμένην σείεσθαι μὲν ὑπ' ἐκείνων αὐτήν,

“but owing to being filled with potencies that are neither similar nor balanced, in no part of herself is she equally balanced, but sways unevenly in every part, and is herself shaken by these forms and shakes them in turn as she is moved.” (52E)²⁶

τότε οὕτω τὰ τέτταρα γένη σειόμενα ὑπὸ τῆς δεξαμενῆς, κινουμένης αὐτῆς οἷον ὀργάνου σεισμὸν παρέχοντος, τὰ μὲν ἀνομοιότατα πλεῖστον αὐτὰ ἀφ' αὐτῶν ὀρίζειν, τὰ δὲ ὁμοιότατα μάλιστα εἰς ταύτὸν συνωθεῖν, διὸ δὴ καὶ χώραν ταῦτα ἄλλα ἄλλην ἴσχειν, πρὶν καὶ τὸ πᾶν ἐξ αὐτῶν διακοσμηθὲν γενέσθαι.

“The four classes (elements) being shaken by the container (Receptacle), were, for the most part, separating the most dissimilar of themselves from themselves by the same motion, which was as if an instrument supplying some sort of agitation, but moreover they were pushing together the most similar of themselves into themselves, wherefore indeed these differing classes were (each) occupying different place even before everything became ordered out of them.” (53A)

In addition, Timaeus explicitly states that Receptacle, along with becoming and being, are ancient realms of existence:

ὅν τε καὶ χώραν καὶ γένεσιν εἶναι, τρία τριχῇ, καὶ πρὶν οὐρανὸν γενέσθαι.

“Both being and place (Receptacle) and becoming existed, three entities in three parts, even before the universe had come into existence.” (52D)

²⁵ See Cornford (1952), pg 162. The elements are not yet formed during Timaeus' discussion of Chaos, but traces of elemental quality (for example, heat) are present.

²⁶ Henderson (2005)

Thus even in the absence of the Divine Architect, a disorderly power or powers were still capable of shaping entities of Becoming. As these pre-Divine Architect entities of Becoming must be tangible by their very natures, it follows that they cannot be inherently dependent upon atomic molecules (for example, the Platonic molecule “fire”) but rather on the underlying elemental qualities (in the case of fire a propensity for swift, sharp motion and an essence of relative lightness).²⁷

In summation, variations existing within the ethereal composition of Receptacle (later embodied by the four different Platonic molecules), and pre-existing the Divine Architect, allow for some natural capacity of random genesis within Receptacle itself. They also continue to influence the realm of Becoming and thus the nature of humankind even with the onset of cosmic order. This is not to say that humans are not the products of rational influence, but rather that other ration-less forces also shape the products of Receptacle (i.e. all entities of Becoming), thus causing imperfection. Perhaps Timaeus’ need to address Receptacle in terms of atomic parameters is due to the inconceivable nature of elemental qualities as depicted exclusively in terms of motion and fluctuation and without corporeal constraints.

Whatever the precise source of this motion, Timaeus chooses to label it the “Errant Cause” and goes on to note the powerful effects that it has on human beings. As its name implies, Errant or Wandering Cause (πλανωμένη αίτία) operates with a lack of purpose,

²⁷ Cornford (1952), pg 178, “We are now to think of qualities which are not also ‘things’ or substances, but transient appearances in the Receptacle.”

embodying forces such as random chance (τύχη) and innate disproportion²⁸ that are at work within the realm of Receptacle. These forces do not always work against the designs of reason, but they are disorderly in that they cause haphazard motion and have no real design or goal.

While by nature purposeless and chaotic, Errant Cause nevertheless appears to cause deterministic motion²⁹ with lasting repercussions in the universe. Plato applies the name necessity (ἀνάγκη) to the inescapable products³⁰ of Errant Cause, especially when they clash with the will of the Divine Architect:

νοῦ δὲ ἀνάγκης ἄρχοντος τῷ πείθειν αὐτὴν τῶν γιγνομένων τὰ πλεῖστα ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιστον ἄγειν, ταύτη κατὰ ταῦτά τε δι' ἀνάγκης ἡπτωμένης ὑπὸ πειθοῦς ἔμφρονος οὕτω κατ' ἀρχὰς συνίστατο τόδε τὸ πᾶν.

“But with Reason ruling Necessity, it was (required) for Reason to persuade Necessity that she, bring about, to the best end possible, the majority of those forms coming into existence, and in this way, concerning this matter (the creation of the universe), on account of Necessity giving way to intelligible persuasion (thus) everything was arising in the beginning.”³¹(48A)

This revelation is worthy of a “new start” within the text, and Timaeus proposes to describe the entire cosmos as a creation of both Reason and Necessity. An example of these two forces working together within the plane of Receptacle is illustrated by the creation of atoms. Various innate elemental differences residing within Receptacle were first separated by the

²⁸ Meldrum (1950). Even if the reader accepts sources of motion other than the soul, it is difficult to determine exactly what Plato intends these sources to be: “In the state of chaos space is a receptacle filled with strange contents... in ceaseless change and motion,” and “in the Timaeus kinesis is represented as something ‘given’; it has no origin any more than the Forms or Space” (pg 66).

²⁹ See Johansen (2004), pg 93, pgs 118-132. Johansen unfortunately focuses predominantly on the interaction between atomic bodies, citing the use of the perfect tense (119) as an indicator for permanence of design and utility. These same qualitative forces must have also preexisted the Divine Architect, and the while description of the separating motion of Receptacle “works (much better) in the cosmos than in the pre-cosmos” (125) due to conceptual problems, readers should not ignore textual implications for ease of comprehension.

³⁰ Mason (2006), pg 284. Also referred to as “natural” or “causal” necessity.

³¹ C.f. (30A)

chance power of Errant Cause, and the deterministic power of Necessity then continued to affect motion and perhaps to cause the creation of disordered entities of Becoming.³² Yet it was not until the application of intelligent design based on the divine forms that highly ordered atomic structures were physically shaped.

Further remarks pertaining to the anatomy of man indicate a similar twin authorship. The immortal soul must be placed within a flawed body “due to Necessity” (ἐξ ἀνάγκης), and because of this bodily habitation the soul is subject to several necessary consequences, including sensation and emotion. Elsewhere Timaeus reveals that the mouth was constructed

ὁδοῦσιν καὶ γλώττῃ καὶ χεῖλεσιν ἔνεκα τῶν ἀναγκαίων καὶ τῶν ἀρίστων ...
ἀναγκαῖον μὲν γὰρ πᾶν ὅσον εἰσέρχεται τροφήν διδὸν τῷ σώματι, τὸ δὲ λόγων νᾶμα
ἔξω ῥέον καὶ ὑπηρετοῦν φρονήσει κάλλιστον καὶ ἄριστον πάντων ναμάτων.

“with teeth and a tongue and lips for the sake of both necessary causes and also the best causes ... for all of that sort (of matter), given as nourishment, which enters into the body is necessary, but the stream of words which was flowing out was ruling mind was the most beautiful and best of all such streams.” (75D – E)

Again, of the construction of the body, Timaeus describes how

δὴ κατὰ τὰς συμβολὰς τῶν ὀστέων, ὅπῃ μήτινα ἀνάγκην ὁ λόγος ἀπέφαινε δεῖν
αὐτὰς εἶναι, βραχεῖαν σάρκα ἔφυσεν.

“indeed concerning joints (points of contact of the bones), when logic was declaring that it was necessary for these to exist because of some necessary cause, he produced little flesh.”(74E)

It is vital to note that while the motions of Errant Cause are bound to the realm of Receptacle (thus able to influence the realm of Becoming), they are occasionally able to affect

³² Dean-Jones (2000), pg 104. Elemental structures “are not brought into being by the imposition of form but by the mechanical processes of shaking and like attracting like.”

the functions of reason and the higher operations of the soul.³³ In fact, it is this ceaseless struggle, between the divine reason of the immortal soul and the haphazard condition of corporeal essence, which most characterizes the plight of man.

The ability of Errant Cause to affect even the rational capabilities of corporeal beings becomes clear when examining the structure of the soul, the seat of reason. Timaeus claims that the composition of the immortal human soul is akin (although inferior to) the composition of “World Soul,” the divine component of the cosmos which contains within it “all the corporeal” (πάν τὸ σωματοειδές). During the creation of this entity, three components (Being, Becoming, and a mix of the two) were blended into a uniform whole and then distributed according to a complex mathematical theory in order to produce a unified whole. It is from this compound that both World Soul and immortal human souls were formed. However, because of this mixed composition and the varied motions of the soul³⁴ (particularly of human souls), interaction with the tangible universe is possible.

While Plato is clear that the soul is unique in its capacity for thought, rationality, and conceptualizing the realm of being, he also repeatedly warns that the other sources of motion within the universe are powerful distractions, and that they may obstruct the human soul from its true purpose:

τὸν δὲ νοῦ καὶ ἐπιστήμης ἐραστὴν ἀνάγκη τὰς τῆς ἔμφρονος φύσεως αἰτίας
πρώτας μεταδιώκειν, ὅσαι δὲ ὑπ’ ἄλλων μὲν κινουμένων, ἕτερα δὲ κατὰ ἀνάγκης

³³ Vlastos (1939), pg 79, “It (the soul) can move, and it can be moved. Because it can be moved it is subject to sensation, desire, pleasure and pain, and passions of every sort.”

³⁴ Skemp (1967), pgs 78-79. The motion of the “Circle of the Different” is especially important: “The Circle of the Different is in no sense irrational, except in the sense that its province is the sub-rational; but its function is to bring the sub-rational as near to rationality as it can be brought.”

κινούντων γίνονται, δευτέρας ...λεκτέα μὲν ἀμφοτέρω τὰ τῶν αἰτιῶν γένη, χωρὶς δὲ ὅσαι μετὰ νοῦ καλῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν δημιουργοὶ καὶ ὅσαι μονωθεῖσαι φρονήσεως τὸ τυχὸν ἄτακτον ἐκάστοτε ἐξεργάζονται.

“But it is necessary that the lover of reason and knowledge pursue first the causes of an intelligible nature, but pursue second those other things (causes) arising from necessity, in as much as they are arising from things moving and things being moved ... for both of these types are to be called causes makers of (things), but those makers of things beautiful and good by the faculty of the mind are separate, as are those makers which, forsaking proper thought, always produce disordered chance.” (46D-E)

It is this frail susceptibility to errant motions that primarily hinders humans from reason and separates them from the more divine entities of the *Timaeus*. It is this same susceptibility which demands a life of discipline and philosophic training in the hopes of controlling and overcoming the motions of Receptacle. For only in this way can humans hope to surmount the turmoil of the physical world and strive for the divine.

TRAINING & DISCIPLINE

Having established the obstructions (namely corporality and the chaotic motions of Receptacle) that prevent humans from easily utilizing the rational capabilities of the immortal soul, namely corporality and the chaotic motions of Receptacle, this section will examine the ability of man to overcome these impediments. Loosely following the information presented in three selections of the text, I will explore the increasingly complex model of human anatomy presented in the *Timaeus*, as well as the moral and metaphysical ramifications of this model.

The first section compares the plight of man with the cosmological responsibilities of a group of lesser deities. Imitation of the Divine Artisan and the realm of being is a significant device employed by both parties in their efforts to rationally coerce the chaotic realm of becoming towards order. This theme continues in section two, but I focus specifically on the relationship between the immortal soul and the physical body. Finally, section three discusses the mortal soul and its effects on the ability of humans to utilize reason.

Two critical points should become apparent through the discussion in this section, and they are equally relevant to the entire paper. First, humans are flawed entities living amidst a flawed realm of existence. Although they are endowed with divine characteristics in the faculty of their immortal souls, the chaotic motions and corporeal hindrances associated with physical reality are able to, and continually do, impede rational processes. Second, as humans are able to be manipulated by external forces, so they have a limited ability to influence their own existence.

Furthermore, because Plato equates rationality with moral virtue, humans have an obligation to act upon this ability.

41 A – 42 D

The theme of imitation recurs throughout the Platonic corpus, but its importance to the *Timaeus* in particular cannot be understated. Within the selected section, Plato highlights the universal principle of imitation as it applies to both humans and a group of lesser deities, the “new gods” (νέοι θεοί). Both groups attempt (or should attempt in the case of humans) to “imitate” the flawless action of the Divine Architect in his efforts to shape and improve the chaotic universe through reason. Both groups are ultimately unsuccessful in their endeavors. Yet whereas the new gods instinctively utilize proper imitation, humans need both instruction and moral encouragement. By describing human imitation within a moral framework, that is enforcing the act of proper imitation with threats of punishment, Plato suggests that humans have to both the ability and the moral duty to emulate their superiors.

Plato begins this section of his discourse with a curious rhetorical device: an authoritative speech given by the Divine Architect himself to his semi-immortal¹ underlings. These new gods are to shape the mortal components of birds, men and beasts,² while the artificer himself will form their divine souls. The reasoning behind this division of labor is simple, as Timaeus explains:

¹ “Wherefore ye also, seeing that ye were generated, are not wholly immortal or indissoluble...” (41B) - Henderson

² The Divine Architect is unable to complete this task himself for fear that these creatures would be immortal.

δι' ἐμοῦ δὲ ταῦτα γενόμενα καὶ βίου μετασχόντα θεοῖς ἰσάζουσιν.

“But these, partaking in life through my agency, might be made equal to gods.”

(41C)

Meticulously crafted by the Divine Architect, immortal souls contain precious knowledge of the universe and of the “laws of allotment” or “destiny” (νόμους τε τοὺς εἰμαρμένους), and furthermore each soul claims a star as its permanent home away from the body. Unfortunately, Necessity dictates the existence of flawed mortal beings, and thus the Divine Architect’s partial withdraw is necessary to prevent humans from achieving immortality. Along with all other mortal creatures, humans are not formed from the same material as the cosmos but rather from a more “polluted” variety. The creation of their bodies is solely the responsibility of the new gods, who are expected to falter in this task.

That mortal beings, tangible entities of becoming, are granted bodies comes as no surprise. What is unusual, however, is the particular manner in which the Divine Architect commands his underlings to produce these bodies. Specifically, he commands the new gods to

τρέπεσθε κατὰ φύσιν ὑμεῖς ἐπὶ τὴν τῶν ζώων δημιουργίαν, μιμούμενοι τὴν ἐμὴν δύναμιν
περὶ τὴν ὑμετέραν γένεσιν.

“turn yourselves, according to your nature, towards the craftsman of all things living (the Divine Artificer), imitating my power employed in (crafting) your beginning.” (41C).

The exact phrasing of this decree is intriguing, especially when compared to other instances of imitation within the *Timaeus*. The first such use comes earlier in the text when Socrates discusses the limitation of poets and poetry:

καὶ τὸ μὲν ἑμὸν οὐδὲν θαυμαστόν: ἀλλὰ τὴν αὐτὴν δόξαν εἴληφα καὶ περὶ τῶν
πάλαι γεγονότων καὶ περὶ τῶν νῦν ὄντων ποιητῶν, οὗτι τὸ ποιητικὸν ἀτιμάζων γένος,
ἀλλὰ παντὶ δῆλον ὡς τὸ μιμητικὸν ἔθνος, οἷς ἂν ἐντραφεῖ, ταῦτα μιμήσεται ῥᾶστα καὶ
ἄριστα, τὸ δ' ἐκτὸς τῆς τροφῆς ἐκάστοις γιγνόμενον χαλεπὸν μὲν ἔργοις, ἔτι δὲ
χαλεπώτερον λόγοις εὖ μιμεῖσθαι.

“And regarding my (inability to describe a state in motion) there is nothing amazing: but I hold the same belief about the poets, both those having come about long ago and those now living, not dishonoring the creative act (of poetry), but it is clear to all that the imitating class, among what it was brought up, it may imitate these things easily and best, but it is difficult to imitate well what arises outside the rearing of each in deeds, and still harder in words.” (19D-E)

The audience may assume that this passage builds on other Platonic discussions of imitation, particularly those of the *Republic*. Here though, the inability of poets to adequately describe Socrates' ideal state is attributed to a lack of experience and likely a flawed source of inspiration. In his commentary, Proclus makes careful note of the difference between divinely inspired poetry and mere skill in the poetic arts.³ Similarly, there are two distinct forms of imitation used throughout the text of the *Timaeus*, both inadequately expressed by the same root word: *μίμησις*.⁴ A differentiation between the two is supported by contextual comparisons, and it is most clearly (although without the actual verb form itself) expressed in *Timaeus*' own description of craftsmanship:

ὅτου μὲν οὖν ἂν ὁ δημιουργὸς πρὸς τὸ κατὰ ταύτᾳ ἔχον βλέπων αἰεὶ τοιοῦτῳ τινὶ
προσχωρῶμενος παραδείγματι, τὴν ἰδέαν καὶ δύναμιν αὐτοῦ ἀπεργάζεται, καλὸν ἐξ
ἀνάγκης οὕτως ἀποτελεῖσθαι πᾶν: οὗ δ' ἂν εἰς γεγονός, γεννητῷ παραδείγματι
προσχωρῶμενος, οὐ καλόν.

³ Proclus III (2008), pgs 157-8

⁴ see Tate (1932), pgs 161-163

“But whenever the artificer of any object, in forming its shape and quality, keeps his gaze fixed on that which is uniform, using a model of this kind, that object, executed in this way, must of necessity be beautiful; but whenever he gazes at that which has come into existence and uses a created model, the object thus executed is not beautiful.” (28A-B)⁵

Proclus expounds on this theme by suggesting that Socrates does not criticize poetry as a whole, but rather only the “skilled” or “imitative” kind that has been “raised on poor laws and character.”⁶ What is needed for proper imitation is no mortal skill or device, but rather the goal of replicating the realm of being⁷ and acting in a manner akin to that of the Divine Architect.⁸ Thus in creating bodies for the three types of mortal beings, the new gods would ideally imitate their own maker by focusing on the paradigm of the ideal animal.

It is worth reiterating that, while this type of imitation is both proper and will result in a beautiful product, perfection cannot and should not be obtained. Like the Divine Architect himself, the new gods are bound by the limitations of Necessity. In addition to these basic restrictions they are also themselves less-than-perfect deities⁹ and are immortal only by default.¹⁰ Their creations must be mortal and flawed by nature or else the cosmos would be

⁵ Henderson (2005)

⁶ Proclus III (2008), pg 158

⁷ Tate (1932), pg 161, “The kind of poetry (or painting or oratory or any other art) which is imitative in the good sense is that which expresses the ideal world. It uses the ‘divine paradigm.’”

⁸ Ibid. Comparisons with other Platonic texts, particularly the *Sophist*, lead Tate to define *imitation* as form of imitation in which the “creator of the appearance uses himself as the instrument of imitation, i.e., where the imitator makes himself appear like another person in body or voice.”

⁹ Cornford (1952), pg 141, makes a fitting analogue between these lesser deities and the Sun, which has both motion of the Same (rotation) and motion of the Other (seen as a gradual movement up and down the ecliptic plane according to season). Both types of motion are rational, but the new gods are not simple or uniform in their motions and reasoning as is the Divine Architect.

¹⁰ Their continual existence depends entirely on the whim of the artificer, but he claims that he will never destroy them.

incomplete. In places, a cynical reader¹¹ may detect undertones of maliciousness and spite in the actions of these lesser gods, especially when the negative aspects of their works are described:

τε εἶδος ἐν αὐτῷ ψυχῆς προσωκοδόμουν τὸ θνητόν, δεινὰ καὶ ἀναγκαῖα ἐν ἑαυτῷ
παθήματα ἔχον, πρῶτον μὲν ἡδονήν, μέγιστον κακοῦ δέλεαρ, ἔπειτα λύπας, ἀγαθῶν φυγὰς,
ἔτι δ' αὖ θάρρος καὶ φόβον, ἄφρονε συμβούλῳ, θυμὸν δὲ δυσπαραμύθητον, ἐλπίδα δ'
εὐπαράγωγον

They “housed therein besides another form of soul, even the mortal form, which has within it passions both fearful and unavoidable – firstly, pleasure, a most mighty lure to evil; next pains, which put good to rout; and besides these, rashness and fear, foolish counselors both; and anger, hard to dissuade; and hope, ready to seduce.” (69C-D)

Nevertheless, intermittent phrases seem to indicate that such distrustful speculations exceed the language of the text. In particular, Timaeus later mentions that the new gods were

σεβόμενοι μαιίνειν τὸ θεῖον, ὅτι μὴ πᾶσα ἦν ἀνάγκη, χωρὶς ἐκείνου κατοικίζουσιν εἰς

“fearing to pollute the divine (soul), because it was not entirely necessary.” (69D)

Instead of ill purpose, Plato seems to argue that these lesser deities operate solely on rational motives,¹² and have little or no choice in the method (imitation) or manner (proper imitation) of their production. Ultimately, bodily flaws seem to arise only from unavoidable blunder, and thus in no way can any malevolence be ascribed to the Divine Architect.

¹¹ Johansen (2004), pg 147-148, explores this theme, concluding that “this is no way to describe affections that are necessary from the point of view of our good.”

¹² Johansen (2004), proceeds to argue against the hypothesis that the lesser deities “gave us these affections exactly *in order* to trip us up,” claiming that they should not be catalysts for irrationality.

From here, Plato proceeds to explain¹³ these bodily flaws in detail, including the various symptoms that arise as a result of the turbulent motions of the mortal anatomy,¹⁴ as well as their impact on mortal psychology. The specific effects here enumerated include:

πρῶτον μὲν αἴσθησιν ἀναγκαῖον εἶη μίαν πᾶσιν ἐκ βιαίων παθημάτων σύμφυτον γίγνεσθαι, δεύτερον δὲ ἡδονῇ καὶ λύπῃ μεμειγμένον ἔρωτα, πρὸς δὲ τούτοις φόβον καὶ θυμὸν ὅσα τε ἐπόμενα αὐτοῖς καὶ ὅποσα ἐναντίως πέφυκε διεστηκότα

“First, necessary perception of the senses of violent collisions that is one possession ingrained, and second, love that is mixed with pleasure and pain, and those in addition to these being fear and spirit, and those following contrary (to reason) which are separate.” (42A-B)

Rather than stopping here, however, Plato proceeds to build upon these physical realities in order to establish a system of morality, complete with a description of punishments (in the form of ignoble reincarnations¹⁵) that will be inflicted on those humans who do not overcome the hindrances of their bodies:

ὣν εἰ μὲν κρατήσοιεν, δίκη βιώσοιντο, κρατηθέντες δὲ ἀδίκῃ. καὶ ὁ μὲν εὔ τὸν προσήκοντα χρόνον βιούς, πάλιν εἰς τὴν τοῦ συννόμου πορευθεὶς οἴκησιν ἄστρου, βίον εὐδαιμόνα καὶ συνήθη ἔξοι, σφαλεῖς δὲ τούτων εἰς γυναικὸς φύσιν ἐν τῇ δευτέρᾳ γενέσκει μεταβαλοῖ: μὴ πανόμενός τε ἐν τούτοις ἔτι κακίας, τρόπον ὃν κακύνοιτο, κατὰ τὴν ὁμοιότητα τῆς τοῦ τρόπου γενέσεως εἰς τινα τοιαύτην ἀεὶ μεταβαλοῖ θήρειον φύσιν.

“If they should overcome these (contrary forces), they will live justly, having overcome the unjust. And he having lived well his proper amount of time, having been sent back into his rational, astral abode, he will have a pleasing life

¹³ This part of the account is not directly quoted from the Divine Architect as the speech proper ends in section 41D.

¹⁴ Miller (1957), pgs 103-4, remarks that Plato’s main objective in describing the turbulent motions of the mortal human body is to note their effects on the immortal soul. Due to the conceptual difficulty of this topic the nature of these motions is often “revealed in poetic language and metaphorical conceptions.”

¹⁵ Saunders (1973), pgs 237-8, notes that this system of reincarnation is built on a hierarchy similar to the elemental atoms, with the best (fire) being the lightest or highest and the worst (earth) being the lowest and heaviest.

and home, but he having failed in these endeavors will change in the second beginning into the nature of a woman, and still not ceasing in these evils, he may be further corrupted in this way, he will always change into some sort of beastly form according to the likeness of the beginning of his form. according to the nature of the beginning of his form into some such.” (42B-C)

Such a bestowal of accountability assumes both that humans have the ability to discern the just from the unjust, and also that they have the means to act on this knowledge in spite of their mortal limitations. This is not always the case, however, as Plato himself reveals:

κακὸς μὲν γὰρ ἑκὼν οὐδεὶς, διὰ δὲ πονηρὰν ἔξιν τινὰ τοῦ σώματος καὶ ἀπαίδευτον τροφήν ὁ κακὸς γίγνεται κακός, παντὶ δὲ ταῦτα ἐχθρὰ καὶ ἄκοντι προσγίγνεται

“For no one is willingly immoral, but the immoral man becomes immoral because of some painful condition of the body and a boorish upbringing, and for everyone these things (conditions) arise unwillingly as enemies.” (86E)

Instead, the emphasis seems to be on control over one’s body, and the relationship that the human body has with the immortal soul. Like the new gods, humans have the ultimately unobtainable obligation to preserve the rational essence of their immortal souls. Indeed, the absence of any post-life assessment or judgment¹⁶ suggests that the continual cycle of reincarnation is a natural process contained within the universe, and that it occurs without the direct intervention of any higher power. Thus to some degree, mortal physiology (actual bodily composition) may be altered by the (in this case unjust) actions of mortals themselves based on their own moral behavior.¹⁷ Unjust behavior, then, is partly the result of willing adherence to

¹⁶ Ibid, pg 238. This is also reflected in the language of this passage.

¹⁷ Cornford (1952), pg 144, “the chief lesson here is that the soul is responsible for any evil that it may suffer,” and “moral evil is the only real evil.”

base motions and urgings¹⁸ found within the human anatomy and can somehow be partially remedied by means of mortal agency.

Plato is hesitant to name this remedial faculty of mankind, but it must be a form of proper imitation similar to that employed by the new gods. Inexplicably, the strongest use of the actual verb, μιμέομαι, occurs when humans are advised to imitate Receptacle in maintaining a constant motion (i.e. exercise) of the body as a means of warding off disease (88D-E). It is indeed astounding that Plato does not instead urge for the imitation of a paradigm or some other more divine entity. His reasoning for citing such a flawed source of inspiration may be due to the relative imperceptibility of the ideal forms (68E – 69A), or perhaps because the issue at hand is the imitation of the body rather than the soul. However, it is very likely that Plato is referring to the rational benefits of certain empirical stimuli (particularly Astronomical bodies and the harmony of music), as he prefaces these remarks with the statement:

κατὰ δὲ ταῦτα ταῦτα καὶ τὰ μέρη θεραπευτέον, τὸ τοῦ παντὸς ἀπομιμούμενον εἶδος.

“But it must be discussed concerning these things themselves, the ones apportioned and imitating the form of the universe.” (88C)

Whatever the reason for this particular use of μιμέομαι, other forms of imitation must exist that allow for “proper” imitation. Plato’s unwillingness to mention such imitation is partly due to the nature of the text. The *Timaeus* is a cosmological dialogue and it concerns itself with “λόγον παντὸς” (92C), not λόγον ἀνθρώπων. Nevertheless due to the nature of mankind’s primary task, overcoming the necessary hindrances of the body with reason and order, it must be assumed that humans are also to imitate more divine entities such as the Divine Artificer.

¹⁸ Stalley (1996), pg 364

43A – 44D

The previous passage focused on the theme of imitation as both a creative faculty and as a means of surmounting bodily flaw. Almost immediately following it, this passage is a progression and elaboration of similar topics. The human body and soul are now fully formed, and the affects of each on the other are explored in greater detail. The turmoil of corporality continues to be a prominent theme, but Timaeus now describes a more complex system in which the body is both a hindrance and a necessary tool for achieving reason and harmony. In order to imitate the Divine Architect and successfully stabilize the motions of the immortal soul, humans must necessarily seek to balance the physical requirements of their bodies with a beneficial aversion to the chaotic sensations of the world of becoming. Yet equally important is the distinctly human ability to harness certain useful sensations and utilize them in the pursuit of internal harmony and rationality. To live justly, that is to foster and adhere to the innate, rational tendencies of the immortal soul, humans will need to train themselves to perform both avoid and embrace sensation.

To begin as Plato begins with the early life of a human, the immortal soul is first subjected to insertion within the mortal body, and the disorderly motions that arise as a result:

τὰς τῆς ἀθανάτου ψυχῆς περιόδους ἐνέδουν εἰς ἐπίρρυτον σῶμα καὶ ἀπόρρυτον. αἱ δ' εἰς ποταμὸν ἐνδεθεῖσαι πολὺν οὔτ' ἐκράτουν οὔτ' ἐκρατοῦντο, βίᾳ δὲ ἐφέροντο καὶ ἔφερον, ὥστε τὸ μὲν ὅλον κινεῖσθαι ζῶον, ἀτάκτως μὴν ὅπῃ τύχοι προῖέναι καὶ ἀλόγως

They placed “the revolutions of the immortal soul within the flowing and streaming body. But these, bound (as if) in a great river, were neither superior nor defeated, but were being carried and carrying by force so that the whole animal was moved, and it came about disorderly and illogically by means of chance.” (43A-B)

Quite plainly, this union is neither easy nor particularly pleasant for humans to bear.

Unfortunately, the insertion of rational souls within vulnerable bodies is the product of Necessity¹ and thus unalterable.

Here, as elsewhere, Plato uses the imagery of motion to express degrees of rationality or irrationality. For instance, World Soul moves with the motions of the “Same” and “Different.” Thus it is able to manifest characteristics of divine rationality while simultaneously interacting with the inherently chaotic realm of becoming.² The human soul also possesses a spark of divine rationality, but it is infinitely more vulnerable and also exposed to more (here six specifically) and stronger sources of motion.³ The body, which is subject to influx and efflux of Receptacle, is primarily a portal through which the turbulent motions of Receptacle are able to attack the human soul. Plato continues to describe the young soul which is afflicted and impaired, and no longer able to utilize reason:

¹ Cornford (1952), pg 147, “The language hints at a certain analogy between the task of the human reason the task of the Demiurge himself, who ‘took over all that was visible, not at rest but in discordant and unordered motion, and brought it from disorder into order (30A)’.”

² See 37

³ Johansen (2004), pg 143, The circles of the soul are exposed to linear motions through the bodily processes of nutrition and perception... Timaeus employs the image of a river to illustrate the impact of the body’s motions on those of the soul.

ὅταν τέ τῳ τῶν ἔξωθεν τοῦ ταύτοῦ γένους ἢ τοῦ θατέρου περιτύχῳσιν, τότε ταύτόν τῳ καὶ
θάτερόν του τάναντία τῶν ἀληθῶν προσαγορεύουσαι ψευδεῖς καὶ ἀνόητοι γεγόνασιν,
οὐδεμία τε ἐν αὐταῖς τότε περίοδος ἄρχουσα οὐδ' ἡγεμών ἐστίν

"And whenever they meet with one of those from without, either of the class of the Same or of the Different (or Other), then greeting it as the Same or the Different, the opposite of that, things false and unfamiliar with the truth, since no revolution in these guide nor is there any ruler." (43E – 44A)

The physiological condition of the soul, here its initial insertion within the human body, has exposed its normally rational motions and operations to irrational stimuli. The result is both flawed action and perhaps even moral condemnation. Undoubtedly humans are neither responsible for the detrimental influences encountered at "birth," nor wholly for the natural inadequacies of their developmental stages. Nevertheless, the soul has a constant obligation to return to its "first and best state," and the burden of responsibility remains on humans throughout their lives to lessen the distractions of the body.

To complicate matters, though, Plato later expresses the need for balance between the body and soul:

πρὸς γὰρ ὑγείας καὶ νόσους ἀρετάς τε καὶ κακίας οὐδεμία συμμετρία καὶ ἀμετρία μείζων
ἢ ψυχῆς αὐτῆς πρὸς σῶμα αὐτό: ὧν οὐδὲν σκοποῦμεν οὐδ' ἐννοοῦμεν, ὅτι ψυχὴν ἰσχυρὰν
καὶ πάντῃ μεγάλην ἀσθενέστερον καὶ ἔλαττον εἶδος ὅταν ὀχῇ, καὶ ὅταν αὖ τοῦναντίον
συμπαγῆτον τούτῳ, οὐ καλὸν ὅλον τὸ ζῶον, ἀσύμμετρον γὰρ ταῖς μεγίσταις συμμετρίαις.

"For concerning both healthiness and illnesses and excellence and evils, there is no symmetry or asymmetry greater than that of the soul with the body: of these, we neither see nor think that when the soul, because whenever a strong and entirely great soul holds a sickly and weak(er) appearance (i.e. the body), or again whenever this frame is thus opposite, the living creature is not beautiful, for it is unmeasured in the greatest symmetries." (87D)

Here described, the interaction between immortal souls and human bodies is complex and particular to the individual. Yet in all cases, the faculties of both the immortal soul and the flawed body must be exercised if harmony is to be achieved. Understanding this dubious partnership between body and soul, as well as the influence that each may have on the other, is vital to understanding mankind's culpability and responsibility.

Controlling the irrational motions⁴ caused by and experienced through the flawed body, and thus returning to a state of ordered motion and rationality,⁵ appears to be a two part process. Initially, humans must seek to distance themselves from any catalysts of non-rational motion so that the more primal motions of the soul will not be overwhelmed. It appears that Plato is specifically referring to atomic processes, especially those that can be controlled by human agency. Plato uses the term "sensation" to describe the interactions between elemental atoms and the human body. However, these physical collisions often have more metaphysical consequences for the immortal soul and the overall disposition of the person involved.

For example, the unstable development of adolescents combined with a corresponding increase in the necessary amount of consumption (i.e. food and drink) yields an instability that is not conducive to rational thinking.⁶ Such a practice is necessary to the growth of children, and thus is not "unjust" by nature. However, continued and unnecessary overindulgence into the adult years is seen as a result of human agency, and can result in the onset of unwanted medical

⁴ Understanding the particular types of motions that erratic forces cause is not vital to this argument, and it may well be infeasible. It is imperative that these motions be understood as different and contrary to the workings of reason, which are often presented by Plato as operating in a circular motion.

⁵ Reynolds (2004), pg 84. "The immortal soul is still potentially able to restore proper motion to itself and the body. It is important to remember that soul as soul is unchanging in its primary characteristic. It is always striving to return to its natural self-moving circular path."

⁶ Proclus V (1998), pgs 1040-1

consequences and unjust behavior due to excessive interaction between the soul (via the body) and external forces.

A substantial portion of the *Timaeus* dwells upon the nature and medical symptoms (though seldom the moral implications) of various excesses of sensation. Discipline of the body, both to avoid corporeal sources of rational motion and, when they are encountered, to limit their impact upon the immortal soul, is necessary for living justly. Often, however, these negative effects can be avoided or remedied by a natural inclination towards balance and internal harmony, as is seen with the newly implanted soul:

καὶ διὰ δὴ ταῦτα πάντα τὰ παθήματα νῦν κατ' ἀρχάς τε ἄνους ψυχὴ γίγνεται τὸ πρῶτον, ὅταν εἰς σῶμα ἐνδεθῇ θνητόν. ὅταν δὲ τὸ τῆς αὔξης καὶ τροφῆς ἔλαττον ἐπὶ ῥεῦμα, πάλιν δὲ αἱ περίοδοι λαμβανόμεναι γαλήνης τὴν ἐαυτῶν ὁδὸν ἴωσι καὶ καθιστῶνται μᾶλλον ἐπιόντος τοῦ χρόνου, τότε ἤδη πρὸς τὸ κατὰ φύσιν ἰόντων σχῆμα ἐκάστων τῶν κύκλων αἱ περιφορὰὶ κατευθυνόμεναι, τό τε θάτερον καὶ τὸ ταῦτὸν προσαγορεύουσαι κατ' ὀρθόν, ἔμφορα τὸν ἔχοντα αὐτὰς γιγνόμενον ἀποτελοῦσιν.

“Hence it comes about that, because of all these affections, now as in the beginning, so often as the Soul is bound within a mortal body it becomes at the first irrational. But as soon as the stream of increase and nutriment enters in less volume, and the revolutions calm down and pursue their own path, becoming more stable as time proceeds, then at length, as the several circles move each according to its natural track, their revolutions are straightened out and they announce the Same and Other aright, and thereby they render their possessor intelligent.” (44A–B)⁷

Limiting sensations aids in the elimination of excess, irrational motion and allows the soul to return to a state of reason. It should be noted, however, that several instances of

⁷ Henderson (2005)

sensation⁸ are generally beneficial to the soul, and thus are welcome catalysts of harmonious motion. Indeed Plato continues to describe how these beneficial sensations of the body, in the form of atomic interaction with the eyes, can be used to guide the soul back towards reason and a proper state of motion:

θεὸν ἡμῖν ἀνευρεῖν δωρήσασθαι τε ὄψιν, ἵνα τὰς ἐν οὐρανῷ τοῦ νοῦ κατιδόντες περιόδους
χρησάμεθα ἐπὶ τὰς περιφορὰς τὰς τῆς παρ' ἡμῖν διανοήσεως, συγγενεῖς ἐκείναις οὕσας,
ἀταράκτοις τεταραγμέναις, ἐκμαθόντες δὲ καὶ λογισμῶν κατὰ φύσιν ὀρθότητος
μετασχόντες, μιμούμενοι τὰς τοῦ θεοῦ πάντως ἀπλανεῖς οὕσας, τὰς ἐν ἡμῖν πεπλανημένας
καταστησαίμεθα.

"God found and gave to us sight so that having looked upon the revolutions of reason in the universe we might manage the revolutions of thinking regarding ourselves, these being alike to those, as are the disturbed to the undisturbed, but having learned and having shared in the uprightness of calculations of nature, imitating those entities of god being wholly unmoving, we calmed the wanderings in ourselves." (47 B-C)

This willful and beneficial utilization of the bodily faculties for rational purposes is the second means of controlling irrational motion and overcoming corporeal flaws. Retrospectively, Timaeus' exhortation to merely lessen the "stream of increase and nutriment" is deceptive in that it does not advise of application of sensation as an instrument of rationality.⁹ The body, then, is not merely a portal for chaotic motions. It is also a tool which allows immortal soul¹⁰ to interact with and learn from the divine organization of the universe. Humans are both able and expected

⁸ Hearing, particularly of harmonic musical tones and also of useful instructions, is another prominent example of beneficial sensation.

⁹ It is unclear whether the sensations of the body have direct effects on the soul itself, or if they merely supersede other, more harmful, sensations and thereby lessen the negative influences affecting the rational and unchanging immortal soul. See Reynolds, pgs 84-85. "The astronomical phenomena serve as a constant reminder of the proper motion of the soul."

¹⁰ Ibid. "Of course, merely gazing at these motions will not solve his (the recipient's) problems... It is the recognition of the proper motion of the stars, the motion of the Same, and the ordering of time that is vital to the start of philosophy."

to harness useful sensations with positive results. However, Plato warns of the need for an “upbringing of education” (τροφή παιδεύσεως) in order to maintain consistency in this endeavor:

ἂν μὲν οὖν δὴ καὶ συνεπιλαμβάνηταί τις ὀρθὴ τροφή παιδεύσεως, ὁλόκληρος ὑγιής τε παντελῶς, τὴν μεγίστην ἀποφυγῶν νόσον, γίγνεται· καταμελήσας δέ, χολὴν τοῦ βίου διαπορευθεὶς ζωὴν, ἀτελὴς καὶ ἀνόητος εἰς Ἅιδου πάλιν ἔρχεται

“Now indeed anyone who may in the right path of education, escaping sickness for the most part, becomes entirely whole and healthy; but he having taken no care (for his upbringing), having fulfilled a meager excuse for a life, he returns again incomplete and thoughtless he returns to Hades.” (44C)

It is difficult to determine exactly what actions fall under the category of “educational training,” but Plato gives some hint earlier in the text when Socrates briefly recalls several points of interest from the *Republic*:

τί δὲ τροφήν; ἄρ' οὐ γυμναστικῇ καὶ μουσικῇ μαθήμασιν τε ὅσα προσήκει τοῦτοις, ἐν ἅπασι τεθράφθαι;

“And about the upbringing (of the *Guardian* class)? How much it (the upbringing) was seeming to be (composed of) training in gymnastic (athletic) skills and the things learned (education), and that they be reared among all these?” (18A)

The apparent hesitancy to discuss this matter at length within the *Timaeus* may be a purposeful attempt to avoid redundancy and overlap with the *Republic*, which is after all focused on the social aspects of justice. Nevertheless, Plato makes it clear that “educational training” encompasses a wide range of subjects and that it seeks to both discipline the body (through the use of gymnastics), as well as to habituate the immortal soul to proper actions (learning and understanding) and proper motions (the ordered revolutions of reason). Like the Divine Architect

and also the lesser deities, humans should attempt to “persuade” the workings of Necessity towards the best possible outcome. Yet unlike their divine superiors, humans can (and should) avail themselves of the beneficial influences of the universe. The interaction between the intangible, immortal soul and all things corporeal is rather complex, and Plato is compelled to introduce the faculty of “mortal soul” in order to adequately explain the process.

88B – 90D

In this final section, Plato presents his most comprehensive description of the immortal human soul (housed in the head), its rational and occasionally irrational revolutions, and how humans must proceed to obtain balance and reason. Throughout previous discussions it has become increasingly clear that while the needs of the body are contrary to the ultimate goal of man, they are a necessary component of human life and of interaction with the physical universe. To this equation Plato adds the twin components of the mortal soul, embodied by the faculties of spirit and appetite, which are located in the chest and belly respectively. While subordinate to the divine rationality of immortal soul, these flawed bodily faculties are nonetheless powerful. If humans are to achieve a just and rational existence, they must first find a means of coping with their mortal souls.

Like the human body, mortal soul is a flawed product of the new gods:

οἱ δὲ μιμούμενοι, παραλαβόντες ἀρχὴν ψυχῆς ἀθάνατον, τὸ μετὰ τοῦτο θνητὸν σῶμα αὐτῇ περιετόρνευσαν ὅχημά τε πᾶν τὸ σῶμα ἔδωσαν ἄλλο τε εἶδος ἐν αὐτῷ ψυχῆς προσωκοδόμουν τὸ θνητόν.

“but the, imitating, having recieved the immortal guide of the soul, after this they fitted around this the mortal body and gave the body as a vessel and as another form in which they built in addition to this the mortal part of the soul.” (69C)

Negative descriptions of the mortal soul are understandable. It exists as an embodiment of the hindrances associated with corporality and the limitations of an existence within

Receptacle. Nevertheless, it would be improper to label any component of mortal soul “immoral.” For whereas the immortal soul is by nature equipped with the ability to reason and thus can and should utilize this faculty, the more base urgings of mortal soul are entirely devoid of reason.¹

Plato proceeds to develop a hierarchy of souls, and describes how human anatomy is structured for the benefit of the immortal soul:

χωρὶς ἐκείνου κατοικίζουσιν εἰς ἄλλην τοῦ σώματος οἴκησιν τὸ θνητόν, ἰσθμὸν καὶ ὄρον διοικοδομήσαντες τῆς τε κεφαλῆς καὶ τοῦ στήθους, αὐχένα μεταξὺ τιθέντες, ἵν' εἴη χωρίς. Ἐν δὲ τοῖς στήθεσιν καὶ τῷ καλουμένῳ θώρακι τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς θνητὸν γένος ἐνέδουν. καὶ ἐπειδὴ τὸ μὲν ἄμεινον αὐτῆς, τὸ δὲ χεῖρον ἐπεφύκει, διοικοδομοῦσι τοῦ θώρακος αὖ τὸ κύτος...

“Apart from this they established in another part of the body the mortal, having built an isthmus and a wall between the head and the chest, having placed the neck in between, so that it (the immortal soul) might be separate. Indeed in the breast and in that called the thorax they have the mortal type of soul. And since one type is better, but one is worse, they again built a hollow within the thorax.” (69E – 70A)

τὸ μετέχον οὖν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀνδρείας καὶ θυμοῦ, φιλόνικον ὄν, κατώκισαν ἐγγυτέρῳ τῆς κεφαλῆς μεταξὺ τῶν φρενῶν τε καὶ αὐχένος, ἵνα τοῦ λόγου κατήκοον ὄν κοινῇ μετ' ἐκείνου βίῃ τὸ τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν κατέχει γένος, ὅπουτ' ἐκ τῆς ἀκροπόλεως τῷ τ' ἐπιτάγματι καὶ λόγῳ μηδαμῇ πείθεσθαι ἐκὸν ἐθέλοι...

“That portion of the [mortal] soul partaking of courage and spirit, being a lover of victory, they established near the head between the midriff and the neck, so that it might subdue the class subject to desires by the same force as that one [the immortal soul], an adherence to logic, whenever they might not at all willingly wish to obey the edicts and logic of the topmost head.” (70A)

¹ Reynolds (2004), pg 92.

τὸ δὲ δὴ σίτων τε καὶ ποτῶν ἐπιθυμητικὸν τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ ὅσων ἔνδειαν διὰ τὴν τοῦ σώματος ἴσχει φύσιν, τοῦτο εἰς τὸ μεταξὺ τῶν τε φρενῶν καὶ τοῦ πρὸς τὸν ὀμφαλὸν ὄρου κατώκισαν, οἷον φάτνην ἐν ᾧ παντὶ τοῦτω τῷ τόπῳ τῇ τοῦ σώματος τροφῇ τεκτηνόμενοι· καὶ κατέδησαν δὴ τὸ τοιοῦτον ἐνταῦθα ὡς θρέμμα ἄγριον, τρέφειν δὲ συνημμένον ἀναγκαῖον, εἴπερ τι μέλλοι ποτὲ θνητὸν ἔσεσθαι γένος

“But that part of the soul desiring of food and drink, and whatever the nature of the body holds a lack of, this they established in the place between the midriff and the boundary by the navel, having built a sort of crib in all this place for the rearing of the body: and indeed they bound this sort [the mortal soul] within as if it were a savage nursling, but although pressing it, it was necessary to rear it, if ever the mortal portion wished to exist.” (70D-E)

What is described is a complex system of interdependence that, like the body-soul relationship, is crafted in the most beneficial and rational manner allowed by Necessity. Just as World Soul is composed of elements from the realms of Being, Becoming, and a mix of the two (35A-B), so readers may assign specific identities to the three divisions of the human soul. The immortal soul, secluded and divine, is quite naturally the strongest link² between humanity and the divine. Conversely, human appetite for both sensation and basic nourishment represents a direct interaction with the realm of “becoming” and all of the disordered atomic motions therein.³ The “spirit” is a combination of the two, albeit a reasonless combination,⁴ and it acts as an intermediary between the irrational motions of the belly and the (ideally) harmonious motions of the head.

² Another, more irrational means of accessing the realm of the divine not discussed in this paper is divination.

³ The disorderly motions surviving from a pre-ordered cosmos. Miller (1957), pg 104, The first [source of disorderly motion] is the stream which furnishes the nourishment of the body... The other stream is the “tumult” of sensation, the result of the motions caused in the body when the creature happened to strike against [exterior objects].”

⁴ Reynolds (2004), pg 92

The danger of this system lies in the potential for the immortal soul to be overwhelmed and mastered by the processes of its subordinates.⁵ Plato earlier described the detrimental effects of sensations upon the young immortal soul, recently implanted within the body:

καὶ δὴ καὶ τότε ἐν τῷ παρόντι πλείστην καὶ μεγίστην παρεχόμεναι κίνησιν, μετὰ τοῦ ῥέοντος ἐνδελεχῶς ὀχετοῦ κινεῖσθαι καὶ σφοδρῶς σείουσιν τὰς τῆς ψυχῆς περιόδους, τὴν μὲν ταύτου παντάπασιν ἐπέδησαν ἐναντία αὐτῇ ῥέουσιν καὶ ἐπέσχον ἄρχουσιν καὶ ἰοῦσαν.

“And indeed also at that time, holding the most and greatest motions, moving with the constantly flowing canals and shaking violently the revolutions of the soul, and they bound the flowing altogether of this one with itself flowing opposite and they held down its controlling and moving [natures].” (43C – D)

The latter half of the *Timaeus* describes the innumerable physical routes by which further sensations of becoming are able to affect the immortal soul and its ordered motions. Plato continues to describe the dire consequences of heeding only the physical desires of the body and the mortal soul:

τῷ μὲν οὖν περὶ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας ἢ περὶ φιλονικίας τετευτακότε καὶ ταῦτα διαπονοῦντι σφόδρα πάντα τὰ δόγματα ἀνάγκη θνητὰ ἐγγεγονέναι,

“Whoso, then, indulges in lusts or in contentions and devotes himself overmuch thereto must of necessity be filled with opinions that are wholly mortal, and altogether, so far as it is possible to become mortal, fall not short of this even a small degree, inasmuch as he has made great his mortal part.” (90B)⁶

Balance between the three aspects of the human soul as well as between the needs of the body and the purpose of the immortal soul, must be achieved. Only when the requirements of the body are satisfied is immortal soul able to learn and understand, thereby restoring the divine

⁵ Ibid, pg 84. “The many ephemeral substances of becoming, with their own chaotic desire to move to other like substance without reason, can suppress this natural tendency [of the immortal soul to return to its best state].”

⁶ Henderson (2005)

motions of reason. Plato is fairly optimistic about the capabilities of man to overcome his mortal limitations, but only to a certain degree. As with the new gods, it is likely that perfection in this human endeavor is ultimately an unobtainable ideal.⁷

Expounding further upon the theme of balance, Plato now describes his hierarchy of souls in terms of motion:

καθάπερ εἵπομεν πολλάκις, ὅτι τρία τριχῇ ψυχῆς ἐν ἡμῖν εἶδη κατώκισται, τυγχάνει δὲ ἕκαστον κινήσεις ἔχον, τυγχάνει δὲ ἕκαστον κινήσεις ἔχον, οὕτω κατὰ ταύτῃ καὶ νῦν ὡς διὰ βραχυτάτων ῥητέον ὅτι τὸ μὲν αὐτῶν ἐν ἀργίᾳ διάγον καὶ τῶν ἑαυτοῦ κινήσεων ἡσυχίαν ἄγον ἀσθενέστατον ἀνάγκη γίνεσθαι, τὸ δ' ἐν γυμνασίοις ἐρρωμενέστατον· διὸ φυλακτέον ὅπως ἂν ἔχουσιν τὰς κινήσεις πρὸς ἄλληλα συμμετρους.

“Although we said many times that three forms of the soul were established within us, and it was discovered that each was holding its own motion, thus now regarding these matters it must be mentioned as briefly as possible that through the carrying over into laziness of these and the maintenance of the inertness of its own motions, it becomes by necessity very weak, but that one maintaining itself with exercise becomes very strong. On account of which it must be well guarded that they hold motions in symmetry with one another.” (89E - 90A)

Here again, motion is the metaphysical embodiment of rationality, or lack thereof. Plato reminds readers that ordered motion, instilled within immortal souls by the craftsmanship of the Divine Architect, is ideal:

τῶν δ' αὖ κινήσεων ἡ ἐν ἑαυτῷ ὑφ' αὐτοῦ ἀρίστη κίνησις, μάλιστα γὰρ τῇ διανοητικῇ καὶ τῇ τοῦ παντὸς κινήσει συγγενής, ἡ δὲ ὑπ' ἄλλου χείρων· χειρίστη δὲ ἡ κειμένου τοῦ σώματος καὶ ἄγοντος ἡσυχίαν δι' ἐτέρων αὐτὸ κατὰ μέρη κινούσα.

“But again concerning motions, the best motion is one in itself because of itself, for this is most similar to intellect and to the motion of the universe, but motion

⁷ Cornford (1952), pg 354, “The life of reason can be fully enjoyed only after death when the spirit is released from the distractions of bodily needs; but our business here is to partake of immortality in the fullest measure that our mortal nature will admit.

from another is less good. but the worst is the motion of the body and it disrupts through a state of idleness and moving according to the lot of other things." (89A)

While never fully developed in the text of the *Timaeus*, this concept is the clearest indication of why Plato believes humans ought to behave rationally. What is “good” or “best” in the Platonic sense is the ideal both for individuals and the Universe as a whole.⁸ Acting otherwise is the result of ignorance, pain, or a myriad of unfortunate states that are ultimately the results of Necessity working against Reason.⁹ Self-motion for the human body takes the form of exercise (89A). Self-motion of the human soul is modeled after the purely rational operation of the World Soul, in its unceasing task of encountering, identifying, and rationally understanding all of the cosmos:

αὐτή τε ἀνακυκλουμένη πρὸς αὐτήν, ὅταν οὐσίαν σκεδαστὴν ἔχοντός τινος ἐφάπτηται καὶ ὅταν ἀμέριστον, λέγει κινουμένη διὰ πάσης ἑαυτῆς ὅτῳ τ' ἂν τι ταῦτόν ᾤ καὶ ὅτου ἂν ἕτερον, πρὸς ὅτι τε μάλιστα καὶ ὅπῃ καὶ ὅπως καὶ ὅποτε συμβαίνει κατὰ τὰ γινόμενά τε πρὸς ἕκαστον ἕκαστα εἶναι καὶ πάσχειν καὶ πρὸς τὰ κατὰ ταῦτ' ἔχοντα αἰεὶ.

“And she (the World Soul) revolving upon herself, whenever she encounters something holding its essence scattered or instead encounters something undivided, moved through her whole self she says whether it is in any way the Same or whether it is the Other, by where and by what method and when it comes about concerning the things being and which suffer to each to be each, and about those things being always.” (37A-B)

Contemplating the nature of a purely rational human would be a daunting, if not impossible, task that Plato does not attempt. Neither does he attempt the equally difficult task of describing an entirely “mortal” human devoid of any rational motions and subservient only to base needs. However, when contemplating the effects of the mortal soul upon mankind, a useful

⁸ Saunders (1973), pg 234

⁹ Gill (2000), pg 75. “Vice is understood as an expression of a kind of defectiveness which we would all want to be free from, if we could be led to recognize its nature.”

comparison can be made with Plato's descriptions of plants, which do in fact act only upon the urgings of appetite:

μετέχει γε μὴν τοῦτο ὃ νῦν λέγομεν τοῦ τρίτου ψυχῆς εἶδους, ὃ μεταξὺ φρενῶν ὀμφαλοῦ τε ἰδρυῖσθαι λόγος, ὃ δόξης μὲν λογισμοῦ τε καὶ νοῦ μέτεστιν τὸ μηδέν, αἰσθήσεως δὲ ἡδείας καὶ ἀλγεινῆς μετὰ ἐπιθυμιῶν. πάσχον γὰρ διατελεῖ πάντα, στραφέντι δ' αὐτῷ ἐν ἑαυτῷ περὶ ἑαυτό, τὴν μὲν ἔξωθεν ἀπωσαμένῳ κίνησιν, τῇ δ' οἰκείᾳ χρησαμένῳ, τῶν αὐτοῦ τι λογίσασθαι κατιδόντι φύσει οὐ παραδέδωκεν ἡ γένεσις.

“Certainly that creature which we are now describing partakes of the third kind of soul, which is seated, as we affirm, between the midriff and the navel, and which shares not at all in opinion and reasoning and mind but in sensation, pleasant and painful, together with desires. For inasmuch as it continues wholly passive and does not turn within itself around itself, repelling motion from without and using its own native motion, it is not endowed by its original constitution with a natural capacity for discerning or reflecting upon any of its own experiences.” (77B – C)¹⁰

Unlike plants and other inert beings, humans are endowed with the ability to turn within themselves around themselves (that is to obey the sovereign motions of the immortal soul), and also to repel motions from without. They have a limited ability to utilize reason in an effort to alter the revolutions of their souls. Plato leaves readers with a warning about their mortal needs, and stresses overall balance between these flawed faculties and the immortal soul. Yet the need for balance should not prevent humans from imitation of the Divine Architect or other more divine entities, and in no way should it hinder them from fulfilling their divine purpose and living a just life of discipline, learning and understanding:

θεραπεία δὲ δὴ παντὶ παντὸς μία, τὰς οἰκείας ἐκάστῳ τροφὰς καὶ κινήσεις ἀποδιδόναι. τῷ δ' ἐν ἡμῖν θείῳ συγγενεῖς εἰσιν κινήσεις αἱ τοῦ παντὸς διανοήσεις καὶ περιφοραί: ταύταις δὴ συνεπόμενον ἕκαστον δεῖ, τὰς περὶ τὴν γένεσιν ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ διεφθαρμένας

¹⁰ Henderson (2005)

ἡμῶν περιόδους ἐξορθοῦντα διὰ τὸ καταμανθάνειν τὰς τοῦ παντὸς ἁρμονίας τε καὶ περιφοράς, τῷ κατανοομένῳ τὸ κατανοοῦν ἐξομοιωῖσαι κατὰ τὴν ἀρχαίαν φύσιν, ὁμοιώσαντα δὲ τέλος ἔχειν τοῦ προτεθέντος ἀνθρώποις ὑπὸ θεῶν ἀρίστου βίου πρὸς τε τὸν παρόντα καὶ τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον.

“And the way of tendance of every part by every man is one – namely, to supply each with its own congenial food and motion; and for the divine part within us the congenial motions are the intellections and revolutions of the Universe. These each one of us should follow, rectifying the revolutions within our head, which were distorted at our birth, by learning the harmonies and revolutions of the Universe, and thereby making the part that thinks like unto the object of its thought, in accordance with its original nature, and having achieved this likeness attain finally to that goal of life which is set before men by the gods as the most good both for the present and for the time to come.” (90C – D)¹¹

¹¹ Henderson (2005)

WORLD SOUL

As living creatures endowed with bodies, souls and the capacity for reason, humans are morally obligated to emulate the ideal living animal in the pursuit of a rational and virtuous life. However, an intermediate “animal” exists in the entity of World Soul, which Plato says has

τῶν νοητῶν ἀεί τε ὄντων ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀρίστου ἀρίστη γενομένη τῶν γεννηθέντων.

“the best thing coming into existence of all those becoming, and account of the best thing of all those things utilizing reason.” (37A)

World Soul is partly an entity of becoming, and thus under the strict parameters defined by *Timaeus* it should not be a model for imitation proper. Even so, as a force of reason within the tangible realm of becoming, and as the seeming embodiment of the immortal human soul, World Soul is worthy of study and perhaps, to whatever degree possible, emulation.

Drawing comparisons between humans and World Soul is often frustrating, in that World Soul seems immune to many mortal afflictions. That this cosmic psyche is subject to corporeal influence is repeatedly affirmed within the text of the *Timaeus*. As formerly stated, the composition of World Soul is fashioned from a mixture of Being, Becoming and a blend of the two. In addition, this World Soul is strewn

ἡ δ' ἐκ μέσου πρὸς τὸν ἔσχατον οὐρανὸν,

“from the middle towards the outer end of the universe,” (36E)

and furthermore, it contains within it all corporeal matter.

Even so, the more base components of World Soul seem to exist only to aid in the processes of recognition and understanding,¹ and do not impinge upon the higher faculties of being.

One obvious explanation for this imperviousness is that the body assigned to World Soul (the universe) is not subject to external sensation of any kind, and is thus more tranquil. The Divine Artificer enclosed all matter within the perfectly round sphere of the heavens in order to prevent the antagonistic disruptions caused by atomic collisions:

ἔτι δὲ ἴν' ἀγήρων καὶ ἄνοσον ἦ, κατανοῶν ὡς συστάτῳ σώματι θερμὰ καὶ ψυχρὰ καὶ πάνθ'
ὅσα δυνάμεις ἰσχυρὰς ἔχει περιστάμενα ἔξωθεν καὶ προσπίπτοντα ἀκαίρως λύει καὶ
νόσους γῆράς τε ἐπάγοντα φθίνειν ποιεῖ. διὰ δὲ τὴν αἰτίαν καὶ τὸν λογισμὸν τόνδε ἕνα
ὅλον ὅλων ἐξ ἀπάντων τέλεον καὶ ἀγήρων καὶ ἄνοσον αὐτὸν ἐτεκτίνατο.

“And further, that it might be secure from age and ailment, since He perceived that when heat and cold and all things which have violent potencies, surround a composite body from without and collide with it they dissolve it unduly and make it to waste away by bringing upon it ailments and age ... he fashioned it to be one single whole, compounded of all wholes, perfect and ageless and unailing.”
(33A)²

Again this same characteristic also eliminates the capacity for bodily senses, which are so valued among humans, as well as the need for maintenance of the body:

¹ Proclus (1998), pgs 705-706. “For the soul knows itself, and the natures prior to, and posterior to itself; since it is the image of things prior to, but the paradigm of things posterior to itself. Hence perceiving itself, and evolving itself, it knows all things, not at all departing from its own proper power.”

² Henderson (2005)

ὁμμάτων τε γὰρ ἐπεδείκτο οὐδέν, ὁρατὸν γὰρ οὐδὲν ὑπελείπετο ἔξωθεν, οὐδ' ἀκοῆς, οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀκουστόν: πνεῦμά τε οὐκ ἦν περιστὸς δεόμενον ἀναπνοῆς, οὐδ' αὔτινος ἐπιδεδῆσ ἦν ὀργάνου σχεῖν ᾧ τὴν μὲν εἰς ἑαυτὸ τροφὴν δέξοιτο, τὴν δὲ πρότερον ἐξικμασμένην ἀποπέμψοι πάλιν.

“There was nothing lacking of eyes, for there was nothing visible left over outside, not of hearing, for there was nothing to hear, nor any air around it lacking the capability of breathing, nor, again, did it need any organ whereby it might receive the food that entered it and evacuate what remained undigested.” (33C)

As might be expected, these bodily characteristics give World Soul distinct kinetic advantages. Plato reveals that the World Soul was divided into two spheres of motion, “same” and “different,” which both govern its function³ as well as explain astrological patterns.⁴ Nevertheless, unity is continually stressed and both of these rational spheres of motion are manifested in circular movements:

κίνησιν γὰρ ἀπένειμεν αὐτῷ τὴν τοῦ σώματος οἰκείαν, τῶν ἑπτὰ τὴν περὶ νοῦν καὶ φρόνησιν μάλιστα οὔσαν: διὸ δὴ κατὰ ταῦτά ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ καὶ ἐν ἑαυτῷ περιγαγὼν αὐτὸ ἐποίησε κύκλῳ κινεῖσθαι στρεφόμενον, τὰς δὲ ἕξ ἀπάσας κινήσεις ἀφεῖλεν καὶ ἀπλανὲς ἀπηργάσατο ἐκείνων.

“For movement he assigned unto it that which is proper to its body, namely, that one of the seven motions which specially belongs to reason and intelligence; wherefore he spun it round uniformly in the same spot within itself and made it move revolving in a circle; and all the other six motions he took away and fashioned it free from their aberrations.” (34A)⁵

³ Meldrum (1950), pg 67, “the Circles of Same and Different, for all we are told, have purely cognitive function.” The main function of World Soul seems to be that of identification (37B-C), and bestowing rational motion on the rest of the universe.

⁴ The irregular motions of the planets are subsumed in the divisions of the Circle of Different. That the “Wandering” of the planets is not analogous with the Errant Cause is readily apparent. Skemp (1967), pg 79, “they are regular enough in fact to act as the clocks of the universe and ‘define and preserve the numbers of Time.’” Vlastos (1939), pg 67, “their wanderings (the planets) are only apparent ... and involve no interruption in the revolution of the Different.”

Indeed because of the superior relationship between the universe and World Soul, no mortal soul is needed to mitigate interaction with the physical world. In fact, World Soul seems by and large unaffected by the demands of Necessity.⁶ Clearly the Divine Architect was careful in his shaping of World Soul. It is more primal than and thoroughly disparate from the body of universe to the degree that it may act as a permanent source of rational motion. Furthermore, World Soul does not appear responsible for the necessary corporeal inability (on the part of the universe, or body) to completely adhere to these rational urgings. Flaws are not only expected, they are needed for a complete model of the “ideal animal.”⁷ Finally, and in the same fashion as the “new gods,” choice and thus morality is not applicable. World Soul exists for all time as a divine being of unceasing and intelligent life, and thus does not need fear of cosmic punishment as an encouragement for rational behavior.

Given these superior qualities and a highly divergent and advantageous anatomy, how can humans hope to emulate World Soul? In short, they cannot. Failure, in the guise of distraction and at times irrationality of the immortal human soul, is unavoidable. There are, however, several inspirational particulars that humans can acquire from a study of World Soul to aid them in their struggle.

The first such point of interest is that, while World Soul is infinitely better suited to conducting itself rationally, both humans and World Soul (and presumably all animals) strive for the same goal. Plato advises mortal creatures to that they

⁶ Reynolds (2004), pg 81, “The soul of the mixing bowl can be created apart from the demands of necessity because it is not yet out in the world of Becoming.

⁷ Flaws are necessary to bring mortal creatures, humans included.

δύ' αἰτίας εἶδη διορίζεσθαι, τὸ μὲν ἀναγκαῖον, τὸ δὲ θεῖον, καὶ τὸ μὲν θεῖον ἐν ᾧ πασιν
ζητεῖν κτήσεως ἕνεκα εὐδαιμόνος βίου, καθ' ὅσον ἡμῶν ἡ φύσις ἐνδέχεται, τὸ δὲ
ἀναγκαῖον ἐκείνων χάριν, λογιζόμενον ὡς ἄνευ τούτων οὐ δυνατὰ αὐτὰ ἐκεῖνα ἐφ' οἷς
σπουδάζομεν μόνον κατανοεῖν οὐδ' αὖ λαβεῖν οὐδ' ἄλλως πως μετασχεῖν.

“...ought to distinguish two kinds of causes, the necessary and the divine, and in
all things to seek after the divine for the sake of gaining a life of blessedness, so
far as our nature admits thereof, and to seek the necessary for the sake of the
divine, reckoning that without the former it is impossible to discern by themselves
alone the divine objects after which we strive, or to apprehend them or in any way
partake thereof.” (68E – 69A)⁸

World Soul is endowed with the curious ability to supersede necessary, or secondary,
causes and instead acts only out of divine inspiration. This should be the goal of human life, and
acting in such a manner is considered proper and morally good. Humans may not always be able
to accomplish this goal, but when they do they can take confidence in the fact that they are both
acting in a manner pleasing to the Divine Architect, and that they are performing well in their
imitation of the “ideal” or “paradigm” animal (37D).

A further source of inspiration lies in the knowledge that World Soul, a created entity
with a temporal beginning and (theoretically) end, can act as a source of rational motion unto
itself and for the corporeal universe as well.⁹ It does so through a continual rational process
which is analogous to the human goal of learning and understanding, although it occurs without
any effort and needs no reinforcement through any regiment of training. Plato describes this
process, saying that

ὅταν οὐσίαν σκεδαστὴν ἔχοντός τινος ἐφάπτηται καὶ ὅταν ἀμέριστον, λέγει κινουμένη διὰ
πάσης ἑαυτῆς ὅτω τ' ἂν τι ταύτῳ ἢ καὶ ὅτου ἂν ἔτερον, πρὸς ὅτι τε μάλιστα καὶ ὅπη καὶ

⁸ Henderson (2005)

⁹ Reynolds (2004), pg 65, “Plato clearly believed the soul was self-moving and also moved the body.”

ὅπως καὶ ὅποτε συμβαίνει κατὰ τὰ γιγνόμενά τε πρὸς ἕκαστον ἕκαστα εἶναι καὶ πάσχειν
καὶ πρὸς τὰ κατὰ ταῦτα ἔχοντα αἰεὶ.

“whenever (World Soul) touches anything which has its substance dispersed or anything which has its substance undivided, it is moved through its entire being and announces what the object is identical with and from what it is different, and in what relation, where and how and when, it comes about that each thing exists and is acted upon by others both in the sphere of the Becoming and in that of the ever-uniform.” (37A-B)¹⁰

Humans should assume that their own rational souls possess similar capabilities, and that to some small degree humans are also able to mitigate the flaws of their surroundings in addition to those of the human body. It must be remembered, however, that the body of the universe is, in fact, also the “body” of World Soul. They are perpetually intertwined and equally comprise the sum total of existence with the realm of becoming. Corporeal sensations are only “external” in that they are foreign to the permanently rational nature of World Soul.¹¹

Endowed with immortal souls and capable of rational assessment, humans must certainly be equipped with abilities similar to those of World Soul. Yet humans do not (and ultimately cannot) look inward in the application of sense, but rather must look externally to the body of World Soul. That is, humans are not capable of influencing the immortal soul directly, but instead must operate through the channels of corporality. Both beneficial (i.e. ideal circumstances of sight, hearing) and detrimental (appetite for example, but atomic interaction in general) sensations are experienced without through interaction with the universe. Humans can manipulate the amount and type of external stimulation they receive, yielding either useful or

¹⁰ Henderson (2005)

¹¹ Proclus (1998), pg 719, “It is not proper, therefore, to think that the soul of the universe receives the knowledge of sensible externally, or that it is in want of organs to the apprehension of them.”

harmful results, but they cannot directly influence the immortal soul without first affecting aspects of mortal soul and the body.

The ramifications of these assertions are many and, for the most part, they cannot be supported by the information presented in the *Timaeus*. Nevertheless, readers may speculate as to the human ability to affect other entities of becoming, especially other humans, as World Soul affects the universe. Can and should humans beings, acting in accordance with the ordered motions of the immortal soul and participating in the processes of learning and understanding, emit rational motions within the realm of becoming?

Plato seems to indicate that humans may indeed act as channels for the ordered essence of the immortal soul, thus influencing not only their own internal motions but the motions of others as well. Timaeus himself serves as an embodiment of such a figure by channeling his knowledge of astronomy and the workings of the universe into a coherent and persuasive lecture. In fact, his preface seems to effectively describe the act of proper imitation, complete with divine inspiration and rational acceptance:

ἀλλ' ὦ Σώκρατες, τοῦτό γε δὴ πάντες ὅσοι καὶ κατὰ βραχὺ σωφροσύνης μετέχουσιν, ἐπὶ παντὸς ὀρμῇ καὶ σμικροῦ καὶ μεγάλου πράγματος θεὸν αἰεὶ που καλοῦσιν: ἡμᾶς δὲ τοὺς περὶ τοῦ παντὸς λόγους ποιεῖσθαι πῃ μέλλοντας, ἥ γέγονεν ἢ καὶ ἀγενές ἐστιν, εἰ μὴ παντάπασι παραλλάττομεν, ἀνάγκη θεοὺς τε καὶ θεὰς ἐπικαλουμένους εὐχέσθαι πάντα κατὰ νοῦν ἐκείνοις μὲν μάλιστα, ἐπομένως δὲ ἡμῖν εἰπεῖν.

“But as to that, Socrates, all men who possess even a small share of good sense always call upon god at the outset of every undertaking, be it small or great: Therefore I, proposing to deliver a discourse on the Universe, how it was created or may be uncreated, should invoke the gods and goddesses (if we be not utterly

demented) praying first that I say may be approved by them, and second that by ourselves.” (27C-D)¹²

The issue of whether or not humans should act as founts of reason is more complex. Plato puts an emphasis on learning and understanding, not on external exertion. He advises readers to discipline their bodies and accustom themselves to a life of reason, but there is no moral obligation to instruct or regulate any entity apart from each individual’s own immortal soul. Discipline of the body is a necessary precursor, but ultimately only a means to an end. To return to the emulation of World Soul, the emanation of ordered motions seems to be a mere byproduct of rational existence and not a goal in-and-of itself. Rather, it is only the Divine Artificer who can use his own rational essence as a solitary source for influencing the physical realm:

ἀγαθὸς ἦν, ἀγαθῷ δὲ οὐδεὶς περὶ οὐδενὸς οὐδέποτε ἐγγίγνεται φθόνος· τοῦτου δ’ ἐκτὸς ὧν πάντα ὅτι μάλιστα ἐβουλήθη γενέσθαι παραπλήσια ἑαυτῷ.

“He was good, and in him that is good no envy arises ever concerning anything: and being devoid of envy, he desired that all should be, as far as possible, like unto himself.” (29E)

To speak in generalities, neither World Soul nor humans are charged with the duty of rectifying the physical world. World Soul is as incapable of instilling permanent order within the universe as humans are of eliminating the faults of their bodies. Moreover, World Soul is not obligated to nurture the immortal souls of humans and other mortal entities, even though these creatures are necessarily immersed within the body of the universe. Likewise, individual humans need not feel any moral compunction for the state of foreign souls. All the same by the very act

¹² Henderson (2005)

of behaving justly, that is actively cultivating the innate motions of the immortal soul, both humans and World Soul necessarily act as rational influences in the universe.

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