ESSAYS ON THE *TIMAEUS*

M. R. WRIGHT (ed.): *Reason and Necessity. Essays on Plato's* Timaeus. Pp. xvi + 191. London: Duckworth, 2001. Cased, £40. ISBN: 0-7156-3057-1.

In the last fifteen years or so there has been something of a renaissance in study of the *Timaeus*. It is curious that so apparently central—and indeed, in some respects, so mysterious—a work should have fallen into such (relative) neglect. Part of the explanation is perhaps just that mysteriousness, and the distance that so often appears to separate the *Timaeus* from any recognizable modern concerns. But the appearance is misleading: one just has to give up on the temptation to dismiss Plato as a dilettante or a fool, or both, and dig a little harder, with more sophisticated tools. In any case, times are changing, and the Wright volume, together with the conference from which it initially derived, is clear evidence of it; soon still further impetus will be given to the process by Thomas Johansen's *Plato's Natural Philosophy: A Study of the Timaeus-Critias* (promised by CUP for July 2004).

While Johansen's book will be through-and-through philosophical, *Reason and Necessity* is more of a mixture. The editor, in her own chapter (her Introduction gives a short summary both of the *Timaeus* and of the papers in the volume), attempts to make sense of the claim that 'In Platonic theory science is myth' (p. 1)—a claim that seems hardly less 'extraordinary' (ibid., for which cf. my 'mysterious' above) by the end of her chapter: that Timaeus more often refers to his account as a *logos* than as a *muthos* is not, perhaps, strictly incompatible with its being a 'myth' of some sort (cf. Kathryn Morgan, *Myth & Philosophy* [Cambridge, 2000]), but I remain unconvinced that its mix of the playful and the serious has anything much to do, as Rosemary Wright seems to suggest, with the idea that 'scientific advance is achieved by the continuous replacement of one theory by another that is "more probable" ' (p. 19). Sergio Zedda, in 'How to Build a World Soul: A Practical Guide', explores the rôle accorded to the visual in Timaeus' *logos* (so e.g. '. . . vision, in this case a mental vision of the image of the world soul, becomes the bridge between knowledge of the world soul itself and sense perception of the armillary sphere', p. 38); while in 'How to Build a Human Body: An Idealist's Guide', Scott Burgess finds a continuity between the principles involved in the divine craftsman's construction of the human body and that of the world soul and its human counterpart.

So far, perhaps still so mysterious. Christopher Gill, in 'The Body's Fault? Plato's *Timaeus* on Psychic Illness', is more illuminating. He casts his net outside Plato, to Galen and the Stoics, to find help in understanding of what on first (and perhaps even second, third . . .) reading seems a particularly bizarre passage, even by the standards of the *Timaeus*: 86b–87b, where on one interpretation (which Gill himself tends to favour) all psychic defects, down to and including ignorance, derive from bodily conditions. This is an important and challenging paper, in response to which I make just three tentative, and rather general, points: (i) Gill says little or nothing about the general status of Timaeus' *logos*, or of this part of it; (ii) his initial analysis of the passage may already be in danger of Stoicizing it; and (iii), as Gill would himself immediately accept, whatever the Stoics might have found in the passage—which they may very well have been plundering for their own purposes—is not necessarily a guide to what is actually in it. Andrew Barker writes with the usual clarity and precision on 'the processes by which music [is represented in the *Timaeus* as] imping[ing] upon the soul, especially those involving movements inside our own bodies, and the ways in

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which the soul apprehends it', attempting all the while 'to identify among [these processes] the transactions through which music can be instrumental in promoting the return of our psychic "revolutions" to their proper order' (p. 86): 'Timaeus on Music and the Liver', another important paper in the general area of Platonic psychology. Lesley Dean-Jones's 'Aristotle's Understanding of Plato's Receptacle and its Significance for Aristotle's Theory of Familial Resemblance' moves back and forth between Plato, Aristotle, and Greek ideas about reproduction; Jan Opsomer writes about 'Proclus on Demiurgy and Procession: A Neoplatonic Reading of the *Timaeus*', and does not in the end let Proclus off lightly (the 'only correct interpretation of Plato'—as its author would have thought of it—contains 'inexplicable' elements, p. 130).

However the volume reserves its best, or at any rate its most exhilarating, for last: Gordon Campbell, on 'Zoogony and Evolution in Plato's *Timaeus*: The Presocratics, Lucretius and Darwin'. The chapter begins and ends with Flann O'Brien, and *The Third Policeman*; Don Fowler also makes an early showing: '. . . in reality we are like Aeneas before the pictures in Carthage, seeing what we want to see and telling a story'. Just so, Campbell argues, 'Whether we like it or not, Darwin will be our source text and *Timaeus*, Lucretius and Empedocles our target texts, and so knowledge of Darwinism becomes crucial' (p. 166). But the most appealing aspect of the chapter is its treatment of the *Timaeus* as a 'subversive text' (pp. 165–6): the dialogue 'appropriates and subverts a tradition of Presocratic scientific cosmology' (p. 166). I myself think the dialogue rather subverts itself, as in the concluding passage on the origin of species (where what is subverted is already appropriated). Nevertheless, Campbell surely gets the general tone of at least parts of the *Timaeus* right—in the process giving a rather different dimension to the question that Rosemary Wright asked at the beginning of the volume: what kind of account is *Timaeus* giving? His closing story about how birds and other animals began is surely not so far removed from Sergeant Pluck's about bicycles, his great-grandfather, and his horse (Campbell cites from *The Third Policeman*, pp. 72 ff.). But that only seems to make the whole more mysterious; for it is surely not all subversive.

All in all, a book most people reading the *Timaeus* will find useful as well as provocative; in the absence of something more comprehensive (Johansen?), it might serve as a kind of commentary. But in any case it has some outstanding, even exciting, bits—which is a lot more than most such collections of papers achieve.

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THE *TIMAEUS* AND ITS INTERPRETERS

G. J. Reydams-Schils (ed.): *Plato's* Timaeus *as Cultural Icon*. Pp. xiv + 334, ills. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003. Paper, US$29.95 (Cased, US$59.95). ISBN: 0-268-03872-4 (0-268-03871-6 hbk).

This collection of essays arose from an international conference of the same name, held at the University of Notre Dame, from 30 March to 1 April 2000. Arguably, until relatively recently, no dialogue of Plato has been more influential throughout its *Nachleben* than *Timaeus*. This volume bears eloquent witness to this influence both by the range of its subjects and the scope of its chronology. Reydams-Schils has put

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