

Plato I: "The World is the Handiwork of a Mind"

Lecture Outline

p.16 In the *Timaeus* Plato wants to link the morality of the *Republic* with the order of the natural world.

p.16 The rational order of the natural world is the foundation of both the rationally organized city-state and its virtuous citizen.

Not just knowledge, then, but true morality as well, isn't arbitrary; i.e., isn't social convention.

p.17 As foundational (fundamental) this rational order is graspable by the intellect (mind). (The fundamental issue in Greek phil. is Being/Becoming. Since what is sense-perceivable is always becoming, it can't be fundamental. What is fundamental (unchanging) is what is graspable by the intellect.)

p.17-18. The physical universe, always changing, is highly organized (rational) and stable (dependable.)

Therefore it must be a copy of what is unchanging, an ideal pattern graspable by the intellect. This pattern is the world of forms.

The formation of the universe is not an instance of *creatio ex nihilo* but rather the ordering of pre-existing matter.

p.18 Pre-existing matter places limitations on the demiurge or craftsman ("Mind") who brings order out of chaos as Mind tries to copy the world of forms as nearly as possible.

p.18 Matter has an inherent "necessity" or "chance" (purposelessness), which Mind attempts to limit, thus rendering chaos cosmos. Mind, however, can never fully reduce matter's necessity to order.

p.19 Therefore the sensible world is forever inferior to the ideal world. The imperfections of the physical world are the result of intractable matter.

p.19 The soul has come into a sensible world, and in order to attain its true destiny it must return to a supersensible world.

p.21 The forms lend reality to the sensible world. The craftsman uses the forms as a blueprint, thus rendering the sensible world a reflection of the forms.

p.21 The craftsman fashions a world soul that fills the entire universe. This world soul is an intelligent, living *creature* whose body is the visible world.

p.22 The entire sensible universe (the body of world soul) is directed towards good; i.e., each part is designed to contribute to the *harmony* and *beauty* of the universe, so far as the intractability of matter will allow.

p.24 Note: "Because God is eternal, we cannot comprehend the divine in its essence."

{p.24-25 Plato doesn't have a creation story here comparable to that of scripture, since,

[1] matter pre-exists the world

[2] the forms pre-exist the craftsman. (The craftsman isn't a designer.)

[3] the craftsman merely copies the world of forms.}

p.24-25 250 years later (1st cent. BCE) the Middle Platonists identified the forms with the divine mind. Now the universe was deemed to be a reflection of God's mind (rather than a reflection of the forms.)

Result: [1] the study of the created universe leads to a knowledge of the mind of the creator,

[2] science can arise, for now it is affirmed that natural things *aren't* God

p.25 Christians who took over Plato at this point falsified him, since for P the mind is receptive, not creative: it recognizes its objects but doesn't create them. For P the world of forms is independent of mind. For P, forms can be grasped by the mind and are used to order matter, but forms arise from neither mind nor matter. The forms are part neither of the craftsman's mind nor the world soul's mind.

p.27 Strictly speaking, the world didn't *begin*. What has a beginning is the connection of the forms and the sensible world. (Only the *visible* universe has a beginning.)

The craftsman is only an agent, and he makes the world soul, which soul in turn is the ordering principle of the universe. Since only the forms have being in themselves (apart from God, who is unknowable in any case), the forms are the proper object of knowledge.

p.35 By analogy with human making out of the things of nature (which human making suggests intelligence and purpose), the world is a handiwork of intelligence. Having come to regard the world as intelligible on the basis of the above-mentioned analogy, P then regards the order of nature as purposeful; its intelligibility supplies the way human life is to be ordered.

p.35. NB. The craftsman makes a copy (blueprint) of the world of forms, fashions an intelligent world soul as the animating principle of the world, which soul bridges the gap between unchanging forms (mind-perceivable) and constantly changing sensible world (sense-perceivable.) But the "father of all", who wholly transcends the forms and craftsman and world soul, is "beyond all finding out."

p.36 Wherein *Timaeus* differs from biblical creation story:

The cs doesn't arise from the perception that nature operates in a mind-like way; the cs rests on God's initiative in calling a people and thereafter interacting with them relentlessly. In other words, in scrip. belief in creation is grounded in belief in election: God *first* wills a people for himself, and *then* wills (creates) all that is needed to support people.

In the cs God is independent of all things, while all things depend on God. God as creator is *Lord* over the creation. The universe is the creation of someone (God) who has an exclusive claim upon it and interacts with it at all times. (This latter point does not deny the relative independence of the creation; i.e., the creation is not an extension of God or emanation from God or aspect of God or part of God.)

In the Christian tradition the creation is said, following scrip., to bear the marks of the creator (what I call God's "footprints.") Philosophers endeavour to help us ascertain the extent of the "marks" and how well the human mind can discern them and what conclusions can be drawn from them. Different areas of the church (e.g., Roman Catholic and Protestant) have differing degrees of confidence in philosophy as "the handmaid of theology."

Questions to Consider

p.15. The Apologists and Fathers of the early church saw large affinities between Plato and biblical thought, as did the humanists of the Renaissance ("Socrates, pray for me.") How extensive is the affinity? How does it function? (See C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*.) Where do the Reformers disagree?

p.16 Plato wants to ground morality in the natural order. Ethics presupposes metaphysics. Is this recognized today? If our society can't agree on a common metaphysic, how can it expect to have/enforce a common ethic? How are "values" to be distinguished from preferences, whims, even prejudices? To what extent is "multi-valuing" possible in a multicultural society?

p.16 What (dis)similarities are there between P's notion of the natural order as the structure of creation and the role of the Word in John 1, Colossians 1, and Hebrews 1?

p.18 What do P and scrip. say respectively on chaos/cosmos?

p.19 Scrip. never says that disorder is the result of matter's intractability. Then what is?

p.20 Scrip. never suggests that humans find their destiny by escaping a sensible world and returning to a supersensible. Then how do we?

p. 21 and *passim* How does P's soul/body understanding differ from a Hebrew understanding?

p 35. According to scrip., is the "father of all" "beyond finding out?" beyond being known? Are these the same?