

An Examination of the Metaphysics of Creation in Plato's *Timaeus*

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Abstract

The physical world we live in speaks volumes of a changing nature, but deep underneath there is a great sense of constancy. Even though the utmost goal of every human being is to be happy, man has perpetually lived between two parallel poles in this life. There is a glaring presence of beauty and order which man cannot enjoy. Humans are faced with the problem of explaining the presence of order and beauty which cannot be enjoyed to the fullest. It is based on this difficulty that this study attempts a philosophical examination of the metaphysics of creation of Plato's *Timaeus* to delineate between human nature and its attainment of unity through human conduct. The study adopts the historical, expository, and evaluative methods for analysis. The study discovered that no matter how hard human beings pursue their desires, they are bound not to be happy. Happiness is the goal of human life that is achieved when individuals look out for the happiness of the whole. It also reveals that each individual is a microcosm of the universe and for the whole world to be happy, everyone must think of the other. The study concludes that justice and truth are mere worlds, but can be achieved in this life if we follow the natural law in our actions.

Keywords: Metaphysics, Development, Happiness, Plato, Human nature

Date of Submission: 13-01-2021

Date of Acceptance: 28-01-2021

I. INTRODUCTION

The world we live in has remained the same for more than two millennia. The sun rises from the East and sets in the West. The rain falls from the sky to water the ground year in year out. Every human being is born of a woman. At every birth, there are expressions of joy and happiness, while the news of the death of any human being is greeted with sadness and sorrow. Although the following concepts like truth, goodness, peace, kindness, sincerity, and happiness have not changed when seen objectively, they are not adequately recognized, appreciated, and cherished throughout the whole world. There appears to be metaphysics of creation that only Plato is consciously aware of which is gradually eroding. The world is closing in on human beings as human acts cannot be defined as a human per se. In these maladies; there are beauty and order which speak volumes of the goal of our human existence.

The ultimate goal of any human being in this life is to be happy. When it seems very difficult to achieve happiness in this life, then, an individual or a group of individuals cry foul. Life is associated with various forms of troubles and challenges. In Nigeria, these problems and challenges have reared their ugly heads in different forms that can easily be observed in the increasing rate of corruption in both high and low places. The people who are not interested in sustaining the ills in the society are agitating and calling for the restructuring of the federal character. The hope in the minds of these agitators is that when the system is made perfect, leadership will be enhanced and the kind of decisions leaders will take cannot be outside of the principles of good governance. A leader who comes to office under such an arrangement will find it very difficult to politicize universals values likes accountability, transparency, truthfulness, integrity, fairness, love for one another, and so on. The researcher desires that human beings should not be working in vain unto death, but have a happy life where all men are united with one another as members of one stock that he was stimulated to carry out a Philosophical Examination of the Metaphysics of Creation in Plato's *Timaeus*.

The study examines the perennial difficulties experienced by human beings in the name of change. Lack of self-assurance and satisfaction has limited humans in their efforts to achieve that teleological nature that truly defines human nature as a, "well ordered"¹ creature in the whole world. The purpose of this study is to carry out a philosophical examination of the metaphysics of creation in Plato's *Timaeus* to delineate between human nature and its attainment of unity in diversity through the cultivation of virtue in human conduct. There is a limit to which human beings can express their interest that is detrimental to the collectivity of the whole and

contrary to natural law. The significance of this study is two-fold. Theoretically, it will add to the literature on metaphysics. Practically, it will deepen our understanding of our human nature in the context of the nature of the universe as a whole. It shows that human actions are judged by universal concepts like justice, truth, goodness, and the development of human beings to achieve, "the most excellent life offered to humankind by the gods, both now and forevermore."²

The primary concern of this study is to philosophically examine the metaphysics of creation in Plato's cosmology. However, related works on creation, substances, and natural science will also be explored. The sources for the data used in this study are books, journals, and periodicals. Three methods are used: historical, expository, and evaluative. The historical method is adopted to systematically locate the development of the idea of creation up to the time of the *Timaeus*. The expository method is used to delineate if the Demiurge has a hand in the creation and sustenance of the world. The evaluative method is used to evaluate the merits and demerits of the metaphysics of creation in Plato's *Timaeus* and other related dialogues.

The Concept of Creation

When we talk of the metaphysics of creation, there is a need to attempt a historical journey within a philosophical history. Plato's cosmology is clearly articulated within such philosophical history where "...others who wrote nothing at all."³ Most of the Pre-Socratic philosophers and scientists wrote nothing at all. Even at that, there are salient points that can establish "the development of philosophy in Ancient Greece."⁴ These salient points have formed "the basis for the interpretation of the Pre-Socratic."⁵ This reinterpretation is variously seen as philosophical re-engineering or "hypothetical reconstruction of the philosophical systems".⁶ It is instructive to note that in reinterpretation or reconstruction, the fundamental metaphysical question of what it is, has not changed. The methodology has changed from "cosmological speculation to constituent analysis".⁷ The emphasis in this work is to find out whether or not "the universe is originated from a single primary substance"⁸.

When reviewing the works of Pre-Socratic philosophers, it is very important to visit the person of Thales (c.624 – 546 B.C.) who was "one of the Seven Sages" of Greece and the "originator of natural philosophy."¹⁰ Thales wrote "*On the Solstice*" in which he talked of the ultimate cause of the universe as, "water."¹¹ His position was rejected by Plato who argued that the cause of the physical universe cannot be a part of the cosmos, but must be external to it. Another aspect of Thales' teaching that impressed on Plato was the doctrine of "the immortality of the soul"¹² which accepted it and used it to form the basis of his theology of reincarnation in the *Phaedo* with somewhat diverse details in the *Laws* and Book X of the *Republic*. He later makes natural philosophy a topic of concern in the *Timaeus*.

Anaximander (610 – 546 B.C.) is attributed to be the father of cosmology. He wrote *On Nature*.¹³ He went beyond the material things of this world to get the principle of all things in the *Boundless* which is eternal. Lloyd commented on it thus "At the birth of this world a germ or seed which is generative of hot and cold separated off from the eternal thing (Boundless) from this a sphere of flame grew round the air surrounding the earth, like a bark around a tree."¹⁴ The Boundless forms the "whole furniture of the heavens"¹⁵ therefore, identifying it with divinity and characterized by deathless and indestructibility. However, his stand on the Boundless that it is directly involved with the cosmos is rather confusing. Plato rejected the assumption and insisted that his Demiurge does not relate with the corporeal universe directly. Plato tried to solve the problem of the distinctiveness of the immaterial from the material by introducing the idea of the World-soul with the power to complete the work of creating the physical universe.

Anaximenes (c.585 – 525 B.C.) went back to the material element by arguing that the underlying unity of the universe is air which is unlimited and inexhaustible. Like Thales' water, this air is soul because it holds together and guides all creatures through the process of rarefaction and condensation. Air when rarefied becomes fire, when it condenses it becomes water, further condensation it becomes clouds, then earth, and stone. Although he explained the material constitution of things, he was silent on its form. Even though Pythagoras took up this task in the fifth century, it had its fulfillment in Plato's theology which forms the basis of Plato's philosophical endeavor. Reality is in the World of Forms or Ideas and not in the world of appearance.

Pythagoras of Samos (c.570 – 490 B.C.) who is the Father of numbers insisted that the essence of beings and the stability of all things is found in numbers. This makes Mathematics the centre of his philosophy. Mathematical relations govern all things and numbers as sacred. In their cosmology, they argued that "in numbers, there are things that are and come to be, more than in fire and earth and water...and the modifications of the ratios of the musical scales were expressible in numbers."¹⁶ They were primarily concerned with the way life is lived on earth. They also had a strong belief in, "immortality and transmigration of souls."¹⁷ Pythagoras' soul is not just the animator but, "the seat of consciousness and personality."¹⁸ His teaching on the immortality of the soul a seed sown by Thales was fully developed by Plato later on in many of his dialogues.

The sayings which have made Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 535 – 475 B.C.), famous are that "the only permanent thing in life is change" and "that you cannot step in the same river twice". Regarding the primary cause of all things, Heraclitus says is a material thing known as fire. For him, everything is fire and fire is

everything. He interprets this to mean that everything is an exchange for fire. This is a direct contradiction of his theory of constancy of change. Unique to him is the introduction of the idea that pairs of opposites make up a unity. In addition to the idea of pairs of opposites was his ability to connect his theory of nature with the human condition which was taken up by Socrates and Plato to build the idea of personal identity. Parmenides of Elea (c. 515 – 450 B.C.) is the Father of Metaphysics (the science of things that do not change). Writing *On Nature*, he argues in favor of The Way of Truth by declaring that, “coming-to-be, passing-away, and change of any sort are all alike impossible and the Way of Seeming/Opinion is, “deceitful.”¹⁹ The implication is that truth cannot be known through the senses, except through pure reason. Reality is One, unchanging and an indestructible whole. Hence, there is no change in this world and, “nothing can come to be from not-being.”²⁰ This doctrine was later taken up by Anaxagoras and Empedocles. However, Plato's theory of Forms and Ideas using the principle of separability insisted that Reality is in the World of Form and what we see with our senses is deceptive and cannot be trusted.

Anaxagoras (c.500 – 428 B.C.), in his cosmological theory, asserted that the original state of the cosmos was a thorough mixture of all its ingredients, but not entirely uniform. Some ingredients were higher in concentrations than others. To him, “a portion of everything is found in everything.”²¹ The principle of all things is the *nous* whose whirling motion could shift and separate the ingredients that made up the cosmos. The *nous* for him is the “mind” which is a matter but is conceived as something purer, finer, can act freely, and is present in everything. His difference with Heraclitus is highly indistinguishable. Humanity had to wait for the advent of Aristotle to decipher the true nature of the *nous*. Like Parmenides, “the senses provide the basis for inferences concerning what cannot be directly observed.”²² Plato agrees with him on the basis that the senses cannot be trusted.

Socrates (c. 470 - BC), staged a second philosophical revolution after Thales. He insisted that there is teleology in nature which means the existence of purposefulness or goal in life. In *Gorgias*, Socrates talks of “beautiful things”²³ although there is no clear evidence that beautiful things imply the physical world. One has to go all the way to towards the end of *Phaedo* to hear Socrates describe the world as being spherical and located at the center where it is surrounded by heavenly bodies. The idea of permanency is further developed and sustained by the theory that the world does not change its position due to the symmetry nature of the universe. He went beyond searching for the unity of all things to the search for “justice in dealing with men and the reverence due to the gods.”²⁴ Socrates succeeded in pulling justice “down from the sky to be set in cities and at the same time introduced into homes.”²⁵ All of this was to support the idea of a teleological cosmos. Plato consummated this purposeful cosmology in the “*Timaeus*.”²⁶ The book which forms the basis of our study is attributed to be authored by Plato who is an Athenian philosopher. He was born in c. 427 B.C and at twenty-eight years old his master was put to death in 399 BC. There are about twenty-five dialogues attributed to Plato. The works are divided into the early, middle, and late periods. Some of his works include *Timaeus*, *Republic*, *Critias*, *Sophist*, *Theaetetus*, *Apology*, *Antisthenes*, *Phaedo*, *Xenophon*, *Memorabilia*, *Aristippus*, *Eucleides*, *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Meno*, *Euthyphro*, *Phaedrus*, *Euthydemus*, *Cratylus*, etc. Plato died in 347 B.C. T

The Metaphysics of Creation in Plato's *Timaeus*

The reality of God is found deep in the order and beauty of the universe. Plato who is not a believer writes in the *Timaeus* as if he was inspired by the spirit of God. *Timaeus* as a body of work is grouped among Plato's late works that deal with three aspects of his philosophy; metaphysics, theology, and psychology. The other works which fall within the late period are “the *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Critias*, *Philebus*, and *Laws*.”²⁷ There is no clear cut distinction between the three fields of study. The point of emphasis is to explain true reality. In the *Timaeus*, what is recognized as reality is located in a spirit-realm. It contains models of objects and concepts which are perfect. He refers to these models as Forms or Ideas. These Forms are not in their true identity in the physical world. The world of appearance is an imperfect reflection of the really-real in the World of Forms.

This thought forms the foundation for Plato's philosophy in its entirety. Plato's metaphysics of creation is the central issue in the *Timaeus*. He presents a highly spiritual account of how the creation of the world came about. He did not attribute the cause of creation to Judeo-Christian God as a way of escaping the ever raging debate about immateriality and materiality. So the world was created through the activities of the *Demiurge* (Craftsman), The opening of the *Timaeus* contains a summary of the previous day's discussion concerning, “the *Republic*.”²⁸ The remaining parts of the *Timaeus* deal with Plato's narration of his cosmology, ontology, teleology, and ethics.

Demiurge: The Maker of the World

Plato was aware that a pure, immaterial being cannot be responsible for the creation of a material world. So, he took the middle course by attributing the story of creation to the (*demiourgos*) Demiurge which means craftsman. There are different ways of describing Plato's Demiurge. It is, “that which *always is* and *has no becoming* and can be differentiated from that *which becomes*, but *never is*.”²⁹ It is, “changeless”³⁰ or the, “indefinite dyad”³¹ or “the Form of the Living Being”³² or the, “Father and Maker”³³ or the, “world's

progenitor.”³⁴ It is naturally intelligent and does not act by chance. This is a reminder of the purposefulness of nature. Becoming is created by instantiating in it the Form of the Good which is an eternal model, but is not identical with the eternal model or paradigm. It is responsible for the creation of the World-soul and soul as “the best of all things created in the whole world.”³⁵ Such a world is created and guided by “the Form of the Good”³⁶ or justice as the best representative of “the best of intelligible.”³⁷ Note the tactical argument presented by Plato regarding the story of creation. The Demiurge is the first principle that created the “universe after the form and character of an intelligible model.”³⁸

Its ultimate goal is to grasp the Good itself is encapsulated in the Forms as suprasensible objects of knowledge. They are referred to as self-movers in *Book X* of the *Laws*. Aristotle calls them hypostases. There is a large plurality of these self-movers in the form of divine souls, human souls, or brute souls. Unfortunately, Plato is not able to explain, “how many of these self-movers truly exist.”³⁹ However, two things are true of the Forms. The first is that they are objects of definition. The second is that they are universals. In the *Euthyphro*, Plato asks, “What is F?” Here, F stands for, “Forms”⁴⁰ or “Ideas.”⁴¹ To make it intelligible, Plato replaces Form with piety. Nature or essence is the F-ness. It can only be revealed when all Fs are F. If we now ask, what is piety? It simply means we want to know the essence of piety. The best answer to the question of piety would be, that very form by which all the pious are pious. That means something that is the same in every pious action. This Socratic response clearly shows that universals or essences were not separated from their particulars. This is the thin line dividing Socrates from Plato.

Plato adopted the “notion of analogy with philosophical force,”⁴² to explain the relationship between, “the world of matter and the world of ideas.”⁴³ Metaphysically, Plato also uses the concept of *nous* or (λόγοι) interchangeably with, “Forms (εἶδοι) or belief (πίστις) to imply truth (ἀλήθεια).”⁴⁴ In that usage, Plato identifies the *nous* with the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*, a real being, rather than a mythical character. He calls these forms substances or basic things which makes him more committed to the idea of separation.

The World of Becoming

The process of creating the universe began with, “the creation of the body of the cosmos,”⁴⁵ before, “the generation of the World-soul.”⁴⁶ However, the actual order of creation by the “Demiurge is the reverse direction.”⁴⁷ Demiurge brought order to a, “thoroughly disorderly state of affairs.”⁴⁸ This clearly shows that chaos in the World before the Demiurge acted upon it. The World body is not spoken of as an individual entity but as, “the completed bodies ‘in’ the whole.”⁴⁹ It is referred to as a god who *always is* because it was made from an eternal model which is, “perfect and excellent as possible...”⁵⁰ indeed, the spherical shape of the cosmos makes it, “the most perfect and most beautiful thing”⁵¹ that was created. It is called, “the world of Becoming ... which never really is.”⁵² This is an “ontological designation for things that change and have a degree of reality inferior to that of real Being.”⁵³ It is, “perishable and generated in time.”⁵⁴

The World-Soul

The creator of the physical world is not, “a divine intelligence, but a manual labourer.”⁵⁵ The Demiurge created the Cosmos and the souls of everything, then commanded the World-soul to create the bodies of mortals. The World-soul is synonymous with *nous* which is the orderer (*diakosmekos*). Jason G. Rheins calls it, “metaphysical improvements”⁵⁶ because in creating the mortals, the World-soul makes them alive and intelligent. However, the World-soul created the mortals by the use of a sensible model which makes them lack in beauty and incorruptibility.

Apart from other mortal beings, the World-soul was also responsible for the human body and senses which share its soul and intellect with the World-soul. The soul in human beings has mortal parts. The role of the soul is to protect the body and provide it with needed nourishment and desires. Apart from ordering, the World-soul is responsible for managing and maintaining, “everything that is without a soul.”⁵⁷ These are bodies that, “are neither inhabited nor animated by a soul.”⁵⁸ Examples of things without soul are, “the stars, moon, sun, and other celestial bodies.”⁵⁹ However, they are instruments of time as they define, “years, seasons, and months.”⁶⁰ Plato in the *Timaeus* clearly explains the order of the physical world by giving responsibility to the World-soul without alluding to material causes as Anaxagoras did.

The Receptacle

There is no suitable word for the receptacle in the *Timaeus*. The best word used is *chôra* (which means space). It connotes a seat “hedra” or the wet nurse or the mother that is responsible for producing the children (becoming). It is an enduring substratum that can be equated to matter. It is a container in which, “things come to be and pass away.”⁶¹ Ontologically, the receptacle shares the features of being and becoming, but before the coming of order. Therefore, the process of transmission from becoming to being is, “cyclical in nature.”⁶² For instance, when we see the appearance of fire here and now, it is not fire in its own right, but the fieriness is a temporary characterization of fire. It means that that which appears as fire is not the form of fire.

Teleology in Plato's Cosmology

Purposefulness is one of the major themes in the *Timaeus*. The question is why was the cosmos created? No clear answer is provided for in the *Timaeus*, but it comes in handy in the *Phaedo* in terms of, "participation."⁶³ Plato links the Demiurge in the *Timaeus* to the form of the Good adequately introduced in the *Republic*. Plato declines giving an account of the nature of the form of Good in the *Republic*, he designates it as the reason in the *Timaeus*. Here, the Demiurge is considered the final cause of creation. He devotes much time talking about the issue of choice or necessity. In the above section, we are told that "the creator of the universe is good,"⁶⁴ free of jealousy, and he wanted everything to become as much like, "himself as was possible."⁶⁵ This is a beneficent design that is found, "in different forms and degrees in mathematics as an act of God."⁶⁶

Ethics in the *Timaeus*

The *Timaeus* reveals another great turning point in the study of philosophy which is similar to that experienced by Socrates. That is, the bringing down of philosophy from the skies to our society and through human conduct. This is exemplified in the wise sayings such as "Man know thyself" and "an unexamined life is not worth living". For Socrates, goodness is the true cause (*aitia*) of the beneficent arrangement of the natural world. The nature of goodness which many think was elusive to humans has become possible to recognize, understand, and with the aid of reason, human beings can emulate the Good to be truly virtuous and happy. This brings us to the climax of the *Timaeus* at 90a2-d7 where the goal of human life is placed at the gate of realignment where "the final stage of purification is attained."⁶⁷

The Metaphysics of Creation in Plato's *Timaeus* examined

There is no doubt that Plato is the author of the *Timaeus*. The most controversial thing in the dialogue is the closeness of Plato to the characters. Socrates is not the speaker in this dialogue, but a fictitious figure called Timaeus is the narrator. It is not proper to hold Plato, "accountable for the claims made by this character,"⁶⁸ for obvious reasons. On one hand, the distancing from the characters is a literary tool Plato usually adopts so that he (Plato) would not be held responsible for the errors of the character. This reason notwithstanding is highly speculative. On the other hand, with special reference to *Timaeus*, it is clear that Socrates was not truly interested in discussing natural philosophy. We can understand why he decided to give the leading role to his friend. Even though Socrates was not interested in cosmology, he did not throw in the towel completely. This is glaring in the use of concepts that dealt with the whole of reality especially as it affects human morality. The concepts like justice and virtue are mainly used for moulding our character, our life and our attitude with a view to, "determine our interests and shape our ambitions."⁶⁹

Plato's Theory of Forms

The whole of Plato's ontology is contained in his theory of Forms as it is the centrality of his philosophy. The theory of Forms is, "one of the great metaphysical theories in the history of philosophy."⁷⁰ Although Socrates spoke of Forms he did not distinguish the Forms from the particular tangible, individual things that share in the images of the Forms. In fact for both Socrates and Plato Forms were intelligible, logical, and articulate. They were arguing for the existence of forms arising from the concept of knowledge. To say knowledge is infallible implies that it is truth. It means Platonic Forms can be known, understood, and explained as reality.

If Forms were understood in this light, Aristotle would not have had any problem with Plato. The problem started when Plato defined Forms as "ultimate realities that are abstract universals or abstract forms of men or manhood or of horse or horseness, which constitute, "the basic furniture of the real world."⁷¹ The problem lies in the reduction of the Many to One. Here, the issue is not so much about what we know as a merely existent thing, but that such a thing must exist or is a necessary being. The different "men" are reduced to the Form of Man, but the Form of Man is still a single reality that is different from the various men. For Plato, the "men" are unreduced to one. The real Man is not any of the particular individuals like Henry, Anthony, and Socrates. However, they are merely shadows mimicking the original Form.

Going by this analysis, Plato's idea of participation is obscured. This is true because a coherent metaphysical structure of participation cannot be brought forth until the relationship of the Forms to the One as their source and ground can be recognized and made metaphysically articulate. Even if Plato had insisted that the Good is the highest divine principle, there is nowhere that he was able to clearly show whether the highest divine principle is ontologically higher than the *mind* or *nous*. It is based on this challenge that I think it is worthy enough to categorically state that Plato's notion of participation between the world of ideas and mind did not put to sleep the controversy it raised during his time. The raging controversy gave birth to the problem of universals and particulars.

Aristotle, one of the most brilliant students of Plato took up this problem by translating the theory of Forms from the doctrine of separate existence into the doctrine of immanence. For Aristotle, "universals exist when and only when they are instantiated in particular things."⁷² That is why the substance (*οὐσία*) is that

concrete thing which exists, sufficient by itself (per se) as the “ground” (ἀρχή) of, “all non-self-sufficient categories of being.”⁷³ Joseph Owen is of the view that “the form is the intrinsic cause of the characteristics of the substance or entity.”⁷⁴ It was on this basis that Aristotle refused the idea of separation of Forms from the things that were constituents of the Forms. This is not to say that Plato was unaware of the internal inconsistencies in his theory of the Forms. This issue was expressed in the famous, “Third Man Argument (TMA) of Parmenides.”⁷⁵

However, the solution he offered to the problem of universals using metaphorical language did not nail the hammer on the casket, “Nay, but the idea may be like the day which is one and the same in many places at once, and yet continuous with itself; in this way, each idea may be one and the same in all at the same time.”⁷⁶ Rather it called for a distinct Form in which the particular instances that are not identical to the form can participate in them. This is because Aristotle sees, “a separate Form as causatively impotent, which means that only immanent forms can cause.”⁷⁷ With knowledge of hindsight it is apt to state unequivocally that all five arguments share two common flaws that are: (a) none of them is a sound argument for the existence of forms (b) even if they prove anything at all, they would prove that “there are forms of all the things of which they are intended by all sciences”⁷⁸ and not, “what is wanted only of some.”⁷⁹ This means that Platonic theology cannot be adequately justified in the face of Aristotelian theology.

The above position is based on the fact that ordinarily, the function of man in the world is to imitate the Ideal world as much as possible. The imitation we are talking about must as a matter of necessity be extended to the imitation of the Good, to ensure that every individual personally and collectively acts morally. But for Aristotle, it is impossible to see how the eternal Forms can be the efficient and final cause of anything unless they are in matter and therefore not separate. Instructively, Aristotle argued concerning universal causal dependency that, “If there is no first cause, there is no cause at all.”⁸⁰ Thomas Aquinas decided to build on the Aristotelian foundation saying, “whatever is first in any order is the cause of all that comes after it.”⁸¹ In the *Timaeus*, Democritus held that our world is one among an infinite number of worlds, past, present, and future, in an infinite universe.

The Visible Universe

The greatest argument concerning the visible world or the world of becoming was whether the world is one of an infinite number of worlds. Both Plato and Aristotle agreed that the visible world is all that there was, is, and will be. Democritus’ allusion was based on his understanding of the world as a living thing. The world is characterized by the following features; a beginning in time, ultimately perishable, a mortal composite, ever-changing, etc. however, Plato and Aristotle did not agree with the argument that the universe can change into something else. For them, the visible universe will eternally remain the same. One wonders the basis for which *Timaeus* began to talk of a created universe. If the world is stable and permanent, why did Plato speak of a world that comes to be and passes away, but never really is? If Aristotle agreed that the world had an end, why did he turn back through the back door to deny its beginning?

Another challenge about the tangible world we have inhabited is the place of God in it. Is God responsible for the actions that are performed in the world? For Plato and Aristotle, god had played a critical role in the activities that take place in the world. For instance, in the *Timaeus*, the universe was created by a Craftsman (God), but since God is incorporeal He could not mingle the matter; so after creating the subordinate gods—like the World-soul, the heavens as divine beings—he decided to give them the power to finish that which he could not finish due to his nature. Aristotle gives a literal interpretation of the creation story in the *Timaeus*. It is the basis for his disagreement with his master. Although Aristotle did not doubt the divinity of the heavenly bodies and the functions they play in controlling the movement of the cosmos and sustaining life on earth, how this control is detected differs from the idea held by Plato. Aristotle was very specific that the heavenly bodies do not have motive force by themselves, but they all depend on a single divine Mover.

Plato holds that the created world contains matter that is continuous which means the universe lacks void space. Another notable reality about the infinite universe is that it contains both matter and space. If the matter were finite but not void infinite, there would be an opportunity for atoms to collide and form compounds. If the matter were infinite but void finite, there would be no room for the matter. The total of the whole, bodies plus void, remains immutable. The distinction that is prominent in the *Timaeus* is that of the Craftsman working on a material to bring about the universe. God is the principle of life. This clearly shows that: “At first there is nothing else; then God creates a difference within himself, such that as the principle of life he is ‘contained’ in moisture. This is the living sperm’ which produces the cosmos according to the ‘formula’ of which it is the bearer, “God is the seed-formula... God is at the same time material fire and providential intelligence.”⁸²

The matter is constantly changing in its qualities even though the quantity is stable. Aristotle rejected Democritus’ view which says that the heavens are made of the same kind of matter as the earth by postulating that there is a special matter for the heavens which is endowed with circular motion which results in a change of quality, quantity, or place. In this study, the emphasis is placed on a change that brings a new substance into being (that change that produces something from nothing). Aristotle’s concern is on that which *persists* all

through and is still there at the end. Aristotle's famous illustration of a pale and tanned person holds that when a pale person turns tanned due to the sun, it is neither the paleness nor tameness that remains, but the same person is that which remains through all the changes. This matter Aristotle calls 'ultimate' matter, it differs from the prime matter which cannot be generated and cannot be destroyed.

In the *Timaeus*, Plato conceives matter as containing no void space. Matter for Plato is continuous in the world, it is constantly changing its qualities nevertheless, and the quantity of matter is ever stable. Plato does not speak of matter without linking it to his idea of Forms. So, each material object has its corresponding Form(s) that is not embodied in the object itself but separate from it. This has been treated in the previous section. The point of emphasis here is that Forms are detached, non-physical entities that underlie and cause physical things. A thing is known by its form and not the matter it is made up of. Although *Timaeus* was telling a cosmological story, Plato quickly turned away from cosmology to mathematics and metaphysics to epistemology. The movement has made it very difficult for anyone to comprehend Platonic thought about the matter. For Plato, the form is that which substance is.

There are cases in which Aristotle represents substance with words like, "form"⁸³ (*eidōs*) or "shape"⁸⁴ (*morphe*). Wherever Aristotle used "shape" to infer to substance, it meant matter. Matter can be related to form, but the matter is not substance. This is because; matter does not have the characteristics of "thisness" and "separability" which are, "the basic categories of substance."⁸⁵ Drawn from the above understanding, we can define the substance of a thing as everything definite and intelligible in it, everything it can be significantly said to be. Now, if Plato's theory of matter was highly complex, he insisted that the changing nature of material objects do not give us the true picture of what reality is all about. Aristotle's position is simply vague. His argument was aimed at justifying the claim that reality is the way it appears to the senses.

The Teleology of Plato's Cosmology

Plato in the *Timaeus* affirmed that the world was produced by a Maker, whose purpose was to make it as good as it could be, given certain limitations imposed by the materials with which he worked. The Craftsman (God) is, "the final cause."⁸⁶ Most importantly for Plato, the Demiurge is not just the final cause, it is, "the best of all causes"⁸⁷ and the cosmos created is the best thing that was ever created. Aristotle agreed with Plato on the reality of a cause by categorically saying that "if there is no first cause, there is no cause at all."⁸⁸ Several centuries later, Aristotle's view finds support in the teaching of Thomas Aquinas who maintained that "Whatever is first in any order is the cause of all that comes after it."⁸⁹ In the light of the above, Aquinas interpreted the Demiurge or the Unmoved Mover to be the Christian God who is indeed the *actus purus*; that is, the First and Universal Cause of all things. However, he differs from Plato and Aristotle by asserting that God created out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*), while creatures, as secondary causes are act mixed with potency.

The fundamental teaching of teleology is the purposefulness of the created world. The world is the best of all possible worlds. This means that the way the universe does not indicate a world that comes as a result of chance. It is such as, "satisfy the design of the creator-God."⁹⁰ It cannot be as good as the intelligible world. This is because the world of becoming is ontologically inferior due to its changing nature. Now, when we say that the world is good, we imply that it is a product of Intelligence. The nature of God cannot allow him to create something evil. In the *Generation of Animals*, Aristotle is of the view that "nature follows a course; animate and inanimate entities follow an order in their nature that corresponds to their purpose, which is so determined by their nature."⁹¹ If created beings are acting according to their nature, then, it is true of the Creator of the universe to do better. Plato was aware of this natural endowment in the creation story.

The goal of any act performed by any being is rooted like the being as an end product of the process. This is further interpreted to mean, "nature does nothing in vain."⁹² Here, lies the distinction between true causes which are rational and teleological from material "co-causes" which are merely the mechanisms through which and with which reason operates. Human beings were created in the likeness of God. They were animated with the presence of a soul. The human soul is the engine room of our rationality. However, it is separated from the body. Aristotle defines the soul in relation to the body. Aristotle conceives the soul as the first actuality of an organic body. It is the animating principle of every living body. Interestingly, Aristotle rejected the Platonic Forms are based on separability. So, at what point can the soul be separated from the body for Aristotle? Indeed, at the beginning of *De Anima* Aristotle gave conditions for the separability of a soul from the body. According to him, "A soul is separable from the body if it has some activity that can be done without the body. The activity of understanding can be done without the body."⁹³ He vehemently speaks of, "the separability of the intellect."⁹⁴ Aristotle was afraid that the mixture with the body will affect its ability to understand all things. Apart from understanding, Aristotle later in the work supported the idea of the immortality of the soul by maintaining that there is a kind of intellect that is undying and everlasting.

Whether Aristotle separates the soul from the body as did Plato or not, it is proper to conceive the soul as a form having a clear explanatory and ontological priority over the body both in explaining living activities and in determining what kind of body is necessary for them.⁹⁵ Recent interpretations by Wedin and Caston have made use of Aristotle's argument in DA 3.7 which says that if understanding either is a kind of *Phantasia* or

not, without *Phantasia* it will not be possible for this to exist without the body as being instrumental to the connection between understanding and *phantasmata* to show that, “intellectual activity is still bodily.”⁹⁶ This is a clear suggestion that there is a kind of understanding that is truly separated from the body. The lesson to be learned from the teaching of Aristotle on the separability of the divine nous is the fact that it leads us to accept the fact that God is the first principle of everything, the substance, the “what it is”.

Morality in Plato's *Timaeus*

The idea behind the creation story in the *Timaeus* was not to prove the reality of an eternal world. The primary focus of the creation story culminated in the nature and life of man. Both Socrates and Plato identified a human being with his soul. Aristotle supports Socrates and Plato as offering the ontological account of man. In other words, it is an account of what metaphysically makes a man a man, not just by describing humans as a soul or a mind or a body. The man that was created was later Platonized by Augustine to be like God. Man being like God means that he is some sort of moral agent. Man is free and possesses authority. In the *Republic*, this manifests in the aspect of morality. This is replicated in the *Timaeus*. This attitude is contained in the Aristotelian philosophy of nature in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Today, more than ever before, the study of cosmology becomes meaningful only when it is connected with morality.

The Relevance of Plato's Cosmology to Contemporary Society

The teaching in the *Timaeus* may be generally abstract, but it produces the needed instrument for human beings to reason rationally and structurally on a world inhabited by us without our consent. We are made to appreciate the main purpose of the physical universe which is translated in the call for each individual or the collective contribution of us all in making the cosmos a better place for mutual existence. By sharing in the Demiurgic rationality, human beings can participate in the exercise of paradigmatic goodness. The inability of the human race to realize the gift of conjecturing will send us to the disillusion of expecting wrong models as political leaders and drawing wrong strategies as political agenda, rather than striving to achieve a perfect society as sharers in divine rationality which the Demiurge through the World-soul shares with every human being.

The first lesson we have to learn is concerning the Maker of the universe. Although the *Timaeus* presents the maker in different categorizations, it is evident that this portrayal is couched in anthropological language for easy understanding. Who is the Philosopher-king or the Craftsman-gods? These concepts reflect the ideal. The possession of such attributes makes the possessor be greatly self-sufficing. He allows the power of reason to direct the activities of life, rather than depending on emotions and physical desires. This does not mean that emotions and physical desires are not needed by the Philosopher-king, but they are controlled by rationality which is shared with the Creator –who is Intellect or Intelligence itself.

The basis for human knowledge was to know that which transcended individual particular things. We know what a beautiful painting was if and only if we know the general form of beauty itself which is not found in any individual thing but existed only in a form. Whereas, Aristotle opines that what was primary was the individual thing – a primary substance and our knowledge of universals came from our recognition of what was common between individual things. The commonality does not have an independent reality like the Platonic Forms. Aristotle writes that the essence of each thing is what it is said to be in virtue of itself. In other words, the form of a thing explains the ends or goals (*teloi*) of a natural object. Scholars may be tempted to reject the theory of Form as postulated by Plato on basis that nature is not accidental or mechanical, but it is directed towards ends or goals. I think that the Platonic ideal of making the Universals as substances speaks volumes to human beings in the developing world more than any other time. The more we consider every individual as participating in the general good of society, the better for us all.

II. CONCLUSION

The kernel of Plato's ethics is the doctrine that man's reason is divine and that his business is to become like the divine by reproducing in his nature the beauty and harmony revealed in the cosmos, which is itself a god, a living creature with soul in body and reason in soul. This, among other issues, is a fact revealed by this study. To develop as individuals and communities, we must think like divine beings, using the capacity we share with the Creator, the capacity to create a better world.

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