

CHAPTER I
PLATO'S THEOGONY

Who are the gods? One obvious way for a Greek intellectual to address this question is to tell a story of origins, to locate the very beginning of all gods and then gradually reveal how one generation of gods followed another. Plato's *Timaeus* is no exception to this standard when it offers to examine the nature of gods within the framework of theogony. What usually defines the traditional gods in the theogonic accounts is the succession of gods itself – their identities and roles emerge from the intergenerational relationships, conflicts and successive attempts to secure their own importance in the world. To know these things is to have a relatively privileged type of knowledge, which may be acquired from some sort of religious experience, such as divine inspiration. It is well known that Plato is no less averse to the dubious ways in which poetic and religious figures gain their insights than to the content of their beliefs and stories.¹ It is a mark of ontological and moral deficiency to postulate that there are constant changes among the traditional gods in their aims and undertakings or to speak of a heated rivalry between them and attempts of gods to dominate their peers. However, the *Timaeus* assures its readers that it can provide a more secure alternative method, a cosmological investigation, with better philosophical evidence for the nature of gods. Theogony based on these premises is designed to demonstrate that the universe has mathematical structures, which emerge from an intelligent, perfect, benevolent and goal-directed first principle, and that the ensuing astronomical order signals the divinity of the stars and planets. But now the status of the traditional gods becomes problematic. Can cosmology give us any knowledge concerning the traditional gods? Does it support the

¹ But it is not always so: some important exceptions are the priest and priestesses in the *Meno* (81a–b), Diotima in the *Symposium* (201d) and, as we are about to see, the children of gods in the *Timaeus* (40d–e).

1.1 The Two Theogonies of the *Timaeus*

more conventional religious beliefs about their characters and interrelations? And is there any hierarchy between the traditional and cosmic gods? Are they subordinated to each other or do they stand at the same theological level? This chapter explores the place of the traditional gods in the cosmology and cosmogony of the *Timaeus*. It shall take up one of the key questions in the Greek religious narratives – how the gods came to be – and position it within Plato's broader reflections on the nature of the universe and the value of religious beliefs in a cosmological discourse. The overall objective of this chapter is to determine the relation between different kinds of gods and the specific theological status of the traditional gods.

1.1 The Two Theogonies of the *Timaeus*

Traditional gods make a curious entrance in Plato's *Timaeus*. The scene is set with an entity that is genealogically older than and metaphysically prior to the divinities of Greek religion. It is not the Olympian gods or the Titans who brought forth the cosmic order but the mysterious figure of the Demiurge. He is presented as the first principle and the supreme cause of the universe, who, among other things, initiated time, designed the structure of the physical elements and created the cosmic gods, such as the planets and the stars. After discussing how the latter came to be, Timaeus reluctantly proceeds:

T1 As for the other divinities, it is beyond us to know and speak of how they came to be. We should accept on trust the assertions of those figures of the past who claimed to be the offspring of gods. They must surely have been well informed about their own ancestors. So, we cannot disbelieve the children of gods, even though their accounts lack plausible or compelling proofs. Rather, we should follow custom and believe them, on the ground that what they claim to be reporting are matters familiar to them. Accordingly, let us accept their account of how these gods came to be and state what it is. The children Ocean and Tethys came from Gaia and Ouranos. Phorcys, Kronos and Rhea and all the gods in that generation came from the former [viz. Ocean and Tethys]. Zeus and Hera, as well as all those siblings who are called by names we know, were from Kronos and Rhea. And yet another generation came from these [viz. Zeus, Hera and others]. (*Ti.* 40d6–41a3, mod.)

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Περὶ δὲ τῶν ἄλλων δαιμόνων εἰπεῖν καὶ γινῶναι τὴν γένεσιν μείζον ἢ καθ' ἡμᾶς, πειστέον δὲ τοῖς εἰρηκόσιν ἔμπροσθεν, ἐκγόνοις μὲν θεῶν οὖσιν, ὡς ἔφασαν, σαφῶς δὲ πού τοὺς γε αὐτῶν προγόνους εἰδόνσιν' ἀδύνατον οὖν θεῶν παῖσιν ἀπιστεῖν, καίπερ ἄνευ τε εἰκότων καὶ ἀναγκαίων ἀποδείξεων λέγουσιν, ἀλλ' ὡς οἰκεῖα φασκόντων ἀπαγγέλλειν ἐπομένους τῷ νόμῳ πιστευτέον. οὕτως οὖν κατ' ἐκείνους ἡμῖν ἡ γένεσις περὶ τούτων τῶν θεῶν ἐχέτω καὶ λεγέσθω. Γῆς τε καὶ Οὐρανοῦ παῖδες Ὠκεανός τε καὶ Τηθύς ἐγενέσθη, τούτων δὲ Φόρκυς Κρόνος τε καὶ Ῥέα καὶ ὄσοι μετὰ τούτων, ἐκ δὲ Κρόνου καὶ Ῥέας Ζεὺς Ἥρα τε καὶ πάντες ὄσοις ἴσμεν ἀδελφοὺς λεγομένους αὐτῶν, ἔτι τε τούτων ἄλλους ἐκγόνους.

ΤΙ is the main source of information on the traditional gods in the *Timaeus*. Although the second part of the passage ends with some positive conclusions, the way to it is riddled with a series of cautionary remarks. The very first statements disclaim any personal responsibility on Timaeus' part and make clear that only the 'figures of the past' are accountable for what is about to be said. The highly nuanced rhetoric that follows is a confusing mixture of assertive eloquence and unconvincing reassurance. Timaeus praises the 'children of the gods' and their knowledge; he repeatedly employs prescriptive terms, urging the audience to believe in these figures (πειστέον, 40d7; πιστευτέον, 40e3); and yet he sincerely admits that he cannot offer an adequate foundation for the knowledge of traditional gods. Timaeus accepts the credibility of these accounts by referring to the discourse of those who claim to belong to the divine family.² He envisages these theogonic narratives as a tradition based on customary belief among certain anonymous people, who are familiar (οἰκεῖα, 40e2) with these matters because of their family ties to the gods (ἐκγόνοις . . . θεῶν οὖσιν, 40d8), as if they are presenting their own family stories. The tone of the passage inevitably leaves us with a sceptical impression.

Timaeus' acceptance of the authority of these 'children' is at odds with his broader concern in the passage that the traditional accounts do not meet the argumentative requirements of his cosmology. In the preceding part of the dialogue, the account of the origins of the cosmic gods was described as an *eikōs muthos*, a

² Cf. *Lg.* 3.679c, where an acceptance of religious stories on trust is construed as something that characterises unsophisticated people.

likely story (29d2), which is a type of discourse that explores how the supreme god would likely create a world and its beings. Following Myles Burnyeat's interpretation, I take the adjective *eikōs* in this context to express both probability and reasonability.³ On the one hand, the *eikōs muthos* derives its contingency from the fact that such an account focuses mainly on matters of which it is impossible to have a comprehensive and firm knowledge – for instance, what the motivations and reasoning of the creator god were. But in so far as an *eikōs* discourse invites the readers to consider the intellectually comprehensible patterns behind cosmogony, rationality also becomes a criterion according to which the reasonability and likelihood of Timaeus' own *muthos* can be judged.⁴ There is also the *anankaios* type of argumentation, which examines a subject matter that is stable and unchanging, like the Forms or mathematical truths, and by means of which the necessary truths can be deduced. Cosmological theogony combines both types of argumentations, because some aspects of the universe, such as the world-soul, have mathematical structure. On an even lower epistemic level, we find traditional theogony, which completely evades the *eikōs–anankaios* distinction. Timaeus' acknowledgement that the customary stories fall short of the *eikōs* standard complicates the status of the passage. It detaches the traditional gods from the *eikōs muthos* because their problematic status and peculiar nature set certain limits on the epistemological status of human discourse about them.

A further discontinuity between these discourses can be observed in relation to their explanatory models. The preferred framework for cosmological theogony (29d–40d) is technological. It starts with an assumption that the primordial situation had three major constituents – the supreme divinity called the Demiurge, the

³ Burnyeat (2009) 167–86.

⁴ Cf. Betegh (2010) 214–21, who advances Burnyeat's interpretation by showing that *eikōs* is a limitative qualification in respect to what human beings are capable of knowing. See also Bryan (2012) 139–47, who emphasises that the term indicates a positive relation between the eternal paradigms and the world. Given that the supreme god aims to make a representation of the model rather than a reproduction, the success of the project requires it to show a likeness to the original rather than be a replica. For an exhaustive discussion of the various ancient and modern readings of the concept of *eikōs* in the *Timaeus*, see Bryan (2012) 114–60.

chaotic materials with their inherent properties and the eternal paradigms or forms – and describes a process whereby the prime god created the world in the manner of a craftsman, who assembled, shaped and developed the material he had.⁵ The primary task of the Demiurge, therefore, is not so much to start from the absolute beginning but to reorganise the primordial state by endowing it with an order.⁶ The task was to arrange the materials the Demiurge had in line with the eternal paradigms, or the ‘Platonic’ Forms, in the best possible way.⁷ The goodness of the Demiurge was the cause of the universe and its most authoritative principle (ἀρχὴ κυριωτάτη, 29e4–30a1).⁸ The objective was to find a way to accommodate the good within the primordial chaos,

⁵ See *Ti.* 27c1–29d3, 29d7–30c1, 31b4–33d3. On the theory of Forms in Plato's cosmology, see Sedley (2007) 108–9; Broadie (2012) 27–31, 63–83.

⁶ In a broader sense, the meaning of these actions hangs on the chosen interpretative strategy. The options were formulated already by Plato's students, some of whom, like Aristotle, preferred a temporal reading of the *Timaeus*, that is, that the world had a beginning and the successive stages of development, while the majority of the Academy, including Speusippus and Xenocrates, read the dialogue from a structural perspective, that is, that the successive stages only stand for different structural parts of the world, but the world had no actual beginning and hence it is eternal. The latter alternative, moreover, encourages a metaphorical reading by approaching these stages as merely a helpful tool to account for the essential characteristics of the world, while the former reading interprets the dialogue literally. For a modern survey of this problem, see Sorabji (1983) 267–75; Zeyl (2000) xx–xxv; Gregory (2007) 147–9. Without plunging deeper into this debate, we can say that the two interpretative strategies share a minimum agreement: the language, the discursive patterns used in describing the origins of the universe is not meaningless. It accounts for some key features of the world. I would like to add a disclaimer that my interpretation of the traditional gods aligns this book with the creationist perspective defended by Sedley (2007) 98–107, Broadie (2012) 243–77 and Broadie (2014). For the ways in which the *Timaeus* features Plato's key doctrines, see Sedley (2019).

⁷ As argued by Burnyeat (2009) 180, this situation requires the Demiurge to apply practical reasoning. The primordial state with its materials constrains him and compels him to take into account the inherent properties of the materials. And even though *chōra*, the fourth primary constituent of the cosmological discourse, is introduced as a characterless space in which the Demiurge performs the world-building, the reduced scope of divine action remains. For a contrary view, see Sedley (2007) 118, who claims that on its own, the primordial matter is purposeless, but in relation to the Demiurge, it becomes entirely dependent on his creative work.

⁸ See further *Ti.* 29e1–2, 30a2, 30a6–7, 30b5. Such characteristics inevitably raise the question of whether or not the Demiurge is identical to (the Form of) the Good. On the other hand, in the later parts of the dialogue (47e–69a), the highest ordering agent is repeatedly titled Intellect. Is the latter identical to the Demiurge? If that is the case, does the Demiurge have a soul as well? And, in general, is the Demiurge a metaphysical principle or not? For an extensive critical treatment of these questions and interpretative strategies, see a recent discussion by Van Riel (2013) 61–117.

the realm of becoming. What is clear from the technological framework is that the world itself and its living beings offers a practical solution to the most fundamental cosmological question: how the things of becoming participate in the things of being and how created things participate in the good. As a result, the cosmic totality and its particular parts such as the planets and the stars are dependent on the creative work of the Demiurge and the principles that guide his actions. Contrary to, for example, the Atomist cosmological theory, where the world emerges from the mechanical collision of the primary elements, Timaeus' discourse makes a goal-directed, intentional agent the key factor responsible for the world.⁹

In the traditional theogony of T1, on the other hand, we cannot immediately find such explanatory principles as the paradigms, the demiurgic goodness or teleology. The generation of the traditional gods seem to rely on the creative force of biological reproduction and therefore their existence is based on the previous generations of gods. Although this is a typical procedure in Greek theogonic narratives which otherwise seems to be intuitively acceptable to any religiously minded reader, its explanatory value in Platonic cosmological discourse is ambiguous.¹⁰ The problem is that this process does not derive from the same creative force that was hitherto used in creating the world and the cosmic gods, namely the cosmic craftsmanship of the Demiurge. It is worthwhile to note, however, the Demiurge is introduced as a father as well (πατήρ, 28c3), and this role is amplified in the later parts of cosmogony (47e–48a, 50c–e), but the biological model is not applied to the origins of the cosmic gods. Two explanatory frameworks, therefore, are employed for the origins of different gods: one, for the generation of the cosmic beings, is technological, while the other, for the generation of traditional gods, is biological. The first is the general explanatory framework used in the *eikōs muthos*, whereas the biological framework appears to distance the traditional gods from the demiurgic theogony to some extent by raising questions concerning the status of

⁹ Cf. *D. L.* 9.6.30–3; Plato, *Lg.* 10.889b–d.

¹⁰ See, for example, Hesiod, *Th.* 123–38, 453–7, 885–923; Homer, *Il.* 15.187–8 and *Od.* 11.318.

this framework, its value and relation with the first explanatory scheme.

The final challenge to accepting the traditional theogonies dates back to Socrates' discussion of the traditional gods in the *Republic*. The main problem with the epic theogonies is the dangerously impious language that depicts the successive theogonic phases as involving struggles between the gods for power and domination (*R.* 2.377e–378a). Consequently, one may see the gods who established their position in Olympus as occasionally malevolent, contentious and unpredictable. Socrates' solution was to avoid such mischaracterisations and instead set the theological regulations that would require us to speak of the gods as the causes of what is good (2.380c) and stable beings who do not mislead into falsehoods (2.383a). As we saw a moment ago, this is precisely what is endorsed by the dialogue. Cosmogony is devoid of the struggle and conflict that are so typical of the divine matters in the epic narratives. The Demiurge does not fight for his authority with other primordial forces and he does not aim at establishing his reign in the universe.¹¹ Along with the cosmic gods, the Demiurge is described as a good and benevolent being. But does Timaeus adopt this kind of religious language for the traditional gods as well? T1 neither mentions the struggles of the traditional gods nor gives support to the conventional mischaracterisations of them. When they come into being, the power structure is already fixed by the Demiurge, and the traditional gods must conform to it. Thus, it seems that T1 avoids describing the traditional gods in a theologically and morally unsound manner.

So far I have identified two major problems concerning passage 40d–41a: (1) its thesis is based on unsatisfactory epistemic grounds; (2) it uses an explanatory framework that is in tension with the primary explanatory scheme. The cumulative force of these observations should compel us to reject the passage as irrelevant to cosmology as many scholars have done before. But even if we are not meant to integrate T1 into the general philosophical architecture, the puzzle remains as to why Timaeus dwelt upon the traditional gods precisely at this point. We may wonder

¹¹ For this point, see Vlastos (1975) 26.

whether he merely wanted to show that the poetic accounts, though limited, have a place in the novel cosmology. Perhaps he might have played safe and avoided the charge of impiety. Or perhaps the classic commentaries were right when they considered the passage as ‘purely, though politely, ironical’?¹² The epistemic, explanatory and descriptive challenges of T1 that we have explored might only strengthen this impression. But it is important to emphasise that the apparent irony of Timaeus is also less than straightforward. It can be interpreted in two ways: he is mocking either the authority of the unnamed poets or the theogonic content composed by them.¹³ Generally, I shall avoid the second reading as it precludes a serious assessment of the relation between religion and cosmology. But the results of my discussion may support the first interpretation, for my aim is to show that the theogony of T1 is formulated in a deliberately vague way and thus unrelated to any specific Greek theogonic narratives. It means that Timaeus is not actually relying on any unnamed earlier poetic figure, even if he playfully pretends to accept their authority.

The solution of the *Timaeus* is not to follow the *Phaedrus* and cosmologise all Olympian gods (see Introduction). Instead, it is to find some common ground between the two theogonies and the key lies, I believe, at the very beginning of each theogony, where we find the same pair of gods, Ouranos and Gaia. The reason that these gods can appear not only in the traditional theogony of T1, but also in the cosmological theogony is that Timaeus uses the cosmological discourse to revise the nature of those astral beings who have theological significance. And this includes some traditional gods, such

¹² Taylor (1928) 245. See also Adam (1908) 376; Bury (1929) 37n2; Cornford (1937) 139; Reverdin (1945) 53; Morrow (1960) 444. This was the general view inherited from nineteenth-century commentators such as Stallbaum (1838); Martin (1841); and, especially, Archer-Hind (1888) 136. And it is still found in the current scholarship, for example Burnyeat (2009) 175; Brisson (1994) 105; McPherran (2014) 74; Nightingale (2021) 231. It is small wonder then that even some recent studies have viewed our passage with a cool welcome. See Zeyl (2000) li–lii, who briefly notes that ‘theorizing about the status of the popular gods falls outside the scope of Plato’s philosophical, even religious, interests’. We find even less in the pioneering studies of Johansen (2004) 186 and Broadie (2012) 84n2, where the traditional gods are only mentioned while reviewing the content of the dialogue, as if they play virtually no part in Timaeus’ discourse.

¹³ For the first possibility, see Karfik (2004) 139–41; Tor (2017) 50n103. Among the entirely non-ironic readers, one can find Solmsen (1942) 117–18; Sedley (2010) 248n3; Van Riel (2013) 33.

as Ouranos (the heavenly god), Gaia (the mother earth), Selene (the moon-goddess) and Helios (the sun-god), that had already functioned as the world-structuring gods in the religious tradition. That Timaeus makes Ouranos the main 'hero' of his cosmological narrative is mostly overlooked in current scholarship because of the emphasis on the world-soul, the psychic cornerstone of the universe, which is among the main themes in the first part of cosmology after the introductory remarks (the *prooimion*). Although the world-soul expresses the cognitive aspect of the world and gives structure to the individual cosmic gods, it is, nonetheless, only one of the components that constitutes the universe. For it is precisely Ouranos, as I shall argue, that unites the totality of cosmic functions and merges all of the contexts in question into a continuous composition. We find Ouranos frequently featured in the dialogue, where he assumes a diverse set of roles such as the name of the first created cosmic being, a senior traditional god and an ethical ideal for humans. With respect to the dramatic composition, Ouranos reappears in such varying segments of the dialogue as the methodological *prooimion* to Timaeus' speech, the cosmological discussion and the appropriation of the traditional theogony in the passage at 40d3–41a6 (= T1). I intend to explain how Ouranos is turned into the point of intersection of these dramatic and theoretical contexts. I shall argue that the *Timaeus* is primarily a theological project, which involves a re-characterisation of Greek gods, in particular the old heavenly god Ouranos, and reclaiming the *ouranos* and the *kosmos* from the cosmologists as a properly divine being. So, my first objective is to show that the dialogue is, among other things, a theogony of Ouranos, which considers him as the first and the most significant created cosmic god (Sections I.2–I.4).

Using this approach, we will also discover the discursive strategy employed for relating philosophical theology to religious tradition: although traditional theogony lacks any proper philosophical arguments for the existence of traditional gods, by claiming that these gods stem from the Ouranian god, Timaeus finds an incisive way to integrate the otherwise-awkward traditional theogony into cosmology. The results of this analysis will open the path to examine how the key themes of T1 correspond to the broader patterns of Timaeus' narrative and, in particular, whether

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the biological explanatory framework is ever used in the cosmological discourse (Section 1.5). I shall also explore whether we can extract anything positive from T1, especially in relation to its theologonical arrangement, and how this information can qualify the epistemic status of the passage and its moral message (Section 1.6). This approach also leads me to my second claim: despite the fact that the dialogue rejects many traditional characteristics of Ouranos and gives a thorough cosmological reassessment of this divinity, he is considered as both a cosmic and a traditional god. This will make it necessary for us to return to the method of the so-called double identification (Section 1.7; see also Introduction). Our findings will confirm that the difference between the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus* is that the latter gives a cosmological update to only those few traditional gods that inherited a structural role in the world-order. In addition, I shall argue that the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* postulate some relation between two more pairs of traditional gods and astral beings, namely Hermes–planet and Apollo–sun (Helios), but this is neither an identificatory relation nor a procedure that is meant to be applied to the rest of the traditional gods.

1.2 Introducing the Ouranian God

Timaeus was given the task of explaining the origins of the universe by Critias (27a–b), who distributed philosophical topics among the interlocutors after Socrates asked for a story about the ideal city in political action. At that point, Critias did not present any clear theoretical requirements, objectives or a specific framework for Timaeus' account, apart from a request to terminate his cosmology with the generation of human beings. From the very beginning, it is clear that Timaeus has to explain his theoretical agenda, and it is small wonder that he delivers a short prologue to the whole cosmological discourse in order to define the subject which was left open by both Critias and Socrates.¹⁴ The *prooimion*, or introduction, (27c–29d) presents a number of

¹⁴ Runia (1997) 104 and Naddaf (1997) 27–36 argue that Timaeus follows the Presocratic *Peri Phuseōs* tradition (especially Empedocles and Parmenides) in so far as he uses the *prooimion* as an introduction to the main topic, method and the basic theoretical

philosophical themes: the origins of the universe as the central cosmological question; a methodological clarification of the *eikōs* as a standard for considering cosmological problems; the distinction between being and becoming; and the causal roles of the supreme creator god and the paradigms in his narrative. This is also the place where we encounter the *ouranos* for the first time:

T2 Now as to the whole *ouranos* – or the *kosmos*, let's just call it by whatever name is most acceptable to it in a given context – there is a question we need to consider first. This is the sort of question one should begin with in enquiring into any subject. Has it always existed? Was there no origin from which it came to be? Or did it come to be and take its start from some origin? (*Ti.* 28b2–7, mod.)

ὁ δὴ πᾶς οὐρανὸς – ἢ κόσμος ἢ καὶ ἄλλο ὅτι ποτὲ ὀνομαζόμενος μάλιστα' ἂν δέχοιτο, τοῦθ' ἡμῖν ὠνομάσθω – σκεπτέον δ' οὖν περὶ αὐτοῦ πρῶτον, ὅπερ ὑπόκειται περὶ παντὸς ἐν ἀρχῇ δεῖν σκοπεῖν, πότερον ἦν αἰεὶ, γενέσεως ἀρχὴν ἔχων οὐδεμίαν, ἢ γέγονεν, ἀπ' ἀρχῆς τίνος ἀρξάμενος.

Cosmology begins with a question regarding the origins of the *ouranos*. Whose origins does it have in mind?

As a common noun, *ouranos* refers to the sky, a physical location of gods. Taken in isolation, the term *ouranos* could mean the celestial realm proper, in which case the objective would be to explain just the generation of the astral bodies, but it can also mean the whole universe, which is precisely Timaeus' topic.¹⁵ The latter sense is reinforced here by placing *ouranos* in conjunction with *kosmos*, thus indicating an expanded meaning – the entire world, including the earth. Both ancient and modern authors debate as to when exactly *kosmos* was conflated with *ouranos* and began to mean the 'world', with possible options ranging from Pythagoras

assumptions. But Timaeus also mimics the poetic tradition, especially Hesiod, for which see Pender (2010) 222.

¹⁵ The variety of meanings of the term *ouranos* is also confirmed by Aristotle in his review of the three leading usages among his contemporaries: (1) *ouranos* can have a very limited meaning of the extreme circumference of the universe, that is, the sphere of the fixed stars; (2) it can also be a less limited reference to the whole cosmic region between the earth and the extreme circumference, namely the planets and the stars; (3) alternatively, the term can have a comprehensive meaning of the world as a whole (*Cael.* 278b9–21). In his commentaries on the *De Caelo*, Simplicius rightly insists that the third sense of *ouranos* was precisely the one adopted by Plato (*In Cael.* 280.15–20).

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and Heraclitus to Plato.¹⁶ Diogenes Laertius (8.1.48), for example, would like us to think that such a use originated in the works of Pythagoras, Parmenides or Hesiod, but these candidates are highly contested mainly because there is no primary textual evidence to support such a claim and one has to rely on the late doxographers.¹⁷ A less disputed alternative is Heraclitus (DK22 B30).¹⁸ However one would wish to settle this debate, the Presocratics clearly used *kosmos* for the ‘world’ one generation later, which, as Socrates’ students remarked, was characteristic of the intellectuals (Xenophon, *Mem.* 1.1.11; Plato, *Grg.* 507e–508a).¹⁹ And by Plato’s time the philosophical tradition has settled on a synonymous use of *kosmos* and *ouranos* to designate ‘world’. Generally, Timaeus follows the rule set out in T2 by interchangeably referring to the universe as *ouranos* (31a2), *kosmos* (29a2, 30b7) and *to pan* (29d7).²⁰ In other words, the origins of the world are regarded as the origins of the *ouranos-kosmos*.

Timaeus’ discourse is theology as much as cosmogony: for the universe is not only a physical entity or a spatial term, but also a god.²¹ T2 makes a pious and typically Greek gesture of leaving it for

¹⁶ The term *ouranos* was not synonymous with *kosmos*, which primarily signified ‘adornment’, ‘order’ or ‘arrangement of things’, for which see Kirk (1954) 312. Cf. Puhvel (1976) 159, who suggests that the proto-meaning might be related to the arrangement of hair (i.e. combing or hairstyle).

¹⁷ Diogenes seems to be partly relying on Aëtius, *Plac.* 2.1.1 MR. For an early reading, see Taylor (1928) 65–6; Nehamas (2002) 60; and a recent defence of the Pythagorean case in Horky (2019). Against this position: Burkert (1972) 77, who cautiously concludes that ‘the Pythagoreans at least, if not Pythagoras himself, played a decisive role in the development of the Greek idea of *cosmos*’.

¹⁸ The interpretation of *kosmos* as the world in this fragment is contested by Kirk (1954) 311–14, accepted with some reservations by Kahn (1979) 132–8 and entirely accepted by Vlastos (1955) 344; Vlastos (1975) 4–6; Marcovich (1967) 269; Robinson (1987) 96; Fronterotta (2013) 110. Cf. Betegh (2004) 325–48. Further support for the latter interpretation can be found in Fronterotta (2013) 31, who also argues for the authenticity of DK22 B89, where the term *kosmos* is mentioned; and in Betegh and Piano (2019), who defend, among other things, the reconstruction of the term *kosmos* in Heraclitus’ quotations in the Derveni papyrus col. 4.

¹⁹ See also Empedocles, DK31 B134.4–5; Anaxagoras, DK59 B8; Philolaus, DK44 B1; Diogenes of Apollonia, DK64 B2. For this reading: Guthrie (1962) 208n1; Kirk, Raven and Schofield (1969) 159n1; Wright (1981) 183; Nunlist (2005) 82.

²⁰ The *ouranos* always assumes a comprehensive sense in the cosmogonic contexts, such as the creation of the world-body or the world-soul (e.g. 31b3, 32b7, 34b5). A more limited meaning, namely the heavens, can be defended in those passages, where the *ouranos* is juxtaposed to the celestial bodies, such as the sun (e.g. 40a6, 47a4).

²¹ A religious reading is reinforced by the religious tone of the *prooimion* itself, which begins with an invocation for the help of all gods and goddesses (27c–d). Although it is conventional to pray to the gods at the beginning of a great undertaking, the nature of

the emerging god to decide which name is acceptable to it, either *ouranos* or *kosmos*.²² I retained the nice ambiguity in Zeyl's translation by leaving the neutral 'it' rather than substituting the pronoun with the more loaded masculine 'he', but this does not change the fact that T2 makes a personal address to the god. As the third person verb indicates (δέχοιτο, 28b4), the god is given a choice to decide on how it is to be called and what name is appropriate to it.²³

In the opening part of the cosmogony (27c–40d), we find a comparable number of the two terms, fifteen for *ouranos* and ten for *kosmos*.²⁴ Sometimes the more fitting name for the cosmic god appears to be *ouranos*:

T3 And he [viz. the Demiurge] set it to turn in a circle, a single solitary *ouranos*, whose very excellence enables it to keep its own company without requiring anything else. For its knowledge of and friendship with itself is enough. All this, then, explains why he [viz. the Demiurge] begat for himself a blessed god [viz. *ouranos*]. (*Ti.* 34b4–9)

καὶ κύκλω δὴ κύκλον στρεφόμενον οὐρανὸν ἓνα μόνον ἔρημον κατέστησεν, δι' ἀρετὴν δὲ αὐτὸν αὐτῷ δυνάμενον συγγίγνεσθαι καὶ οὐδενὸς ἑτέρου προσδεόμενον, γινώριμον δὲ καὶ φίλον ἰκανῶς αὐτὸν αὐτῷ. διὰ πάντα δὴ ταῦτα εὐδαίμονα θεὸν αὐτὸν ἐγεννήσατο.

We can notice here the personal aspects of the *ouranos* emphasised by such attributes as knowledge, friendship and happiness. Now let us compare T3 with the concluding passage of the whole dialogue:

Timaeus' project is highly distinctive and so it remains unsettled whether the gods here are meant to be the traditional gods. Broadie (2012) 14n14 rules out the Demiurge, since 'the Demiurge should not be made an object of worship: he is not a religious figure'. See also Cornford (1937) 35. From a retrospective reading of the dialogue, the cosmic gods and Ouranos are more likely candidates. For Timaeus as a religious exegete, see Nightingale (2021) 221–4.

²² For this point, see Taylor (1928) 66; Rowett (2013) 173–4; Versnel (2011) 49–60. Plato always carefully introduces the name of the divinity: *Cra.* 400e1–401a1; *Phlb.* 12c3–4. Sometimes a similar trope is used to dismiss the relevance of a particular word or name (e.g. *Phaedo* 100d5–6; *Prt.* 358a7–b1; *Lg.* 9.872d7–e1), but none of these instances concern the gods. Cf. Aeschylus, *Ag.* 160–166.

²³ As a cosmic being, Ouranos is neither male, nor female, and its spherical body with no human parts only reinforces the genderless character of this god (32c–34a). As a traditional god, Ouranos is surely male (T1). However, the enduring connection between the cosmologically reformed Ouranos and the traditional god Ouranos sometimes forces us to retain the ambiguity about its gender and sometimes to call it 'him'.

²⁴ *Ouranos*: 28b2, 31a2, 31b3, 32b7, 34b5, 36e2, 36e5, 37d6, 37e2, 38b6, 39b6, 39d8, 39e10, 40a6, 40c3; *kosmos*: 28b3, 29a2, 29b2, 29e4, 30b7, 30d1, 31b2, 32c1, 32c6, 40a6.

1.2 Introducing the Ouranian God

T4 And so now we may say that our account of the universe has reached its conclusion. This *kosmos* has received and teems with living things, mortal and immortal. A visible living thing containing visible ones, perceptible god, image of the intelligible animal, its grandness, goodness, beauty and perfection are unexcelled. This one *ouranos*, indeed the only one of its kind, has come to be. (*Ti.* 92c4–9)

Καὶ δὴ καὶ τέλος περὶ τοῦ παντός νῦν ἦδη τὸν λόγον ἡμῖν φῶμεν ἔχειν· θνητὰ γὰρ καὶ ἀθάνατα ζῶα λαβὼν καὶ συμπληρωθεὶς ὄδε ὁ κόσμος οὕτω, ζῶον ὀρατὸν τὰ ὀρατὰ περιέχον, εἰκὼν τοῦ νοητοῦ θεοῦ αἰσθητός, μέγιστος καὶ ἄριστος κάλλιστός τε καὶ τελεώτατος γέγονεν εἰς οὐρανὸς ὄδε μονογενῆς ὢν.

In T4, Timaeus returns to his religious hesitations and uses all three main terms – *ouranos*, *kosmos* and *to pan* – to complete the discussion of the origins of the cosmic god.

It is a dangerous theological move to use the term *ouranos* as the name for the cosmic god, since it alludes to the old heavenly god Ouranos. In archaic poetry, Ouranos is one of the primordial gods, literally the broad and starry sky that encloses the earth and provides a physical residence for the gods. It is safe to say that he was not the most revered Greek divinity. Ouranos is characterised as a malicious being, who takes pleasure in evil actions: he has unceasing lust for his wife Gaia and hatred for his children, which makes him to hide the new-borns in Gaia herself. These wrongdoings lead his son Kronos to castrate and depose the heavenly god.²⁵ Hesiod's *Theogony* left such a powerful account of Ouranos' viciousness and downfall that the later tradition could only conclude that 'the one [Ouranos] who was formerly great . . . will now not even be spoken of as existing in the past' (Aeschylus, *Ag.* 167–170, trans. A. H. Sommerstein). Given this deplorable religious legacy, one would expect any discourse to distance the new cosmic god from the old Ouranos. Instead, we find an open proposal for the god to take this name. So the crucial question is why Timaeus wants to associate the universe with both *ouranos* and *kosmos*. What is the upshot of this religious juxtaposition?

A short detour to Xenophanes provides background and useful points of comparison for understanding Timaeus' theological project. Xenophanes postulated a single, eternal, omnipotent and omniscient God as the primary principle shaking the universe by the power of

²⁵ For these aspects of Ouranos, see Hesiod, *Th.* 126–8, 154–82, 685–6; Homer, *Il.* 15.36.

mind (DK21 B23–26). This bold and novel characterisation of the divine may have been partly formulated as a critique of Homer's and Hesiod's theological narratives, which attached flawed human moral qualities to the Olympian gods (DK21 B11–12).²⁶ In addition, Xenophanes identifies the God with the universe. In a striking testimony at *Metaph.* 986b24–5 (= DK 21 A30), Aristotle claims that Xenophanes 'asserted that the One is the God by looking towards the whole *ouranos*' (εἰς τὸν ὅλον οὐρανὸν ἀποβλέψας τὸ ἓν εἶναι φησι τὸν θεόν).²⁷ The testimony presupposes an expanded meaning of the term *ouranos*, namely the whole world. According to Palmer, the passage exposes more than the location of the God, for it seems to indicate the coextensiveness, if not consubstantiality, of the divinity with the universe.²⁸ What is significant is Aristotle's emphasis on the term itself: he suggests that Xenophanes chose a familiar and poetically loaded term *ouranos* for the supreme God. This is not an innocent move, since it brings us back to Xenophanes' clash with the poets. Palmer argues that Xenophanes' theology challenges the poetic theogonies, which portray an overthrow of Ouranos and the rise of Kronos and Zeus: 'if it is an attribute of a god to be most powerful and if it is impious to suppose that one god can be subject to the mastery of another, then there will be neither a simultaneous hierarchy of divinities nor any hierarchy of succession. What remains is a single god that preserves aspects both of the Homeric/Hesiodic heavenly rulers and of the physical οὐρανός itself.'²⁹ Thus, Xenophanes' philosophy both continues and reacts to the discourse of archaic poetry. This cosmic God may not be the same old Ouranos, but it is a reformation of this religious being.

²⁶ On the divine disclosure in Xenophanes, see Tor (2017) 116–54.

²⁷ I follow Palmer (1996) 4–7 in taking τὸ ἓν as the subject of εἶναι and ἀποβλέπειν as indicating a deliberative process undertaken before doing something, which in this case is the conclusion concerning τὸ ἓν.

²⁸ For these points, see Palmer (1996) 7–8, 19–23. Palmer also believes that the expression 'looking towards the whole *ouranos*' should be understood as the reason why 'the One is the God', which is to say that some kind of astronomical research led towards this theological conclusion. For a sceptical position, see Brémond (2020) 9–10.

²⁹ Palmer (1996) 17.

1.2 Introducing the Ouranian God

We can now see that Timaeus places the discourse at the crossroads of traditional theogony and the Presocratic cosmogony.³⁰ He is reacting to the poetic images and re-characterising Ouranos with the vocabulary provided by his predecessors. First, Timaeus is concerned with the physical extension of *ouranos*. Just like Xenophanes and later philosophers, Timaeus wants to show that *ouranos* is not just a partial constituent aspect of the universe, the sky, but everything that exists within the world. Second, *ouranos* conflated with *kosmos* enables the latter's rich connotations of harmony, orderliness and systematicity to be employed for the depiction of the world, whilst also ensuring that there is no misunderstanding as to what the relation between the two terms is – they are equated.³¹ This association, therefore, has a rhetorical function, and it will later help to introduce some of the key Platonic terms, such as beauty and goodness.³² And finally, the use of the divine name Ouranos prepares the audience for the idea that an enquiry into the origins of the world is simultaneously an enquiry into the origins of a cosmic god. By using the old heavenly god as the philosophical point of departure, Timaeus distances himself from the new circles of the atheistic intellectuals as well as the materialist cosmologists, who questioned the divinity of astral entities, and settles the philosophical debates in the religious tradition. It is also a clear departure from the *Phaedrus*, where the *ouranos* usually means a celestial region (e.g. 247a5, 249a7) and an epistemic boundary between the world of the sensibles and the intelligibles (247b1, 247b7–c3), but never a divinity. T2 raises a fundamentally theological question: how did the Ouranian god come to be? An investigation into the nature of Ouranos, therefore, decisively associates the *Timaeus* with the theogonic tradition.³³ Let us now take a closer look at the new conception of the *kosmos-ouranos* and explore how it reorganises the religious perception of what is Ouranos.

³⁰ See further Naddaf (1997) 27–36.

³¹ This interpretation is also defended by Lefka (2013) 80–3. However, the two terms were disconnected in later authors, see Pseudo-Aristotle, *De Mundo* 391b9–19; Proclus, *In Ti. I* 272.20–5.

³² For the beauty of the cosmic god, see Laurent (2003) and Nightingale (2021) 231–44, 255–61.

³³ A similar position is argued by Pender (2010) 220–45 and Sedley (2010) 246–58, but without using the evidence concerning the *ouranos*.

1.3 Ouranos and the Origins of the Cosmic Gods

We have already discussed some religious aspects, which radically reconsider the principles of the poetic theogonies. In terms of dramatic composition, the story begins with something more fundamental than the heterogeneous list of Greek divinities. At the primordial phase, there is a single transcendent first principle, the Demiurge, who is responsible for all creation. The creative process, moreover, lacks the typical divine battles and family dramas of the Homeric and Hesiodic gods. If the gods fought each other, they could not be considered as harmonious, and the creative process would be destabilised and therefore deficient. In other words, the cosmogony lacks politics as understood by the poets. In general, there are no conventional political undertones in what the Demiurge does: he does not try to conquer and vanquish some primordial or divine forces, and he does not have an objective to establish his power. The actions of the Demiurge are not described in military vocabulary, and he is not titled a king or a ruler of the universe. Rather, his objective is practical or even technical, that is, to find a way to anchor the world in goodness. This objective is explicated in a language of cosmic craftsmanship. The cosmogony that follows, as we quickly learn, is theogonic, since the generated universe is actually a god, whose name is Ouranos. Just as in the poetic theogonies, Timaeus introduces Ouranos as one of the first generated beings. But in contrast to them, he aims to demonstrate what makes Ouranos superior to the other created gods.

The reason is that Ouranos is generated as a living world and an exceptionally intelligent divinity with a cosmic body constituted of all material elements (the world-body) and a soul that is capable of cognition and movement (the world-soul). The striking feature that the Ouranian god is generated as a bodily, ensouled animal is not accidental, for this is the best model to reflect the good intentions of the Demiurge:

- T5 Accordingly, the god [viz. the Demiurge] reasoned and concluded that in the realm of things naturally visible no unintelligent thing could as a whole be better than anything which does possess intelligence as a whole, and he further concluded that it is impossible for anything to come to possess intelligence apart from soul. Guided by this reasoning, he [viz. the

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Demiurge] put intelligence in soul, and soul in body, and so he constructed *to pan* . . . This, then, in keeping with our likely account, is how we must say divine providence brought our *kosmos* into being as a truly living thing, endowed with soul and intelligence . . . Since the god wanted nothing more than to make the world like the best of the intelligible things, complete in every way, he made it a single visible animal, which contains within itself all the animals whose nature it is to share its kind. (*Ti.* 30b1–31a1, mod.)

λογισάμενος οὖν ἠῦρισκεν ἐκ τῶν κατὰ φύσιν ὁρατῶν οὐδὲν ἀνόητον τοῦ νοῦν ἔχοντος ὄλον ὄλου κάλλιον ἔσεσθαι ποτε ἔργον, νοῦν δ' αὐ χωρὶς ψυχῆς ἀδύνατον παραγενέσθαι τῷ. διὰ δὴ τὸν λογισμὸν τόνδε νοῦν μὲν ἐν ψυχῇ, ψυχὴν δ' ἐν σώματι συνιστάς τὸ πᾶν συνετεκταίνετο . . . οὕτως οὖν δὴ κατὰ λόγον τὸν εἰκότα δεῖ λέγειν τόνδε τὸν κόσμον ζῶον ἔμψυχον ἔννοον τε τῇ ἀληθείᾳ διὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ γενέσθαι πρόνοιαν . . . τῷ γὰρ τῶν νοουμένων καλλίστῳ καὶ κατὰ πάντα τελέῳ μάλιστα αὐτὸν ὁ θεὸς ὁμοιώσας βουλευθεὶς ζῶον ἐν ὁρατόν, πάνθ' ὅσα αὐτοῦ κατὰ φύσιν συγγενῆ ζῶα ἐντὸς ἔχον ἑαυτοῦ, συνέστηρε.

The premise of this passage is the Platonic axiom that intelligence has intrinsic and supreme value. Accordingly, if the world is to be truly good, it must acquire reason. The crucial link here is the soul, which is the source of cognition and life. The Demiurge makes a mathematically precise and proportionate arrangement of the soul-stuff composed of sameness, difference and being (35a), and then weaves it throughout the whole *ouranos* (ἐκ μέσου πρὸς τὸν ἔσχατον οὐρανόν, 36e2), which empowers the universe with reasoning. The Demiurge assimilates the created god to himself (cf. μάλιστα ἐβουλήθη γενέσθαι παραπλήσια ἑαυτῷ, 29e3) by making Ouranos intelligent.

The soul of Ouranos guarantees the perpetual order and divinity of the universe. Through the world-soul, it receives a function to contemplate the eternal beings like the eternal paradigms, and all the created things that are within this cosmic totality (37a–b). The visible expression of this thought-process is the heavenly motions – constant, regular and harmonious revolutions that take place because of equally constant, regular and harmonious cosmic cognition (36d). Thus, the Ouranian god lives a stable life and its motions make the other astral beings follow the same course. Unlike the old Ouranos, it cannot initiate something that changes itself or others towards something worse and evil (Hesiod, *Th.* 154–160). For this reason, Ouranos cannot feel hatred or take joy in wrongful deeds anymore (cf. σφετέρῳ δ' ἤχθηνοντο τοκῆι, *Th.* 155; κακῷ δ' ἐπετέρεπετο ἔργῳ, *Th.* 158). Instead, it serenely contemplates the beings inside it and thus

experiences blessedness and happiness (*Ti.* 34b, 37a–c). The result is that the Demiurge has actually managed to reshape the realm of becoming with a view to the realm of changeless things and to make the world good by endowing it with the rational soul. The latter feature is of a crucial importance, because the created things and beings will be in need of a safeguard to maintain the cosmic organisation once the Demiurge retires from the creation. The world-soul is precisely such a guarantor.

As a created animal, it also has a body. The possibility that Ouranos might be akin to any known species of animals is rejected: there is nothing outside the universe in which it could move or observe, so it has no need of eyes, legs or similar bodily parts. And if it did, that would presuppose that the universe is not constituted by the whole of matter and that there is some kind of disorderly outer material layer, which can interact and collide with the created universe, causing changes and reorganisation of it from the outside (33a). So, if the universe is to be complete, it has to be a self-sufficient and singular entity (μονογενῆς οὐρανός, 31b3), without anything material beyond it. Hence, the Demiurge gave Ouranos a spherical shape composed of all the matter that existed. The body of Ouranos is crafted as visible and tangible entity (οὐρανὸν ὄρατόν καὶ ἄπτόν, 32b7–8) proportionally constituted by the four primary elements (32b–32c).³⁴ The cosmic body encompasses within itself all the living beings, including the younger gods (31a–b with 39e–40a). In other words, Ouranos lends them part of its body, since the living beings are composed of the body of the universe. The singularity and completeness of Ouranos ensures that there is no other body for living beings to partake in, and therefore all the bodies in the current universe are derived from the body of the Ouranian god (33b).³⁵ Among other things, this characterisation stands in sharp contrast to Hesiod's depiction of Ouranos who did not share the world with his children and returned them to Gaia. The reformed Ouranos, on the other hand, could do no such thing as it is inseparable from them. It also implies Gaia is no longer the 'ever

³⁴ Nightingale (2021) 232 notes that the world-body has a dual status: at the cosmological level, its unchanging nature demonstrates perfection and divinity, but at the ontological level, it is merely an imprint of the perfect paradigm on the realm of becoming.

³⁵ My interpretation of these passages, although formulated independently, is very similar to Broadie (2016) 164–5.

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immovable seat of all the immortal [gods]’ (πάντων ἕδος ἀσφαλὲς αἰεὶ ἀθανάτων, *Th.* 117–118). This function is reassigned to Ouranos. Another contrast with Hesiod’s narrative is that Gaia’s organising role is significantly diminished. It is not Gaia, who generates Ouranos to enclose the earth from above (*Th.* 126–127), but instead Gaia *qua* the earth is generated within Ouranos to give a fixed centre to its world-body (*Ti.* 38d, 39b). In addition, Gaia no longer has the power or any personal intention to drive forward generational change among the gods. There is no place for such a change in cosmological discourse, because the cosmic gods are all made after the permanent image of Ouranos.

The generation of cosmic gods, the planets and the stars, is an integral part of the generation of the great cosmic god. They are designed in such a way as to make sure that their functions would be meaningful within the overall cosmic structure and that their existence would provide no conflicts with the senior cosmic god. More specifically, the origin of the cosmic gods is associated with the question of time. The beginning of the world indicates a change from primordial chaos to the ordered condition. This transition opens up a space for a consideration of temporal differences resulting from something that was before and comes after. So, the cosmological conditions for the possibility of time need to be clarified. For this purpose, Timaeus offers a preliminary definition of *chronos* as a measure of change and movement (38a1–5) and tells how the Demiurge created the cosmic gods:

T6 Such was the reason, then, such the god’s design for the coming to be of time, that he brought into being the Sun, the Moon and five other stars, for the begetting of time. These are called *wanderers* and they came to be in order to set limits to and stand guard over the numbers of time. (*Ti.* 38c3–6)

ἔξ οὗν λόγου καὶ διανοίας θεοῦ τοιαύτης πρὸς χρόνου γένεσιν, ἵνα γεννηθῆι χρόνος, ἥλιος καὶ σελήνη καὶ πέντε ἄλλα ἄστρα, ἐπίκλην ἔχοντα πλανητά, εἰς διορισμὸν καὶ φυλακὴν ἀριθμῶν χρόνου γέγονεν.

The main function of the celestial bodies is to make the cosmic motions visible. The cosmic gods in T6 are organised in seven circles with the earth at the centre of the universe (38c–d), the circles in which they are carried by the motions of sameness and difference, while the rest of the stars are distributed in various

positions between the Equator and the poles (40a).³⁶ The relative differences in particular orbits, rotations and speeds lay the basis for the understanding of time. Thanks to the orderly revolutions of the cosmic gods induced by the world-soul, they provide stable measuring units of time – the numbers or general divisions, such as day, lunar month, annual circuit of the sun etc. Hence, time is dependent on the heavenly motions. From the cosmological perspective, the collective role of cosmic gods is to become a kind of cosmic clock (χρόνον ὄντα τὰς τούτων πλάνης, 39d1).³⁷ This function of cosmic gods demonstrates that they contribute towards the order of the universe.

We must distinguish three motions which the cosmic gods make: the axial rotation that is caused by the self-motion of their own souls; the cosmic revolutions that are caused by the world-soul's motion of sameness; and the observable irregularities in movements, such as retrogradation, caused by the world-soul's motion of difference.³⁸ In other words, the world-soul is responsible for all observable motions of astral entities: the usual circling of planets and stars around the earth is caused by the second motion, while the occasional backward motion of the planets that looks like a loop is caused by the third motion. The first

³⁶ See further Taylor (1928) 224.

³⁷ Nightingale (2021) 254 notes that 'Plato works with two different kinds of time in this dialogue. First, circular time: as a "moving image of eternity", the cosmic soul dwells in this cyclic temporality. Although the cosmos does have a beginning, it does not experience its life in terms of a past or a future. It has a perfect body that endlessly moves in circles. For this reason, the cosmos does not change in time's linear and forward motion. I call this "divine time". In identifying time as an eternal moving image of eternity, Plato links time directly to the eternal Forms rather than to the physical realm of decay and death. Second, linear time: mortals live in a temporality that moves forward in terms of days, months, and years. Humans and other mortals experience life in the mode of linear time. I call this "earthly time". In this case, Plato emphasizes the radical disparity between time and eternity.'

³⁸ My reading of the planetary movements follows the insightful analysis in Cornford (1937) 80–93, 106–19, with the exception of his treatment of retrogradation. In Cornford's account, retrogradation happens whenever the self-motion of the cosmic gods overcomes the motions of sameness and difference, but this claim cannot hold against two objections. More generally, the self-motion of the cosmic gods cannot conflict with, or be more powerful than, the motions of the world-soul. If the cosmic gods were allowed such a freedom, the universe would lose its orderly structure. And more specifically, if self-motion is the cause of retrogradation, the motion of difference becomes superfluous, since on Cornford's reading, its job is performed by the individual motions of the cosmic gods. On this particular point, I follow Dicks (1970) and Vlastos (1975), who have convincingly showed that the motion of difference is sufficient to account for retrogradation. For a more comprehensive analysis, see the recent assessments of this debate in Cavagnaro (1997), Gregory (2003) and Guetter (2003).

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type of motion, on the other hand, cannot be observed by human eyes. Some scholars doubt whether the cosmic gods have the self-motion and axial rotation altogether. D. R. Dicks limits individual (axial) movements only to the stars, while Gregory Vlastos goes even further by claiming that no cosmic being has any kind of individual motion apart from those motions inflicted by the world-soul.³⁹ I find their interpretations implausible for several reasons. First, Timaeus explicitly says that the stable and uniform axial rotation comes from a different kinetic source than the stable and uniform motion of sameness (cf. κινήσεις δὲ δύο προσήψεν ἑκάστῳ, τὴν μὲν ἐν ταύτῳ κατὰ ταύτά, περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν αἰεὶ τὰ αὐτὰ ἑαυτῷ διανοομένῳ τὴν δὲ εἰς τὸ πρόσθεν, ὑπὸ τῆς ταύτου καὶ ὁμοίου περιφορᾶς κρατουμένῳ, 40a7–b2). We also have to discard the motion of difference as the alternative option, since it produces retrogradations. And so the self-motion of the stars is the only plausible candidate for being the cause of axial rotations. Second, Vlastos' reading implies that none of the cosmic gods can have souls, as they have no individual motions. Without souls they would become inanimate objects, mere stones or rather globs of fire. It would deny their divine status, but in fact the astral entities are repeatedly called the gods (e.g. 39e10, 40b5, 40c3, 40c6). It is true that the dialogue is rather enigmatic about the psychic nature of the planets. But it occasionally refers to the souls of cosmic beings (38e, 41d–e, 42d–e; cf. *Lg.* 10.898e–899a).

And there is one final reason for considering the cosmic gods as ensouled beings. The cosmic gods are images of the parts of the paradigm of 'Animal' after which the *ouranos* was created. Timaeus claims that it includes four kinds of living things: 'first, the heavenly race of gods; next, the kind that has wings and travels through the air; third, the kind that lives in water; and fourth, the kind that has feet and lives on land' (μία μὲν οὐράνιον θεῶν γένος, ἄλλη δὲ πτηνὸν καὶ ἀεροπόρον, τρίτη δὲ ἔνυδρον εἶδος, πεζὸν δὲ καὶ χερσαῖον τέταρτον, 39e10–40a2).⁴⁰ Each of these kinds must have

³⁹ Dicks (1970) 124–32; Vlastos (1975) 58–63, 109.

⁴⁰ Timaeus turns to the traditional gods precisely after a discussion of the cosmic beings, as if they were a natural variation of the first kind, a particular species of the genus 'animal'. He shuns explaining how they fit within this classification in terms of their physical characteristics. The discussion of the heavenly kind, moreover, was already

an individual soul, a particular predominant element, a specific type of shape, motion and cognition. Otherwise, they could not be living beings. For instance, the cosmic gods are built primarily out of fire, which is the source of their supreme intelligence, in perfect spherical shapes, and move in circles. So, the creation of four natural kinds is a necessary cosmological step in order to bring about the world as an 'Animal' with all of its variations. For this reason, the very existence of cosmic gods contributes towards the completeness of the universe, and eventually assists in achieving what is good.⁴¹ Thus, the cosmic gods have a comparable theological-cosmological characterisation to Ouranos. The planets and stars are the cosmological miniatures of the universe – they have bodies, souls, their own (axial) motions – with the difference being that the cosmic gods also partake of the additional motions (of sameness and difference) imposed by the world-soul.

The *prooimion* and cosmogonic discourse is used to thoroughly revise the poetic features of the Ouranian god. Even though it is still primarily a heavenly being, Ouranos is no longer a mutilated lonely deity cast off to the margins of Greek religion: Timaeus turns the castrated god into an intelligent spherical universe, which all living beings must inhabit so that it would become perfect (41b6–c2). After such a re-characterisation, the new Ouranos may appear to share little with its predecessors, except for the name. But we can observe a continuity between the two gods with respect to the reformed theological aspects: the old Ouranos serves as the point of departure to think about what needs to be changed in order to transform him into the cosmic god. They share the same area of influence, but the extent and the activity are amplified and enhanced in the reformed version of the god. The cosmological discourse achieves the goal set in T2 – it demonstrates that the Ouranian god is *ouranos*, *kosmos* and *to pan*. It is no accident then to find in the final lines of the dialogue a statement that the cosmogenesis has produced 'a single *ouranos*, one of its kind' (εἷς οὐρανὸς μονογενής, 97c7–8).

completed with the cosmic gods before turning to the terrestrial kind (40d). Unless he can explain how these gods are related to Ouranos or other divinities, the traditional gods appear to be redundant in the taxonomy of living beings.

⁴¹ Cf. Broadie (2016) 166.

1.4 The Cosmic Cult-Image

1.4 The Cosmic Cult-Image

Timaeus concludes the origins of the Ouranian god by comparing the created universe to a peculiar religious object:

T7 Now when the Father who had produced the universe, which came into being as a cult-image of the eternal gods, observed it set in motion and alive, he was delighted and well pleased, and he thought of making it more like its model still. (*Ti.* 37c6–d1, mod.)

Ὡς δὲ κινήθην αὐτὸ καὶ ζῶν ἐνόησεν τῶν αἰδίων θεῶν γεγονὸς ἄγαλμα ὁ γεννήσας πατήρ, ἠγάσθη τε καὶ εὐφρανθεὶς ἔτι δὴ μάλλον ὁμοίου πρὸς τὸ παράδειγμα ἐπενόησεν ἀπεργάσασθαι.

I take *agalma* in its stronger sense ('a cult statue') rather than in a more deflationary way – a 'delight' or simply an 'image' – because of the religiously charged context of this passage, which we will discuss in a moment.⁴² However, the connections between the 'cult-statue', 'image', 'delight' should be retained. At this point the *ouranos* is both a created god and a copy of the model, hence a 'cult-image'. And this entity stimulates a positive experience in the Demiurge, hence a 'delight'. An even stronger reading ('a shrine for the everlasting gods') found in Cornford's translation gives the interesting idea that the Ouranian god is a religious figure not only for humans, but also for the other gods.⁴³ Yet it loses the crucial reference to the ontological status of Ouranos, namely the suggestion that the universe is modelled after the paradigm of Animal, so we must retain the association with the image.

The second question is: who are these 'eternal gods' (τῶν αἰδίων θεῶν, 37c6) whose *agalma* is Ouranos? Are they the created gods of which Ouranos is a container, or rather those gods of which Ouranos is a visible representation? In other words, if *ouranos* is a cult-image, are we worshipping the planets and stars inside the universe, or the paradigms of which the universe is a copy? The identity of the gods partly depends on the attribute 'eternal', and who can meet this requirement in the cosmological system. If one takes a non-creationist perspective, then the planets and stars are

⁴² This is the usual meaning of this term in religious contexts, where Plato relates the *agalma* to the gods: *Prt.* 322a5; *Smp.* 215b3; *Phdr.* 230b8, 251a6, 252d7; *Criti.* 110b5, 116d7, 116e4; *Lg.* 5.738c6, 11.931a1, 12.956a1.

⁴³ Cornford (1937) 97–102.

indeed eternal and so the universe could become a temple for the cosmic gods. Otherwise, none of the younger gods in the universe are eternal. The primary reason is that both the traditional and cosmic gods have a temporal beginning and they are potentially destructible (41a–b).⁴⁴ The only properly eternal entities are the Demiurge, the paradigm of Animal and the beings inside the paradigm. So is it the case that our reading of T7 depends on one's prior commitment to a broader interpretative strategy? Fortunately, there is a way to bypass this assumption, and it takes us to the relationship between Ouranos and these *theoi*. From what we discussed above, it is clear that whichever interpretative strategy one adopts, the cosmic gods are still the functional parts of Ouranos and so integral to it. It would be quite odd to take Ouranos as an image of the cosmic gods, because their derivative status and cosmological dependence on Ouranos qualifies them as an image of Ouranos much more than the other way round. Ouranos, therefore, does not represent them. They represent it. We are left then with the second option, which is also reinforces the creationist approach: in so far as Ouranos is the created image of the paradigm of Animal, we should say that Ouranos is the *agalma* of the eternal divine being, namely the paradigm and the beings it includes (cf. 37d1, 37e5).⁴⁵

The final question concerns the religious significance of T7 and the role of the cult statues in Greek culture. The statues of gods were among the key objects of worship, because the Greeks believed that the cult statues point towards the invisible divinity present in the *agalma*. Verity Platt notes that originally the term referred to the votive dedications and cult images, which

denoted an object whose sacred, material and aesthetic value was inseparable from its dynamic role within ritual, whether as a dedication intended to charm a deity into presence, or a cult image functioning as the focus of such activity . . .

⁴⁴ As argued by Tarán (1975) 86–7.

⁴⁵ Taylor (1928) 185–6 attempted to solve the problems arising from the non-creationist reading by either omitting θεῶν or changing it to θεῶν, in which case the phrase would express something like 'an image of his (the Creator's) everlasting objects of contemplation', namely the Forms. It is curious that Taylor sought for the same interpretative outcome, which can be achieved without making any emendations and simply adopting a creationist reading.

1.4 The Cosmic Cult-Image

[and] conflated the shining qualities of precious metals with the luminosity of the divine.⁴⁶

From the fifth century BC onwards, she observes, the meaning of *agalma* was increasingly restricted to the cult statues, but they inherited qualities associated with the votive dedications (divine presence, aesthetic appeal, skilful depiction and material value). The classical period produced perhaps the most famous religious sculptures, such as Pheidias' Zeus at Olympia and Athena at Parthenon, remarkable for their highly technical and naturalistic embodiment of the gods, which expresses the manner in which the divine would likely appear in reality. But the god could also dwell in a more modest form of wooden sculpture (ξύλον) or even aniconic object, such as a stone or an ash altar.⁴⁷ The variety of these religious items shows that there is no single way to capture the divine nature – the gods are present in the material representations and yet they transcend every visual discourse.⁴⁸ It is important to add that the presence of the divine in sculpture meant that an encounter with it could also be regarded as a form of epiphany. Worshippers may consciously pursue this experience through ritual actions that were supposed to reanimate the statues in the festival environment, which would reveal the gods celebrating with the worshippers and overwhelm them with joy and wonder.⁴⁹

The network of these cultural notions is present in T7. Timaeus' strategy is to establish a conceptual link between the cosmos and a religious *agalma*. The universe is like an *agalma*, because it has a creator, almost a sculptor, who shaped the primordial matter into a harmonious composition. It can also be regarded as an *agalma*, because the universe not only inhabits the Ouranian god, but also indicates the divinity, which is beyond the material image and serves as its model. The paradigms of animality and goodness, the so-called eternal gods, are fully accessible only to the Demiurge, but he opened the possibility of partially comprehending them to every rational being through a created medium, which is the cosmic *agalma*. The third sense in which the universe is an

⁴⁶ Platt (2011) 90. ⁴⁷ Platt (2011) 101–5. ⁴⁸ Gaifman (2016) 255–69.

⁴⁹ For a detailed account of effigies epiphany in literary sources, see Petridou (2016) 49–61; in classical sculpture, see Platt (2011) 83–91, 114–25. For the religious gazing at imagery and the personal experience of cult objects, see Kindt (2012) 36–54.

agalma is the idea that the Demiurge produced a naturalistic representation of the eternal gods. Unlike any mortal artisan, he managed to create an image, which is actually a living, moving entity and thus always being present to the mortals in an unceasing epiphany. Finally, it is an *agalma*, because it is a source of wonder and delight, the kind of human reaction that one would expect from an encounter with the gods. The passage, therefore, captures a deeply religious idea. The immediate force of the comparison with a cult-statue is that the cosmic god is depicted as an object of worship, which affirms that Ouranos is a religious figure.⁵⁰ It simply suggests that human beings should recognise the divine status of the *ouranos* just as they recognise the traditional gods in temples. But the deeper significance of this comparison is that it encourages those capable of understanding the identity of the invisible eternal gods to pursue cosmological studies and thus to honour the paradigm and its transcendent gods.

1.5 The Traditional Gods and the Biological Framework

After the considerations above, one might be tempted to conclude that Timaeus' theoretical commitments lie in the cosmological theogony and its products only. However, in the next couple of sections, I shall argue that there is a way to bridge the gap between the two theogonies, at least to a certain extent. Here again Ouranos will play a prominent role. But first I shall consider the explanatory and descriptive challenges that we first identified at the beginning of this chapter. We will see that the biological framework is not only compatible with cosmology, but also a significant part of it (Section 1.5). What is more, I shall argue that there is nothing in the narrative that demonstrates Timaeus' commitment to poetic mischaracterisations of the traditional gods. The latter argument will prepare the way for my next claim. We will see that Timaeus' version of traditional theogony does not depend on any particular poetic or religious source. Instead, he formulates it in such a way as to make it consistent with the cosmological theogony, for the

⁵⁰ Cf. *Ti.* 41c7–8, where the Demiurge announces that the younger gods will become the objects of worship. On the ethical role of Ouranos, see *Ti.* 47a1–c6. On the eschatological consequences of failing to observe and contemplate the god, see *Ti.* 90e2–6.

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starting point of the traditional theogony is Ouranos, the very god who was created as the most senior cosmic god by the Demiurge (Section 1.6). Thus, Ouranos appears as a god with a double-layered identity, and this feature of Ouranos is precisely what allows us to partially circumvent the epistemic challenge. That being said, the cosmological description of Ouranos retains its priority, for it grants a higher level of epistemic certainty. Towards the end of this chapter, I shall argue that Ouranos is joined by Gaia in being characterised as both a cosmic and a traditional god (Section 1.7).

Let us revisit the part of T1 where Timaeus introduces the family of traditional gods:

T1 The children Ocean and Tethys came from Gaia and Ouranos. Phorcys, Kronos and Rhea and all the gods in that generation came from the former [viz. Ocean and Tethys]. Zeus and Hera, as well as all those siblings who are called by names we know, were from Kronos and Rhea. And yet another generation came from these [viz. Zeus, Hera and others]. (*Ti.* 40e5–41a3, mod.)

Γῆς τε καὶ Οὐρανοῦ παῖδες Ὠκεανὸς τε καὶ Τηθύς ἐγενέσθη, τούτων δὲ Φόρκυς Κρόνος τε καὶ Ῥέα καὶ ὅσοι μετὰ τούτων, ἐκ δὲ Κρόνου καὶ Ῥέας Ζεὺς Ἥρα τε καὶ πάντες ὅσους ἴσμεν ἀδελφοὺς λεγομένους αὐτῶν, ἔτι τε τούτων ἄλλους ἐκγόνους.

The identities of traditional gods in T1 are anything but those of the cosmic gods, who form a characterless group of cosmic beings tranquilly circulating in the heavenly region. The passage might strike us as endorsing a more traditional manner of speaking about the family of Ouranos, but the specific features of these gods are extremely limited, only amounting to personal names and chronological arrangement. The passage is so sparing in terms of its theological content that it is probably better to approach it by asking which traditional characteristics are *absent* in the discourse. Under this approach, T1 could be interpreted along the lines of the *Republic* as avoiding all poetic misconceptions.⁵¹

⁵¹ For a similar reading of the *Phaedo* in relation to *Republic* 2, see Betegh (2009) 87–8. It is important to note that, unlike Socrates, Timaeus is far from being engaged in an active theological campaign against the poets. Instead, he asks the interlocutors to accept the theogonic legacy, but his proposal, as I argue below, is formulated in an extremely cautious and nuanced way. In Chapters 2 and 3, we will see that a more positive reassessment of the religious myths and the traditional gods happens whenever we step out of the cosmological discourse and turn to political issues. In particular, I shall argue that Critias' politogony involves a re-characterisation of the patron gods of

So just as we would expect from a Platonic discourse on the traditional gods, T1 lacks both terror-inducing language (cf. *R.* 3.387b) and jokes about the gods (cf. 3.388e–389a). The gods, moreover, do not commit evil deeds (cf. 2.377e–378a, 3.391c–e), hence the absence of Gaia's plot against Ouranos, Ouranos' castration, Kronos' dethronement, or Zeus's accession to power – the episodes which usually mark the transitions from one divine generation to another. And precisely because these episodes are removed, all the old gods have a rightful place in the good *kosmos* the Demiurge builds, where they peacefully live together. The important result is that, contrary to the Hesiodic theogony, the story in T1 is not about a struggle for power and domination. Timaeus narrates a story in which the first political plot against Ouranos never happened.

It appears as if the only distinctively conventional function that the traditional gods retain in T1 is of a generative kind. Although the passage does not consider the physical characteristics of Ouranos and the other gods apart from their sexual differentiation, the gods are put in male–female pairs and some of them, such as Ocean and Tethys, are explicitly called the children (παῖδες, *Ti.* 40e5) of the previous gods. T1 may be seen as implying that the gods have procreative powers. On this reading, Ouranos has to copulate with Gaia, a pattern repeated in the successive generations. In virtue of this, we would be encouraged no longer to think of these gods as the astral bodies, but as the senior traditional gods biologically capable of generating further divine generations. This idea falls under the biological explanatory framework of which we spoke before as contrasting with the creative power of the Demiurge. We noted then that these models differ in the ways in which they explain the generation of divine beings: traditional gods are products of procreation, whereas the cosmic gods result from the goodness of the Demiurge. But we can also add now that divine craftsmanship provides a fixed number of cosmic gods, which consistently follows the idea that the Demiurge only rearranges the primordial condition, hence the limited amount of

political communities, while the Athenian Stranger's colonial project of Magnesia includes a comparable re-characterisation of the traditional gods who are the patron gods of various civic institutions.

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matter in use.⁵² The biological model of generation, on the other hand, can potentially result in an indeterminate number of gods if it is not qualified with clearer principles of generation, for the number of gods progressively multiplies in T1, finally terminating in an unspecified cluster of gods. In any case, the general picture of T1 resembles the divine genealogical trees of the poetic theogonies, which hardly finds philosophical support in Platonic cosmology. It also curiously contrasts with Timaeus' later take on sexual differentiation. Towards the final eschatological scenes of the dialogue, we learn that sexuality did not come about as an essential feature of living beings, for the first-generation humans did not have a gender. On the contrary, the genders are derived from the providential cycle (90e–91d).⁵³ Only in the second generation (ἐν τῇ δευτέρῳ γενέσει, 90e8–91a1) did human beings receive genitals, sexuality and a desire for copulation.

On a closer inspection, however, we can see that the language of sexual reproduction of the traditional gods in T1 must be non-literal. The reason is that the sexual relationship is merely implied in the passage, but not explicitly stated. In the explanation of how Ouranos and Gaia created their children, there are no sexually connotated verbs apart from a middle passive aorist form of the verb γίγνεσθαι: 'the children Ocean and Tethys came from Gaia and Ouranos' (Γῆς τε καὶ Οὐρανοῦ παῖδες Ὀκεανὸς τε καὶ Τηθύς ἐγενέσθη, 40e5–6). The formulation in T1 is carefully crafted. The children simply 'came to be' from the gods without further explanation of exactly what that process looked like. So what the use of the biological framework in T1 does is leave the traditional gods in a peculiar grey zone: it invokes associations with traditional theogonies without committing to them, whilst also remaining true to the cosmological discourse without, however,

⁵² Cf. Betegh (2004) 226.

⁵³ As argued by Taylor (1928) 505. This interpretation has recently been contested on the grounds that such a providential plan questions the goodness of the Demiurge. Gregorić (2012) 192 claims that 'justness of this scheme would be compromised if we had to suppose that the first humans were untroubled by sexual desire and that those who lived through their lives justly and virtuously got punished in the second generation by being reincarnated as men troubled by sexual desire – which is a considerably worse situation, certainly by Plato's lights'. However, even if one admits that Timaeus' account begs for consistency, the textual evidence at 90e–91d clearly speaks in favour of Taylor's reading.

acquiring the same explanatory power. The reader is left with a sparse genealogy without any comment on how the traditional gods actually came to be. Even in this religiously loaded passage, Ouranos and Gaia are presented in such a way as not to create any incoherence with their cosmological characteristics. In Section 1.6 we will see that this particular phrasing is part of Timaeus' broader strategy for dealing with the legacy of the poetic theogonies in TI.

It is important to note that TI is not the only place where 'parental' language is employed to describe the origins of various entities. The Demiurge, for example, is repeatedly titled 'the maker and the father' of the universe (ποιητής και πατήρ, 28c3) and later on he even assumes parenthood of all the gods in the universe, including the traditional gods (δημιουργός πατήρ, 41a7).⁵⁴ The rhetorical figure works closely with the image of mother to account for the restructuring of the primordial state:

T8 For the moment, we need to keep in mind three types of things: that which comes to be, that in which it comes to be, and that after which the thing coming to be is modelled, and which is the source of its coming to be. It is in fact appropriate to compare the receiving thing to a mother, the source to a father, and the nature between them to their offspring. (*Ti.* 50c7–d4)

ἐν δ' οὖν τῷ παρόντι χρή γένη διανοηθῆναι τριπτά, τὸ μὲν γιγνόμενον, τὸ δ' ἐν ᾧ γίγνεται, τὸ δ' ὅθεν ἀφομοιούμενον φύεται τὸ γιγνόμενον. καὶ δὴ καὶ προσεϊκάσαι πρέπει τὸ μὲν δεχόμενον μητρί, τὸ δ' ὅθεν πατρί, τὴν δὲ μεταξὺ τούτων φύσιν ἐκγόνῳ.

In this analogy, the characterless and constantly changing matter is compared to a mother. She is called the Receptacle, because she receives the ordering from the father understood here as the Animal model and provides space and material substrate for the universe to come to be. The Receptacle is analogous to a mother in virtue of her ability to carry and deliver a new-born, the universe.

The Receptacle should not be confused with Necessity, which is a causal factor and, interestingly, is featured as a mother-figure as well:

T9 For this ordered world is of mixed birth: it is the offspring of a union of Necessity and Intellect. Intellect prevailed over Necessity by persuading it to

⁵⁴ Cf. ὁ συνιστάς, 30c3; ὁ γεννήσας πατήρ, 37c7; τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς τάξιν, 42e6–7.

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direct most of the things that come to be toward what is best, and the result of this subjugation of Necessity to wise persuasion was the initial formation of this universe. (*Ti.* 47e5–48a5)

μεμειγμένη γὰρ οὖν ἡ τοῦδε τοῦ κόσμου γένεσις ἐξ ἀνάγκης τε καὶ νοῦ συστάσεως ἐγεννήθη· νοῦ δὲ ἀνάγκης ἄρχοντος τῷ πείθειν αὐτὴν τῶν γιγνομένων τὰ πλεῖστα ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιστον ἄγειν, ταύτη κατὰ ταῦτά τε δι' ἀνάγκης ἠττωμένης ὑπὸ πειθοῦς ἔμφορος οὕτω κατ' ἀρχὰς συνίστατο τότε τὸ πᾶν.

T9 explicitly speaks of Necessity and Intellect as the female and male agents, who generate the physical universe. This event is caused by the union or combination (σύστασις), which was formed when Intellect convinced Necessity of the goodness of their partnership. To explain this process Timaeus uses words with sexual connotations, such as πείθειν and μιγνύναι, which mark sexual seduction and intercourse. On the face of it, the union appears to result from a defeat of Necessity and its subjection to cosmic wisdom, but later on we learn that Necessity agreed to be persuaded (ἡ τῆς ἀνάγκης ἔκοῦσα πεισθεῖσά τε φύσις ὑπέϊκεν, 56c5–6).

The basic idea of T8 and T9 is a simple one: the rational ordering principle sets out to reorganise chaos into the ordered whole. ‘Intellect’ or ‘father’ here stands for what was called the Demiurge in the previous parts of the dialogue, while ‘Necessity’ or ‘mother’ stands for the chaotic aspect of the primordial nature. The father-mother-offspring model is a fractal structure captured at every level of the narrative: at the metaphysical level, we have the intelligible realm composed of the Demiurge, the paradigm of Animal and *chōra* producing the sensible realm; at the causal level, we have a distinction between Intellect and Necessity producing the world; at the cosmological level, we have the main cosmic entities, Ouranos and Gaia, producing perishable living beings. Thus, the difference between the previous parts of the dialogue and T8–T9 is the angle from which we have to reiterate the steps of the world-building. In T8–T9 the perspective shifts from divine theogony to physical cosmogony, where the latter sometimes assumes the shape of matrimony and biological reproduction instead of craftsmanship. What this model indicates are the requirements for transforming the primordial condition.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Cf. Pender (2010) 214.

The biological and matrimonial images describe how those principles cooperate in establishing the world-order.

Contrary to what was assumed at the beginning of this chapter, we can see that the technological and biological frameworks do not offer conflicting explanations. They apply similar principles: in both accounts, the process is oriented towards the good and guided by practical reasoning. Surely, not every biological model necessarily involves the direction of practical reasoning, but this aspect is emphasised for a good reason: it explains how the cooperation of two distinct ontological principles is possible. The biological framework places a stronger emphasis on the idea that Intellect cannot bring about the world on his own. Otherwise, there would be no need to persuade Necessity of the goodness of his plan – Intellect could do as it pleases without restrictions. As Sergio Zedda has rightly noted, the world-building is a mutual, voluntary endeavour of the two main primordial principles.⁵⁶ So it is not the case that Timaeus finds a convenient analogy between human biological reproduction and the world-building, since he does not use something like the Aristotelian sexual dichotomy of passive femininity and active masculinity.⁵⁷ Such beliefs concerning human generation are not applied to explain the basics of ontology. In fact, T8 and T9 lack explicitly sexual language: the meaning is merely implied in the subtext. It is important to emphasise that in none of these passages is *erōs* presented as a causal factor, the principle of generation, like in the early Greek theogonies.⁵⁸ Instead, the images in these passages serve to show on what grounds completely different principles of the primordial phase can nonetheless join in a productive way. These images do not

⁵⁶ See especially the following note from Zedda (2002) 152–3: '[T]he gender characterisation in the Timaeon cosmogony is based on the type of pattern each partner can contribute to the finished universe. The underlying consideration is that the Receptacle can, and in fact regularly does generate patterns. Without the Demiurge, these patterns are devoid of all form, but it must be remembered that it remains in the power of the Receptacle to refuse the rational "rule" of the Demiurge. Even more importantly, the Demiurge needs to delegate the future production of visible objects to the Receptacle in the knowledge that, by so doing, a level of imperfection will always be present in the finished result . . . [It is] a combined effort by both rational and non-rational principles that recognisable objects can be built in the Receptacle.' I am grateful to Sergio Zedda for finding a CD with a copy of his doctoral thesis. Note that the printed pages of Zedda's dissertation might slightly differ from the word file that I quoted.

⁵⁷ See for example Aristotle, *GA* 729b9–18; *Pol.* 1254b13–14, 1259b1–3.

⁵⁸ Cf. Aristotle, *Metaph.* 984b23–985a11.

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imply a metaphysics which would seriously presume the fundamental ontological principles to be sexually differentiated. These passages explain cosmogony by playing with the erotic vocabulary of courting, seducing and copulating.

The biological model is used as an explanatory framework, just like the technological.⁵⁹ Both models give colourful metaphors, which may not be literally true, but still have an exceptional discursive power to illuminate the cosmological processes and structural relations between the ontological principles. Without these familiar analogies the world-building would become far less comprehensible to the audience. The explanatory value of the technological account lies in its capacity to explain how practical reasoning implements teleology, while the value of biological explanation lies in its ability to show how Intellect uses its practical reasoning in cooperation with something entirely different from itself, namely Necessity. Therefore, the biological framework makes intelligible some new areas of cosmology and so it expands on the technological framework without conflicting with it. The additional input of the biological model to the whole cosmological architecture of the discourse is twofold: first, it shows that ontology is pluralistic rather than monistic; second, it explains how Intellect overcomes the potential threats to the production of a good universe by using 'erotic' persuasion. It is only appropriate to sum up the outcome of our discussion with one more metaphor, which is the planned parenthood. The world is a child of Intellect and Necessity deliberately planned to be conceived rather than an accidental outcome of the interaction between them. So when Timaeus uses sexually connotated concepts, he does not commit himself to a robust ontological position. This is just a convenient way of describing some of the more problematic areas of theogony. In the light of these findings, T1 might look less challenging to the basic structure of cosmology – it is in tune with the general method used in T8–T9, though it does not obtain the same force of explanation, since the biological framework is not intended to clarify the role of first principles in the origins of the traditional gods.

⁵⁹ On the theological implications of these frameworks, see Johansen (2004) 477. On the types of these frameworks and the cognitive value of theological metaphors, see Pender (2000) 88–117.

1.6 Timaeus, the Poets and the Orphics

We began with an observation that T1 suffers not only from the explanatory ambiguities, but also from the unreliable authority of the poets and their failure to provide proper epistemic grounds for the knowledge of the traditional gods. Timaeus does not take responsibility for what is assumed in the theogony of T1. The passage belongs to the discourse of the ‘children of gods’. One could think that it is referring to the poets – Homer, Hesiod and the like – since the passage speaks about religious ways of knowing the gods, legendary cultural figures and myths. But the explicit reference to the poets is conspicuously absent in T1. The reason is that Homer and Hesiod never said that they are the sons of the Olympians, let alone based their knowledge of the divine genealogy on this relationship. The ‘children of gods’ appear a few dozen times in Plato’s corpus, but the title is generally reserved for someone who has a direct lineage to the deities, for example the heroes or the younger gods born from the senior gods.⁶⁰ When the poets are mentioned in the dialogues, they are usually called the ‘children of Muses’.⁶¹ The most prominent exception to this rule is located in the *Republic*. Its passage is pertinent to our discussion, since Socrates refers to the children of gods who produce genealogies of gods (τῶν γενεαλογησάντων ποιητῶν, *R.* 2.365e3), just like Timaeus’ characters (*Ti.* 40e4):

T10 [M]ystery rites and the gods of absolution have great power. The greatest cities tell us this, as do those children of the gods who have become poets and prophets of the gods. (*R.* 2.366a7–b2)

αἱ τελεταὶ αὖ μέγα δύνανται καὶ οἱ λύσιοι θεοί, ὡς αἱ μέγιστα πόλεις λέγουσι καὶ οἱ θεῶν παῖδες ποιητὰ καὶ προφῆται τῶν θεῶν γινόμενοι.

In this part of the *Republic*, Adeimantus challenges Socrates by claiming that injustice pays off and one needs only to pretend to be just, since gods usually grant a happy life to bad people. He cites the poetry of Hesiod, Homer, Musaeus and Orpheus to support this idea (*R.* 2.364c–e), arguing that they believe that one can avoid divine wrath by placating gods with sacrifices and rites. However,

⁶⁰ See *Ap.* 27d; *Hp. Ma.* 293a–b; *R.* 3.391d; *Lg.* 5.739d, 7.799a, 7.815d, 10.910a, 11.934c, 12.941b.

⁶¹ See *R.* 2.364e; *Lg.* 7.817d. Cf. Hesiod, *Th.* 94–6.

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the reference of T10 is not so broad as to include all four poetic figures. By the time we come to T10, Adeimantus has in mind only Orpheus and Musaeus, for the mystery rites in question are surely Orphic, and Orpheus and Musaeus are called the sons of the goddesses, the Moon and the Muses, a page before (2.364e3–4).⁶²

Is it possible that Timaeus refers to Orpheus and Musaeus as well? There are some obstacles to accepting such a reading. First, there is a mismatch between the Orphic theogonies and Timaeus' genealogical tree. The divine succession in T1 has the following structure (Figure 1.1).

There is no way to prove that this line of succession does not correspond to *any* Orphic theogony, since it is highly probable that Orphic theogonies existed in many varied versions.⁶³ But the surviving Orphic theogonies do not match the structure in Figure 1.1: the Derveni papyrus has Night and Aether as its starting point, while the *Rhapsodies*, which is, admittedly, a late source, places the origins with Chronos, who produces Aether and Chasma or Chaos.⁶⁴ The Proclean transmission makes Phanes the first ruling god, who was

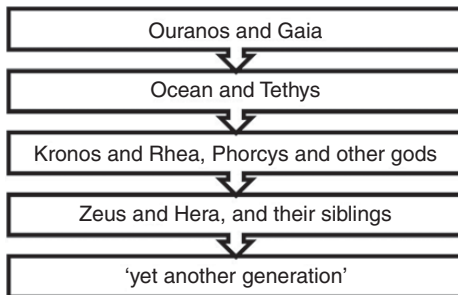


Figure 1.1 Children of gods on the divine succession

⁶² See further Adam (1902) 82, 87; Linforth (1941) 91–2; Kahn (2001) 21; Nightingale (2021) 148–51.

⁶³ As argued by Betegh (2004) 140–52.

⁶⁴ On the relation between the Orphic theogony and the *Timaeus*, see Betegh (2004) 141–3, 147–8, 153–6. Aristophanes gives one more and perhaps a slightly pejorative version of the Orphic theogony, which starts with Chaos, Erebus, Tartarus and Night. The latter then lays an egg in Erebus, from which Eros arises and copulates with Chaos in Tartarus, which results in the birth of Ouranos, Ocean and Gaia (*Birds*, 693–702).

succeeded by Night and then by Ouranos, Kronos, Zeus and Dionysus (*In Ti.* III 168.15–26).⁶⁵ So the main problem is that we cannot find any of the specific features of the Orphic theogony in Figure 1.1: the Orphics begin with a blend of traditional and philosophical elements (a primordial Greek deity plus a first principle) that is absent in our passage.⁶⁶ Alternatively, Adeimantus' reference might be to the Orphics in general as opposed to Orpheus and Musaeus in particular. This solution might be attractive, since we find the Orphics self-proclaiming their divine kinship in the Gold Tablets, similarly to the 'figures of the past' of T1. These Orphics explicitly drew their lineage from the Ouranian kind (γένεος οὐράνιου).⁶⁷ The problem with either reading is that 'the children of the gods' in T1 produce conventional stories: Timaeus is relying on the so-called customary practice of belief (τῷ νόμῳ πιστευτέον, 40e3) at the time when Orphism was far from being generally accepted.⁶⁸

In fact, the genealogy of Timaeus does not correspond exactly to what we find in archaic poetry either, even if it looks somewhat familiar. The Homeric theogony, for instance, starts with Ocean and Tethys, who are placed in the second divine generation in Timaeus' account (*Il.* 14.201, 14.246).⁶⁹ The Hesiodic tradition, on

⁶⁵ Cf. *In Ti.* III 184.1–14. To reconcile the Orphic and the Timaeon theogonies, Proclus identifies Phanes with the Demiurge and Night with the mixing-bowl (see III 169.27–170.6 = fr. 104 Kern), which is a forced solution that only reaffirms how disparate the two theogonies are.

⁶⁶ A similar pattern can be found in the fragments of the seventh and sixth century BC thinkers, such as Pherecydes, Akousilaos, Epimenides and Eumelus. Kovaleva (2005) 142–3 offers a graphic illustration of these theogonic trees. For an in-depth discussion of the mythographers, see Fowler (2013) 5–21.

⁶⁷ See the Gold Tablets from Hipponion (lines 8–10: 'They will ask you, with astute wisdom, / what are you seeking in the darkness of murky Hades. / Say, "I am son of Earth and starry Sky"') and Petelia (lines 6–7: 'Say, "I am a child of Earth and starry Sky, but my race is heavenly. You yourselves know this."'). Both translations are from Graf and Johnston (2007) 5, 7. However, Timaeus says nothing about the potential identities of the parents of the children of gods. On attribution of the Gold Tablets to the Orphics, see Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal (2011) 68–101. I want to thank Chiara Blanco for drawing my attention to this material.

⁶⁸ Flower (2015) observes that Socrates juxtaposes the Orphic initiation into the mystery cult with purifications designed to absolve from crimes and spells devised to cause harm at *R.* 2.364b–e, which is supposed to strengthen the impression that the Orphic rituals are unlicensed religious activity similar to sorcery.

⁶⁹ In Plato, *Cra.* 402b6–c1, Orpheus seems to follow the Homeric tradition, since he is quoted as having said that Ocean was the first to marry his unnamed sister, who sprang from the same mother as he did. This stands in a sharp contrast with the *Timaeus*, since Ocean's mother procreates without a father, and Ocean and his wife form the first divine

the other hand, begins with Chaos and Gaia, the latter being the mother and wife of Ouranos.⁷⁰ In Timaeus' account Ouranos exists independently of Gaia, and Chaos is removed altogether.⁷¹ Timaeus' family tree also deviates from the Hesiodic theogony by making Ocean and Tethys the parents of Kronos, Rhea and Phorcys.⁷² Admittedly, these objections against the poetic and Orphic sources are not conclusive. Instead, I would like to suggest that Timaeus' move is deliberate, intended to clothe the reference to the traditional gods with poetic and mythical contexts, whilst also ensuring that there is some conceptual independence from them. The anonymity of the 'children of gods' frees him from the typical Platonic debates on the value of theogonic stories and invokes a broad cultural horizon without committing to any specific poetic or religious tradition. The only truly standard aspect of Timaeus' theogonic tree is that it is as creatively composed as any other theogonic tree.

We finally arrive at the main reason why we should avoid the ironic reading of the content of Timaeus' tree.⁷³

couple. See also Aristotle, *Metaph.* 938b27–31, where a view that Ocean and Tethys initiated the genesis is attributed to the ancients.

⁷⁰ Proclus believes that it composes the core of Timaeus' theogony (see *In Ti.* III 170.13–21).

⁷¹ Cf. Hesiod, *Th.* 116–117; Plato, *Cra.* 402b; Aristotle, *Metaph.* 983b20–984a5. For divergences from Hesiod, see Sedley (2010) 248n3; Pender (2010) 225.

⁷² The absence of conflict between Ouranos and Kronos may explain Timaeus' surprising choice of making Kronos the son of Ocean rather than the son of Ouranos. In Hesiod's narrative, Kronos is defined through the opposition to the father: he exceeds his siblings by finding courage (*θαρσῆσας*, *Th.* 168) to help his mother to depose Ouranos. In this way, Kronos emerges as a bold and deceitful new king of the universe. But this role is no longer desirable in the *Timaeus*. It seems then that the image of Kronos is softened by turning him into the son of Ocean, the fresh waters that surround the earth, and thus associating Kronos with a god, whose peaceful nature deterred him from participating in the conflicts of gods. This effect is also applicable to Phoreys, who is another violent god, residing in dangerous and sterile waters (Homer, *Od.* 1.72), and particularly known for his monstrous children, such as the Gorgons (*Th.* 270–4). Just like Kronos, he is placed in an unusual theogonic phase, since his original parents are Pontos and Gaia. The new position of Phorcys in Timaeus' succession of gods not only neutralises his transgressive nature, but also terminates his connection to monsters, for he is not accompanied by any consort, who could produce them. As Desclos (2003) 130 accurately observes, the remaking of theogonic positions and the arrangement of new family relations is a way to remove the negative divine powers and to make the gods gentler.

⁷³ If we compared the tone in T1 with, say, the traditional theogonies in the *Laws*, we would find corresponding positions. *Laws* 10.886b–d similarly expresses some doubts concerning the epistemic value and accuracy of traditional theogonies, but then refuses to pass judgement on their ethical value and accepts such stories because of their antiquity, at least in so far as they are pleasing to the gods.

The distinctiveness of T1 with respect to the poetic tradition, I want to claim, is that neither the theogonies of Homer or Hesiod, nor the creation myths of Orpheus or Musaeus have *both* Ouranos and Gaia as the original primordial gods who generate the succeeding gods. This move might appear to be insignificant in the general context of the fluid and unfixed Greek religion. After all, the ancient Greeks were quite open to negotiating the particular divine identities and adapting them according to the local customs and wider Pan-Hellenic conventions.⁷⁴ But the particular arrangement of the divine successions is peculiarly convenient to Timaeus. If the divine genealogy had started with Ocean, or Chaos, or any other Greek god, Timaeus would be unable to position the traditional narrative within his cosmology, because the origins of Ouranos and Gaia would depend on some traditional Greek gods and, as a consequence, it would contradict the previous claim that the cosmic gods were in fact created by the Demiurge.⁷⁵ In that case, the traditional and cosmological theogonies would conflict in terms of their accounts of origins. But now the two types of theogonies share some common grounds. Since T1 argues that there is nothing prior to Ouranos and Gaia as far as the traditional theogony goes, the passage is not at odds with the previous parts of the dialogue, which has shown that in so far as we speculate along the lines of the *eikōs muthos*, there is in fact something older than Ouranos and Gaia, namely the Demiurge. Thus, the traditional theogony is partly absorbed into Timaeus' cosmological theogony.⁷⁶ And this explains why

⁷⁴ See further Versnel (2011) 84–7.

⁷⁵ One could say that even in the *Timaeus*, the story starts with Chaos – that is, an undifferentiated extension or the erratic motions. But unlike in the Hesiodic theogony, Chaos is removed from the theogony of traditional gods and re-characterised as a causal principle.

⁷⁶ We should not underestimate the historical significance of the theogonic arrangement in the *Timaeus*. There is some evidence for a continued use of this theogonic tree in Platonist circles: 'Similarly, Arcesilaus postulates three kinds of gods, the Olympians, the stars and the Titans, who come from the Heaven and the Earth: and from these came Saturn and Ops, [from whom] came Neptune, Jupiter and Orcus, and the remaining generations. Xenocrates the Academic made a twofold division between the Olympians and the Titans who came from the Heaven and the Earth.' (*Aequae Arcesilaus trinam formam diuinitatis ducit, Olympios, Astra, Titanios, de Caelo et Terra: ex his, Saturno et Ope, Neptunum, Iouem et Orcum, et ceteram successionem. Xenocrates Academicus bifariam facit, Olympios et Titanios, qui de Caelo et Terra*, Tertullian, *Ad nat.* 2.2.15–16 = fr. 138 IP) The main

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Timaeus accepts the children's stories (who are not, I must emphasise again, specific figures) in the first place: the children of gods derive the origins of all traditional gods from Ouranos and Gaia, and these are also the most senior cosmic gods created by the Demiurge.

This conclusion may strike as implying that religious beliefs of T1 can contain a rudimentary form of cosmological knowledge and thus their epistemic status appears to approximate to something like the Aristotelian *endoxa*, the credible opinions accepted by the people or the wise.⁷⁷ It would mean that the religious beliefs about the traditional theogonies have some measure of likelihood, which would make them an *eikōs* type of discourse. But T1 firmly rejects such a possibility – the children of gods are unambiguously denied any likelihood. The opinions of the children of gods or any poet for that matter are not credible. Nonetheless, Timaeus may have two independent reasons for including the traditional gods in his cosmological story. On the one hand, the explanatory scheme of their origins is consistent with the cosmological discourse. On the other hand, the starting point for traditional theogony are the two gods, whose existence is assured by the *eikōs muthos*. Timaeus seems to accept the likelihood of these two aspects of the origins of the traditional gods without, however, subscribing to the idea that the theogonic tree of T1 or any other poetic or religious theogony is correct as a whole. Only these two beliefs may find some cosmological support, while the rest of it is neither the *endoxa*, nor the *eikōs* type of discourse.

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Let us now take an overall look at the theological situation. The philosophical project of the *Timaeus* begins with a recognition of religious heritage by employing a divine name for the senior created god, as was familiar to the Greeks. But then it offers a

difference between this passage and T1 is that the former omits Ocean and Tethys. Otherwise, the arrangements are extremely alike. The phrase 'the other generations' (*et ceteram successionem*) is an almost literal takeover from T1 ('yet another generation', ἄλλους ἐκγόνους at 41a3). More importantly, this evidence shows that the Platonists accepted Ouranos and Gaia as the first divine couple and made the other gods their offspring. Baltes (1999) 208–9 argues that the passage should be read as suggesting that Arcesilaus inherited the theogonic tree of the *Timaeus* via Xenocrates.

⁷⁷ Cf. Aristotle, *Top.* 100b21–23.

reinterpretation of the poetic tradition by giving a new cosmological significance to the *ouranos*. This god becomes the universe itself and receives a soul capable of moving every astral entity. The god is placed at the origins of all gods, both the cosmic and the traditional, whilst altering the respective successions of traditional gods inherited from the poets. As a result, the familiar gods find new cosmological grounding for their existence in the reformed cosmic god. Timaeus attempts to build a bridge between the two discourses because of the versatile nature of Ouranos.⁷⁸ I argued that the core affinity between the old Ouranos and the new Ouranos remains intact: they are very physical gods, who provide space for the divine beings and cause heavenly motions. The main difference lies in the theological priority of Ouranos over Gaia, the increased physical extension of Ouranos, which now encompasses the whole cosmos, and the soul of the reformed Ouranos, which elevates the core function to new cosmological dimensions. And for this reason, Ouranos can acquire an important role in the cosmological discourse of philosophers, while still preserving his religious significance to the ordinary believers. However, the new cosmic god does not exhaust the whole nature of Ouranos. For we have to remember that in the context of traditional theogony (TI), Ouranos recovers some of the more conventional aspects, which are not immediately derivable from the cosmological discourse. All in all, Timaeus deploys a curious theogonic strategy: he transforms the old heavenly god into a new cosmic god only to reinstate some aspects of the former once again, when it suits his explanation of the interrelation between philosophy and the religious tradition.

A conclusion to the effect that Ouranos has a double nature (cosmological and religious) might look paradoxical to the modern reader, but it conforms to Greek religious beliefs. One and the same Greek god had different ways of articulation depending on a particular place, festival, tradition and register. To quote Henk Versnel,

local gods, as most exemplarily represented by the gods worshipped by each polis (and its *chōra*), together formed a local pantheon, thus generating many local, relatively isolated, pantheons, one differing from the other not only in their composition, but also in that gods with the same name but belonging to different

⁷⁸ For a similar reading, see Pender (2010) 226 and Lefka (2013) 72–90, 123–8.

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cities were not (necessarily) perceived as being the same gods. The Hera of Samos was another persona than the Hera of Argos . . . [T]here is always the pantheon of Hellas, as gloriously represented in the works of Homer and Hesiod and visualized in tragedy. The two systems, local and national, may clash, but rarely do, since listening to or reading Homer or attending a tragedy takes the participants into another world, a world far more distant, sublime and awesome than everyday reality where sacrifices are made and prayers are addressed to the local gods who are ‘right here’. Many pantheons, many horizons.⁷⁹

To these layers of identity we can add one more, which is cosmological.

For *Timaeus*, the double identification provides a way of positioning the traditional gods within the cosmological discourse. But it also creates a paradox by making one and the same god a traditional deity, whose function is to generate further gods, and a cosmic being, whose function is simply to move and contemplate various entities inside it. The dialogue never resolves this new complication. Analytic philosophers might conclude that the integrative project is fundamentally incoherent and therefore theologically flawed. They would probably expect *Timaeus* either to adopt a full cosmological approach to the traditional gods or to provide the *eikōs* type of arguments in favour of their existence. But a religious historian, to borrow Versnel’s phrase, might find here ‘luxurious multiplicity’, the peaceful coexistence of diverse aspects of the divine, each of which might come to the fore in different theological contexts. Some aspects of Ouranos were needed to correct the cosmogonies of the past, while the others were needed to reintegrate the religious tradition to philosophy. The present study is more sympathetic to the second approach not because it justifies a less rigorous conception of the divine, but because it gives a richer context to the religious notions in the dialogue without pushing Plato’s characters into solutions, which were not pursued by them.

Ouranos is not the only god to receive such a reinterpretation. There are at least three more gods with parallel identities: Gaia and Hermes in the *Timaeus*, and Apollo–Helios in Plato’s *Laws*. In what follows, I will show that the theories concerning these gods lacks systematicity and completeness. Although each of these gods may

⁷⁹ Versnel (2011) 143. For a number of ways of demarcating one god from another and their inherent limitations, see also Parker (2011) 64–102.

be considered as deities with a double identity (cosmological and religious), the problem is that the double identification means different things in each of these cases. Gaia is conceptualised in a similar way to Ouranos: she is a cosmic being, who also has a conventional religious role to generate the traditional gods. Hermes, on the other hand, has in his possession a cosmic entity, a planet, but he does not seem to be identical to it. The case of Apollo–Helios is even more complicated, for Helios is already a cosmic being in the religious tradition (the sun). Plato's *Laws* revises some aspects of this god in the cosmological discourse and then connects him to Apollo in a religious-political discourse. So we have at least three ways of understanding the double identification: it can mean two aspects of the same god, two different beings under the same religious name and two gods worshipped as a single god. Moreover, there is no wholesale identification of the remaining traditional gods with the cosmic gods. It means that the traditional gods as a group were not replaced with the cosmic gods or merged with other kind of cosmological beings. Unlike the *Phaedrus*, Plato's later dialogues do not offer a full cosmological reinterpretation of the traditional gods. Instead, it is safer to follow Glenn Morrow and say that 'Plato hoped to enlarge and enrich current religion by directing attention to other manifestations of the divine than those usually recognized in worship.'⁸⁰ Thus, Plato retains the distinction between the traditional and the cosmic gods. But it is clear that the framework for giving a preference to the cosmic beings and for identifying the traditional deities with the cosmic gods was already prepared by Plato, and, as we will see in the final chapter of this book, that he may have encouraged his students to continue this project.

Gaia

Timaeus puts less effort into elaborating on the nature of Gaia than that of Ouranos and rightly so because we saw that he aims to replace the poetic prioritisation of Gaia with a cosmological theogony that

⁸⁰ Morrow (1960) 447.

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begins with Ouranos (see Section 1.3). However, he makes a similar cosmological attempt to re-characterise her in what follows:

ΤΙΙ Gaia he [viz. the Demiurge] devised to be (1) our nurturer, and, because she winds around the axis that stretches throughout the universe, also to be (2) the maker and guardian of day and night. (3) She ranks as the first and the eldest among the gods that have come to be within *ouranos*. (Ti. 40b8–c3, mod.)

γῆν δὲ (1) τροφὸν μὲν ἡμετέραν, ἰλλομένην δὲ τὴν περὶ τὸν διὰ παντὸς πόλον τεταμένον, (2) φύλακα καὶ δημιουργὸν νυκτὸς τε καὶ ἡμέρας ἐμηχανήσατο, (3) πρώτην καὶ πρεσβυτάτην θεῶν ὅσοι ἐντὸς οὐρανοῦ γέγονασιν.

The passage speaks of the functions of Gaia encapsulated in her titles that elegantly bring together the cosmological and religious layers. ΤΙΙ implies at least three domains of activity. As the guardian of time-markers (day and night), she appears to be a typical cosmic goddess, just like the rest of the planets, whom we already saw ‘guarding the numbers of time’ (εἰς . . . φυλακὴν ἀριθμῶν χρόνου γέγονεν, 38c6) with their revolutions. But she also has a higher rank, that of the *maker* of time-markers. The reason for this is that Gaia is the first cosmic deity to emerge in the centre of the universe as the fixed point, while the remaining planets are positioned with respect to her: the Demiurge places the planets in the orbits surrounding Gaia (38d1) and they move regularly around this fixed axis.⁸¹ The idea of the priority of Gaia leads to another of her titles, which is ‘the first and eldest’ goddess (πρώτην καὶ πρεσβυτάτην, 40c2–3). This title is extremely important, since in ΤΙΙ Gaia is presented as the first created cosmic goddess, while a few lines later in ΤΙ (40e5) the readers will discover her status as the progenitor of all the traditional gods. These two aspects captured in the second title are what allow her to join the cosmological theogony with the traditional theogony and thus to accompany Ouranos in the family tree of divine successions. The last title to consider is ‘our nurturer’ (τροφὸν ἡμετέραν, 40b8).⁸² The phrase invokes the religious images of Gaia, such as the eldest goddess, the giver of life, the benevolent human nurturer, the provider

⁸¹ Cf. Philolaus, DK44 B7, where the central cosmic fire is Hestia; Plato, *Phdr.* 247a1, where the fixed cosmic point is named after Hestia; and Euripides, fr. 944 CC, where the earth is called Hestia.

⁸² This title is also used for the Receptacle: τροφὸν καὶ τιθήνην τοῦ παντὸς, 88d6; cf. 49a, 52d. On Gaia’s image in the *Timaeus*, see further Lefka (2013) 76–80.

of food and a means of physical survival.⁸³ This idea reappears in the Demiurge's final distribution of cosmological tasks, where the cosmic gods are asked to grow and nourish human beings (41d2), which is a function perfectly suited to Gaia.

Hermes

One more candidate for the double identification is Hermes, whose connection with a planet is established in the passage at 38d. The association, however, is not as strong as in the case of Ouranos or Gaia, since the text merely says that there is a star 'sacred to Hermes' (τὸν ἱερὸν Ἑρμοῦ, 38d2), which belongs to him (emphasised by the genitive in ὁ τοῦ Ἑρμοῦ, 38d6). Timaeus never explicitly argues that the two of them, the star and the god, are the same being. What are the alternatives? We cannot be certain whether there are two separate divinities linked by a common name or one traditional god and his possession in the skies. The ontology and theology of naming the planets are still in the early phases, for the passage is one of the first unambiguous associations between an Olympian god and a planet in Greek literature. It is important to emphasise that this is the only planet that receives a traditional name in Plato's dialogues, despite the fact that Timaeus identifies five planets (38c). By contrast, the neighbouring dawnbearer or the morning star is mentioned in the *Timaeus* (38d) and the *Laws* (7.821c), but it does not receive the name of Aphrodite. My tentative conjecture is that the project of giving traditional names to the planets began in Plato's circle and crystallised in the works of the Early Academy (see Section 4.3). When it comes to the double identity, this is as far as the *Timaeus* goes and now we are turning to the *Laws* to see some further and final conceptual innovations.

Apollo–Helios

Perhaps the most interesting case after Ouranos concerns Helios, the god of sun, in the *Laws*. Just like Ouranos, Helios is also presented as a case of mischaracterisation. However, it has less

⁸³ The eldest goddess: *Homeric Hymns* 30.1–2; Hesiod, *Th.* 105–22. The giver of life: Homer, *Il.* 21.63 and *Od.* 11.302–3; Plato, *Cra.* 410c; *Ti.* 23e; *Lg.* 5.740a. The human nurturer: *Homeric Hymns* 30.5–8; Plato, *Mx.* 237d–238a; *Lg.* 12.958e.

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to do with poetic narratives and more with the impoverished state of astronomy and the flawed state of Greek intellectualism. On the one hand, the ordinary Greeks do injustice to this god by thinking that the sun is a being with irregular motions, namely a planet or a wanderer (*Lg.* 7.821b; cf. 7.818c). On the other hand, the atheistic intellectuals deny his divine status by considering the sun to be a mere inanimate stone (10.886d–e; cf. 10.889b).⁸⁴ The Athenian Stranger's solution is to rebuff these critics with a single blow by arguing for the existence of all gods, including the sun-god.

The long passage 10.891c–898c is in many ways reminiscent of what we saw in the *Timaeus*. It establishes soul as the source of self-motion and life, which in turn leads to the claim that soul is ontologically and chronologically prior to body and that it resides in all beings that are capable of movement, including the cosmic beings. In addition, by simultaneously arguing that soul is the source of cognition, the passage shows that soul is also responsible for the regularity, intelligence and divinity of the universe. The combined force of these claims leads to the conclusion that soul is what animates the cosmic beings and produces their regular motions. At this point the relationship between soul and cosmic beings is illustrated with the example of the sun (10.898d):

T12 (1) Either it is there inside this apparently spherical body, and conveys an object of this kind wherever it goes, just as with us our soul carries us around wherever we go; (2) or it finds itself a body from some external source, made of fire or air of some kind (as some people suggest), and pushes it forcibly – a body acting on a body; (3) or, third, it is itself without body, but has certain extraordinary and incomprehensible properties which allow it to guide the object. (*Lg.* 10.898e8–899a4)

(1) Ὡς ἡ ἐνοῦσα ἐντὸς τῷ περιφερῆι τούτῳ φαινόμενῳ σώματι πάντη διακομίζει τὸ τοιοῦτον, καθάπερ ἡμᾶς ἢ παρ' ἡμῖν ψυχὴ πάντη περιφέρει· (2) ἢ ποθεν ἕξωθεν σῶμα αὐτῇ πορισαμένη πυρὸς ἢ τινος ἄερος, ὡς λόγος ἐστὶ τινων, ὠθεῖ βίᾳ σώματι σῶμα· (3) ἢ τρίτον αὐτῇ ψιλῇ σώματος οὔσα, ἔχουσα δὲ δυνάμεις ἄλλας τινὰς ὑπερβαλλούσας θαύματι, ποδηγεῖ.

⁸⁴ Sedley (2013) 341–8 argues that *Laws* 10 presents an accurate picture of Plato's contemporary atheists and their positions. On the sun as a non-divine material object in Anaxagoras and the *Sisyphus* fragment: Plato, *Ap.* 26d–e; Anaxagoras, DK59 A1; Critias, DK88 B25.

Commentators emphasise that option (1) is the closest to the *Timaeus*' conception of self-moving cosmic gods.⁸⁵ What is more, the Athenian distances himself from option (2), which is the position of 'other people' who believe that soul has some kind of elementary corporeality which affects other bodies by collision and force.⁸⁶ Option (3) is usually dismissed as 'resorting to mystery', because of its failure to explain how a soul external to a certain body could move it.⁸⁷ From the further restatements it is clear that the real choice here is binary, namely whether the soul is inside or outside the moving body, but the Athenian repeatedly declines to assume a definite position (10.899a7–9, 10.899b7–8). This is rather puzzling: if these options are so clear and one of them includes a claim that was already argued in the *Timaeus*, then why is it so hard for the Athenian to give a positive answer?

My position is that more than one option might be available to the Platonic cosmologist, and here is why. Option (1) is indeed compatible with the *Timaeus* – its description conforms to our previous analysis of the self-motion that causes the axial rotations of the cosmic gods (see Section 1.3). However, we also know from the *Timaeus* that the universe has another way of producing motions, namely through the world-soul. On the one hand, we could define the world-soul in terms of option (1): the world-soul is internal to the world-body and it causes motions by being present in the world-body. On the other hand, the world-soul moves the cosmic gods in astral revolutions not by being inside them, which is option (1), nor by bodily collision, which is option (2), but by carrying them in the circles of sameness and difference. The motions of sameness and difference might seem like 'extraordinary properties' to anyone who is unfamiliar with the doctrines of the *Timaeus*. But option (3) is the closest we can get to explaining the relationship between the world-soul and cosmic gods in T12, because it postulates the kinds of properties thanks to which an external soul can affect a body without a bodily collision. We should not be misled by the cryptic description of the third option,

⁸⁵ Mayhew (2008) 150–1.

⁸⁶ Schöpsdau (2011) 424 suggests that the second option might belong either to Democritus or Diogenes of Apollonia.

⁸⁷ Schofield (2017) 386n36.

since we have to bear in mind the specific situation and audience of the *Laws*. Some cosmological themes of the *Timaeus* fall outside the theological discourse of *Laws* 10 simply because of the latter's argumentative structure and philosophical objectives. Moreover, the participants here are the elderly legislators from Sparta and Crete, who are not as fluent in cosmology as Timaeus – but it does not mean that such knowledge is lacking in the Athenian himself.⁸⁸

The main implication of T12 is that soul is a god, and by having it (10.899a), the sun along with the other cosmic beings should also be regarded as gods (10.899b). There emerges an emphatic connection between cosmology and religious language, when the soul of the sun is described as a being 'inside the chariot' (ἐν ἄρμασιν, 10.899a7–8). This is a poetic image of Helios (e.g. *Homeric Hymns* 4.68–69, 31.15). However, the philosophical impact of Book 10 on Helios does not amount to what happens to Ouranos in the *Timaeus*, because the notion of his physical body or cosmological function is not redefined to such an extent that the old god would become someone entirely new. We simply learn about the priority of psychic motions in the universe, which allows us to dismiss the atheist arguments against the divinity of astral entities such as Helios. This is not the place where Helios receives a new layer of identity.

A religious re-characterisation of Helios appears in Book 12. Here the Athenian proposes a joint cult of Apollo–Helios, who are to be honoured in a traditional sacrificial manner (12.945e–946c). Specifically, he recommends instituting a common precinct for the two of them, where the god shall choose three priests from the

⁸⁸ Pace Mayhew (2008) 152, who dismisses the importance of evaluating which of these options is correct. Keeping more than one option available is also important because if we subscribed only to option (1), all cosmic beings would be moved only by their own individual motions without any influence from an external source. Such a reading is not only in major conflict with the cosmology of the *Timaeus*, since it denies a place for the overarching motions of the world-soul, but also in a conflict with the *Laws* itself, since the Athenian is sure that there must be a soul that governs the whole universe (e.g. 10.896d10–e3, 10.897b7–8, 10.897c7–9). By contrast, if we followed only option (3), we would be committed to the divinity of the world-soul and of the lesser cosmic beings in so far as they are moved by the world-soul. But they could not be considered individual gods, since none of them would have an individual soul. This is in clear conflict with the claim that each cosmic being is a god (10.899b). So what is at stake here is the divine nature of the cosmic beings. According to my reconstruction, then, having more than one option is not only plausible, but also desirable.

whole Magnesians population to live in the sacred grounds and to serve as the city's auditors:

T13 Every year, after the summer solstice, the whole city is to meet on the sacred ground which is common to Helios and Apollo, with a view to presenting three men from among themselves to the god. (*Lg.* 12.945e4–946a1)

κατ' ἐνιαυτὸν ἕκαστον μετὰ τροπᾶς ἡλίου τὰς ἐκ θέρου εἰς χειμῶνα συνιέναι
 χρεῶν πᾶσαν τὴν πόλιν εἰς Ἥλιου κοινὸν καὶ Ἀπόλλωνος τέμενος, τῷ θεῷ
 ἀποφانوμένους ἄνδρας αὐτῶν τρεῖς.

That Helios should receive religious worship from the Magnesians is nothing too extraordinary, for he had some religious presence in the Greek world, especially in Corinth and Rhodes. His patronage was chiefly grounded in local myths. According to one myth, the territory of Corinth was jointly acquired by Poseidon (the isthmus) and Helios (the Acrocorinthus), and then Helios passed on his assets to Aphrodite. His role in the origins of the city was acknowledged by Helios' *agalma* in the temple of Aphrodite and an altar on the Acrocorinthus.⁸⁹ In Rhodes, Helios was the patron god of the island and after the foundation of the city of Rhodes in 408 BC, he received a major festival called Helieia.⁹⁰ Even in Athens of the classical period there are traces of his cult in relation to the harvest festivals, such as Skira and Thargelia.⁹¹ The cult of Helios, therefore, succeeded in spreading across relatively different parts of Greece, though its level of attraction was nowhere near to the Olympian gods.

At the same time, the worship of Helios was a contested issue and received a mixed response from the Greek intellectuals. For some critics, it was a barbarian rite unworthy of the Greeks, while for others, it was a universally accepted custom, a mark of a natural religious feeling.⁹² Plato was firmly on the side of the latter and he was inclined to present his teacher Socrates as giving

⁸⁹ Pausanias 2.1.6, 2.4.6, 2.5.1.

⁹⁰ For the patron god, see Pindar, *O.* 7.54–69; for the festival, see further Ringwood Arnold (1936) 435–6; for the religious and ideological role of Helios in the unification of Rhodes, see Kowalzig (2007) 239–66; for the evidence of his cult in Greece, see Jessen (1912) 63–70.

⁹¹ See further Notopoulos (1942) 267–8.

⁹² Aristophanes, *Peace* 406–413; Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.131, 7.37, 7.54; Plato, *Lg.* 10.887e.

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an authoritative precedent to worshipping the sun.⁹³ Scholars conjecture that the problem with Helios and his limited appeal was that he was the kind of god who is too detached from the mortals: he had a busy day travelling across the sky according to a fixed work schedule, and an ordinary person could not wilfully summon him at a temple or a festival.⁹⁴ The relationship between Helios and his astral body presumably precluded him from being, to quote Wolfgang Faught, as ‘agile and lively’ as the rest of the Olympians.⁹⁵ However, a shift in cultural attitude towards the god slowly took place from the classical period onwards, a change that was primarily based on his venerable image in epic and dramatic poetry and then reinforced by the growing Greek interest in meteorology and cosmology as well as by the significance of Helios in the mystery cults such as Orphism.⁹⁶ We cannot isolate one single external cause that motivated Plato to focus on Helios, because his work on the cosmic gods can be viewed as a powerful contributing factor on its own in this cultural shift. What is so remarkable about the *Laws* and T13 specifically is that it strongly promotes the religious role of Helios, whilst simultaneously associating the sun-god with Apollo, which is about to become an accelerating trend in later theological thought too.

The *Laws* is surely not the first text to connect the two gods, but it is difficult to point out the exact point of origins. The earliest uncontroversial instance is Euripides’ *Phaethon*, where Clymene in her desperate hour of seeing Phaethon perished addresses Helios, whom she holds responsible for destroying her son, by calling him Apollo, the destroyer (ἀπώλεσας, 224 = fr. 781 CC). One route is to suppose that Euripides borrowed a freshly coined idea from the early philosophers. For instance, we have a late testimony that Parmenides and Empedocles composed hymns to Apollo–Helios.⁹⁷ Some scholars contend that Empedocles, at least, could have reinterpreted Apollo as ‘the intelligent source of heavenly fire’, though there is also a contradicting piece of

⁹³ For Socrates’ prayer at sunrise, see *Smp.* 220d; see also a discussion of Socrates’ solar piety in Lefka (2013) 104–12.

⁹⁴ For this point, see Jessen (1912) 62–3. ⁹⁵ Faught (1995) xviii–xix.

⁹⁶ See further Faught (1995) xvii–xxxiii.

⁹⁷ Parmenides, DK28 A20; Empedocles, DK31 A23.

evidence pointing to Hephaestus as the figure of fire and sun.⁹⁸ Another route is the Orphics. A lost tragedy of Aeschylus, the *Bassarai*, tells a story about Orpheus, who neglected the worship of Dionysus and instead turned to Apollo–Helios.⁹⁹ It seems that Aeschylus may have adapted to his purposes a poem that had an Orphic myth at its core.¹⁰⁰ In the later Orphic material, we find repeated associations between the two gods and specifically the idea that Orpheus derived his extraordinary knowledge from Apollo–Helios.¹⁰¹ A third route is to suppose that the identification has arisen in non-philosophical classical and perhaps even archaic material, such as local legends, poetic accounts or iconographic similarities.¹⁰² Wherever we place the point of origins, it is clear that there were pre-established salient links between these gods and a few interpretative strategies, such as allegorisation, rationalisation and cosmologisation, available to the *Laws*.¹⁰³

Although these sources demonstrate the venues for merging Helios with Apollo, they never touch upon the meaning of this connection. For the crucial question concerns the nature of the joint divinity: are Apollo and Helios to be regarded as a single god, who acquires different meanings in different contexts (religious tradition and cosmology), or as two beings worshipped as a single god in a mutually shared sacred space? Unfortunately, Plato's *Laws* is silent about this question as well. T13 mentions the two gods separately and then merges them into a singular *theos*. The passage does not bring clarity to the dilemma, for the *theos* here can indicate either a collective singular or a more ontologically charged unity. The problem persists with other references too,

⁹⁸ Wright (1981) 255. Apollo and the sun: Empedocles, DK31 A31 with DK31 B134. Hephaestus and the sun: DK31 B98.

⁹⁹ Pseudo-Eratosthenes, *Catasterismi* 24.27–30 = fr. 113 Kern. See also Aeschylus, *Supp.* 213–215, where the chorus invokes Helios, which makes Danaus immediately to respond with an invocation of Apollo; and Aeschylus, *Th.* 856–860, where the chorus describes the land of the dead as the sunless place, where Apollo never travels, thus implying the absence of the sun.

¹⁰⁰ For this point, see West (1983) 12–13. ¹⁰¹ For example, frs. 62, 172, 297 Kern.

¹⁰² See a recent defence of this option in Bilić (2020). Cf. *Homeric Hymns* 3.440–450, where travellers experience an epiphany of Apollo turning into a shining star. For the importance of the constellation of stars for Apollo's temples, see Boutsikas (2020) 71–114.

¹⁰³ See further Jessen (1912) 75–6. For a sceptical reading, namely 'a common cult, but not identity of the two gods', see Schöpsdau (2011) 538.

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where the Athenian mentions either ‘a god’ (12.946b6) or Helios (12.946b7) or both Apollo and Helios (12.946c1–2, 12.946d1, 12.947a6). The textual evidence cannot resolve this issue just as with the god and planet ‘Hermes’ discussed above. What is the theological motivation to associate the two gods? And is this ambiguity intentional?

One obvious reason to rethink the relationship between Apollo and Helios comes from the original context of *Laws* 10, the atheistic challenge to the gods.¹⁰⁴ The unification could be viewed as a second stage in the general defence of gods: the first move was to prove the divinity of astral beings and now the second move would somehow connect the new cosmological system with traditional religion. However, if the *Laws* had a global strategy of this kind in sight, then the dialogue should have applied it to the rest of the planets and traditional gods too and not just to these two gods only. What held the Athenian back from merging the other traditional gods with the cosmic gods, for instance Artemis with Selene, the goddess of the moon? I suggest returning to Ouranos, whose double-identification makes a telling contrast to Apollo and Helios. We saw that the purpose of redefining Ouranos was to give some limited place to the traditional religious beliefs within the new cosmology of the *Timaeus*. If Ouranos received a double identity because of the cultural misconceptions of his nature which are corrected through cosmological re-characterisation of the god, then Helios receives a parallel identity despite any misconceptions or re-characterisations. For the double identification takes place when the Athenian has already dealt with the challenges to understanding the nature of Helios that come from the ordinary people and the atheists in Book 10. It happens when there is no longer any philosophical threat to Helios or, in fact, any other cosmic being – when the Athenian steps out of the proper cosmological discourse of Book 10 and returns to the politics of establishing the Magnesian colony in Book 12. The theological argument of *Laws* 10, therefore, cannot be intended to prove the double identification thesis. On the other hand, we could say that the cosmogonic discourse of the *Timaeus* is not directed at this

¹⁰⁴ As argued in Abolafia (2015) 385–92.

objective either, since there is no way to build a solid argument that Ouranos can be both the universe and the father of the traditional gods. At the very least, however, the double identification of Ouranos is inherently more straightforward than the one between Apollo and Helios, for in the latter case the issue is that two distinct traditional gods are linked together, one of whom has already received a cosmological update. And their connection is introduced not in a cosmological discourse, but in a distinctly religious-political environment. As a result, this connection does not give any direct cosmological updates to the nature of Apollo.

For this reason, I believe that there is a more limited objective in place, which has to do with the project of Magnesia itself and the social impact of this cult on the new colony. The cult is designed to integrate the two audiences of the city, the philosophical elite worshipping the cosmic gods and the ordinary people worshipping the traditional gods, into a common theological landscape. This association is not meant to affect the theological status of these gods, who retain their own separate identities, but rather to make the differing human perceptions of the divine less antagonistic. I shall give a more detailed analysis of this question in Chapter 3. We will see that the Magnesian elite are encouraged to find the traces of Helios in the morally purified version of Apollo, while the ordinary citizens are encouraged to approach the cosmological Helios as their more familiar god Apollo (see Section 3.7). I shall argue that the theological images of the two gods are designed to mutually reinforce each other. For instance, we will see that Apollo is presented as a god responsible for human psychic order and unity, which recalls Helios' orderly soul responsible for its regular cosmic motions. Or take Helios' role in teaching about numbers and the nature of heavens (*Lg.* 7.820e–822c; cf. *Ti.* 39b–c), which nicely ties with Apollo's character, which will be reformed in such a way as to embody the requirements of comprehensive education expected from every Magnesian citizen. Therefore, I shall argue that the objective of this association is primarily ethical and political: it is ethical in so far as it promotes virtuous life by requesting different kinds of moral activity from different groups of moral agents with respect to different gods; it is political in so far as it promotes civic unity by merging diverse

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understandings of the divine into a single cult. To be sure, all of this may strengthen religion by discouraging the potential atheists from displaying their views publicly, but this is so because of the social pressure coming from the two sectors of Magnesian society. The Athenian does not use the cosmological and theological defence of Helios to support the cult of Apollo. Instead, we will see that the need for religion and cult practice is established on the ethical foundation, namely the ideal of godlikeness (see Sections 3.2–3.4).

Zeus and Kronos

Two more candidates for the double identification can be found in the secondary literature. Sometimes the world-soul, sometimes even the Demiurge himself is seen as an updated version of Zeus. There are a few common character patterns between the Demiurge and Zeus. Both are fathers and leaders of gods, intelligent beings, who deliberate on their decisions, instruct the younger gods accordingly and care for the cosmic order by distributing divine honours and preserving justice.¹⁰⁵ However, there is no straightforward association of the two gods in the *Timaeus* – the Demiurge is never called ‘Zeus’. In addition, two further conceptual obstacles stand in the way of maintaining the double identification in this case: the Demiurge is a transcendent creative principle, which causes the origins of the world without becoming part of it (i.e. he departs from the universe once it is created, see 42e), while Zeus is a god, who reorders the existing world and takes an active part in it (i.e. as a king, who presides over the society of gods in the religious tradition); second, Zeus is firmly situated in Timaeus’ theogony of traditional gods as a descendent of Ouranos (40e–41a), that is, of a god, who was created by the Demiurge. Thus, one can assume that the mythological Zeus provided some inspiration for the image of the Demiurge, but the link between the two is still too weak to substantiate a more robust identification.

¹⁰⁵ For a recent defence of these links, see O’Meara (2017) 26–37.

But what if we were not confined by the dramatic boundaries of the *Timaeus*? Let us take a look at the *Laws*. The god of Book 10 is a rational soul that guides the universe towards excellence (10.896d–897b) and ensures justice as a cosmic king (10.904a–d, 10.906a–b). The Athenian maintains that the world-soul is ‘receptive of Intellect’ (νοῦν προσλαβοῦσα, 10.897b1–2), because its activity resembles the motions of Intellect (10.897c, 10.897e). Combined with the evidence of the *Cratylus*, where Zeus is interpreted as ‘the offspring of the great Intellect’ (μεγάλης τινὸς διανοίας ἔκγονον, 396b5), and the fact that kingship and justice are conventional attributes of Zeus, one may conjecture that Book 10 is intended to assimilate the traditional king of gods to the world-soul.¹⁰⁶ Accordingly, Kronos as a father of Zeus then emerges as a mythological figure for the Demiurge and Intellect. The *Cratylus* nicely reinforces the link with the latter by giving an etymological explanation of the name ‘Kronos’ as ‘pure Intellect’ (τὸ καθαρὸν . . . τοῦ νοῦ, 396b6–7). However, this is a fairly selective reading of Plato that produces deceitful cohesion at the expense of other dialogues. For it is in direct contradiction to what was discussed about the *Timaeus* a moment ago, where the philosophical presentation of the Demiurge found some correspondence with the mythological image of Zeus, but not to Kronos. It also does not sit well with a passage from the *Philebus*, where Zeus is simultaneously presented as both ‘the kingly soul’ and ‘the kingly Intellect’ (βασιλικὴν μὲν ψυχὴν, βασιλικὸν δὲ νοῦν, 30d1–2). And last but not least there remains a thorny question whether the pilot, the demiurge and the father of the *Statesman* (272d–273e) – all three being the same god – is Kronos, or Zeus, or both, or neither.¹⁰⁷

Given that there is no real agreement between these dialogues about the cosmological aspects of Zeus and Kronos, we have to examine each dialogue with its own conception separately. And just as conceptual and textual difficulties prevent us from identifying Zeus with the Demiurge in the *Timaeus*, so too Zeus and Kronos are far from being merged with the cosmic gods in the

¹⁰⁶ For this reading, see Van Riel (2013) 109–10; for the cosmic king *qua* Zeus, see Schöpsdau (2011) 438.

¹⁰⁷ See Carone (2005) 149–50, who paradoxically settles for ‘both’ and ‘neither’.

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Laws. Neither Zeus nor Kronos are mentioned in the theological arguments of Book 10 and the specific integration of these two particular gods requires more work than providing vague affinities between different passages. The only theological reform directly mentioned in relation to Zeus, to whose cave the characters of the *Laws* travel, concerns the flawed Spartan and Cretan beliefs, according to which Zeus prefers to foster military institutions and martial virtues (1.630b–d). The correct belief is that Zeus cares for the complete goodness, which involves virtuous behaviour among the citizens in both war and peace (1.631a–632d). In a similar way, the myth of Kronos seems to transform Kronos from a ruthless tyrant of Hesiod's *Theogony* into a benevolent leader of gods, who ensured that the latter would maintain a utopian political environment for human beings (4.713b–714b). Both re-characterisations are completely in tune with a persistent Platonic requirement to depict the gods as morally good beings. Then why is Kronos sometimes seen as a figure for the cosmic Intellect? The myth of Kronos, which will be the focus of Section 2.6, emphasises that the long-gone utopia, where human beings were governed by the gods, came into being due to the insightful reasoning and correct deliberation of Kronos (γινώσκων, 4.713c5; διανοούμενος, 4.713c8). Then there is a parallel between (1) the rule of Kronos through his intermediaries in the previous age and (2) the rule of intellect through the laws in the current age, which suggests that the religious myth give some direction to human politics. In other words, if humans are to follow the gods, they must obey the intellect, our most proximate link to the gods, for Kronos acts like the intellect (*nous*) does. And at this point one is tempted to insert one more parallel with (3) the world-soul and its providential government of the universe from Book 10, thus creating a third level of correspondence: (1) religion, (2) politics and now (3) cosmology. But the actual passage makes no such parallels. All it can prove is that Kronos is an intelligent god, just like the rest of the gods, but that does not make him or them worthy of being the world-soul of the *Laws*, or the Demiurge and Intellect of the *Timaeus*.

Essentially, Plato's later dialogues use three divine names to refer to various leaders in different contexts: Ouranos leads the

gods in the cosmological discourse, Kronos guides them in the accounts of politogony and Zeus, of course, retains his prominence in the polis religion. But if one aims to adopt a more ambitious reading, the cult of Apollo–Helios could act as a useful foil to test its limits: if the Athenian had wanted to combine or merge a cosmic god such as the world-soul with a traditional god such as Zeus or Kronos, he would have explicitly offered this proposal either in Book 10 or elsewhere just the way he did with Apollo–Helios. That being said, it appears to be true that in various parts of his dialogues Plato toyed with the idea of relating either Intellect, or the world-soul, or both, with Zeus. And yet the evidence suggests that he was not firmly committed to such a notion in the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*. This hesitation may explain why his students felt quite free to use the name of Zeus however it suited their philosophical projects. We shall see in Section 4.3 that for Philip of Opus and Eudoxus, Zeus was a planet, whereas for Xenocrates, he was the Monad, the primary ontological principle.

1.8 Conclusions

The aim of this chapter was to explore the challenges for positioning the traditional gods and religious theogony within the cosmology of Plato's *Timaeus* and *Laws*. We have found that the dialogue attempts to address some of the worries that a philosophical reader might have about the poetic tradition. It describes the traditional gods in such a way as not to transgress the theological rules of speaking about the gods, it makes sure that the explanatory framework is consistent with the philosophical cosmogony and it shows that a few selected religious beliefs, however limited, may be translated into a cosmological discourse. In sum, we have discovered that Plato is quite serious about the traditional gods and that he provides a narrow space for the religious theogony in the philosophical cosmogony. The latter is achieved by reconceptualising the world-god Ouranos.

This chapter has approached the *Timaeus* as a theogony of Ouranos, which deliberately engages with poetic theogonies and philosophical cosmologies. On the one hand, the dialogue follows the Hesiodic tradition in so far as it makes the origins of the world

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coincide with the birth of Ouranos. However, the poetic theogonies are refashioned in such a way as not to include any subversive stories concerning the defeat of Ouranos, and as to conform with the theological rules of speaking about the gods. The theogony of the *Timaeus* is devoid of antagonistic political relations, such as the mutilation, imprisonment, or elimination of hostile gods. Plato preserves only a few elements of the conventional religious language, such as the plurality of gods, their particular names, their generative capacities and their birth from Ouranos and Gaia. On the other hand, the dialogue expands the imagery of Ouranos as the heavenly god by attaching to him novel cosmological concepts and explaining his place within the broader Platonic metaphysical framework. Plato presents Ouranos as primarily a cosmic being, remarkable for his orderly, all-embracing body and rational soul. His origins are now based on the creative work of the Demiurge and his nature is anchored in what is good. All in all, the double nature of Ouranos makes him the main cosmic and traditional god. With respect to the cosmic gods, Ouranos ensures cosmic stability and goodness, and provides a theological model to the nature of the younger gods. With respect to the traditional gods, Ouranos and Gaia remain the senior divine parents. My conclusion is that Ouranos, along with Gaia, becomes the centrepiece, which thematically and dramatically joins together the philosophical and traditional ideas in Plato's cosmology. The point of this theology is to keep the two families of gods together without merging them with cosmologisation of religion or rationalisation of the traditional gods. The positive role of Ouranos is precisely to serve as the bridge between the old religious thought and the new cosmological science.

These findings, however, are not without some complications. First, Plato never explicitly addresses the paradoxical question of how a single god can be a cosmic totality and a parent of younger divinities at the same time. The precise meaning of double identification was not properly established. The dialogue encourages the reader to associate the two identities of Ouranos, but it never gives a philosophical *anankaios* or *eikōs* argument which would properly prove the double identification thesis. We saw the same ambiguity present in the *Laws*' discussion of Apollo–Helios,

Gaia and Hermes as well. Second, if it were carried even further in its natural direction, Plato's strategy for integrating the traditional gods with the cosmological discourse would actually be in conflict with the religious beliefs of his day. The double identification thesis, the preference for the cosmic gods as opposed to the traditional gods, the interpretation of the biological origins of the traditional gods as an explanatory framework rather than a real event – all of this presses Plato to take up a fully cosmological reading of the traditional gods, according to which these gods would be fully merged with the cosmic gods or at least transformed into the bodiless souls of the *Phaedrus*. But later Plato abstains from completing this project and, instead, he leaves it to the next generation of Academics to reconsider the distinction between the two types of discourse.

Thus, the *Timaeus* leaves the traditional theogony and its gods in a peculiar middle position between integration and isolation, compatibility and conflict. On the one hand, cosmology has little to say about the basic nature of the traditional gods when compared to the cosmic gods, while on the other hand, it aims to re-establish a connection to the traditional gods via the theogony of Ouranos. Therefore, the relationship between religion and philosophy is extremely delicate in the *Timaeus*. We could say that the two discourses have a number of shared gods, common patterns of thinking about the theogonical issues and even a similar language to explain these matters. Nonetheless, Timaeus' ultimate judgment on the children of gods is that the knowledge of them is beyond the *anankaios* and *eikōs* types of argumentations. Thus, the traditional gods have a limited place in the philosophical project of the *Timaeus*, but their unequal relation with the cosmic gods results in an unequal theological status.