

Handout/abstract for 'Timaeon Demiurgy: Is It All Over and Done With?'

Background:

The *Timaeus* depicts a god (the demiurge) who fashioned the physical cosmos out of disorderly matter, in accordance with an intelligible paradigm. In this picture the physical cosmos has had a beginning. (Also, in the Timaeon account, its construction went through a number of stages; but this is less important for the present paper.) In what sense has the cosmos, on this picture, had a beginning? Not merely in the sense of being metaphysically dependent, (on a demiurgic god, on an intelligible paradigm) but also in the sense of having had a temporal beginning. This last idea must not be understood as implying that the cosmos started at some given moment of an already on-going time (a sort of Newtonian absolute time); for according to the *Timaeus* story, measurable time (*chronos*) itself came into existence when the demiurgic god constructed the cosmos. The stronger-than-metaphysical sense in which the cosmos had a beginning amounts to this: there is a finite number of years (months, days, etc.) between now and when the fully formed cosmos began. The present-day cosmos has a finite age (counting from the beginning to now), even though, according to the *Timaeus*, it will exist without end into the future.

According to Aristotle some people in the early Academy held that Plato gave the cosmos this temporal profile **just because it made his exposition easier**; the implication is that really (in their view) Plato held (in the *Timaeus*) that the cosmos is sempiternal in both temporal directions.

Main question of this paper: is it reasonable to think that the temporal profile assigned to this cosmos in the *Timaeus* was just a device of presentation?

The answer to be argued for here is: No: it has substantial metaphysical implications.

Subsidiary question: **why** did those people in the early Academy hold that the Timaeon temporal profile of the origin of the cosmos is just a presentational device?

Suggested answer: (a) they were Platonists, believing in Platonic forms, in particular in the intelligible paradigm of this cosmos: and **the metaphysics of the paradigm becomes a whole lot smoother** if we take the step of identifying the cosmic paradigm with the divine demiurge. This step, which (it is conjectured) those Platonists took, has the result that it makes no sense to assign to the cosmos a temporal beginning. And (b) these Platonists assumed that their own view was Plato's real view when he composed the *Timaeus*.

Another subsidiary matter: Platonists (including Plato) and Aristotle are alike in holding that the cosmos depends on a supra-physical, trans-natural, incorporeal cause (in Aristotle's case this cause is the prime mover of *Metaphysics* XII. But the trans-natural origin is **very different in the two cases**, by a difference relevant to the main argument of this paper.