

**T.K. Johansen, *Plato's Natural Philosophy. A Study of the Timaeus – Critias*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 218 + VI pp., ISBN 0521-79067-0.**

For once I shall dispense with the traditional procedure and start by pronouncing the verdict: Johansen's [= J.'s] work numbers among the clearest introductions into the maze of *Timaeus* – *Critias* available. Concise and lucid, it accounts for a wide variety of issues, touching upon the structure of the dialogue as well as on its advanced epistemological problems, marking the pathways for further discussion and more detailed enquiries. The close relationship between the two dialogues, of which one forms the natural continuation of the other, is of crucial importance where the explanation of many formal features (as e.g. the preference for monologues) is concerned, and, simultaneously, allows us to conceive of *Respublica*, *Timaeus* and *Critias* as a sequence similar to that of *Theaetetus*, *Sophista* and *Politicus*<sup>1</sup>.

Now, to the details: nine chapters build the body of J.'s work, each of them dealing with a different aspect of the dialogue. A short introduction that precedes them gives a reader the first inkling of the author's method and principles of his interpretation, as right from the start J.'s attention focuses on the teleological issues at stake in the dialogue.

Having thus declared his overall purpose in the introduction, J. moves onward to discuss the *skopos* of this famous dialogic pair, the *Timaeus* – *Critias*: it may be interesting to note that in this he commits himself to the long-standing tradition of Plato's commentaries<sup>2</sup>. The pair is thus put into close relation to the *Republic* as the twine accounts (respectively the *Timaeus* and the *Critias* stories) are regarded as supplementary to the central discussion of that *opus magnum*: the Atlantis story, which fulfills the demands of useful/beneficial fiction, portrays the ideal state at war, while the cosmological narrative of the other dialogue provides the discussion with a universal dimension, portraying the perfectly ordained (yet necessarily composed of very imperfect matter) whole, the whole that may serve as an ultimate model for the best possible organization of any other entity (i.e. state, as this latter is conceived in the *Republic*). Thus, J.'s reading stresses the close connection between the major works of the *corpus*, and it is in this connection that it views certain particulars of the *Timaeus* setting and story. Indeed, it is owing to the assumption of this close link that our author is able to reject (very convincingly) Loraux's view of the Atlantis story as tersely paralleling the focal theme of the *Menexenus*<sup>3</sup> – indeed, on J.'s interpretation, the story may be seen as an exact opposite of Socrates' parody of state *epitaphios* in that latter dialogue. On the other hand, one would probably welcome a more detailed discussion of the possible divergences apparent in the portrayal of the narrative in the dialogic pair<sup>4</sup>. After all, the two accounts: the creation story and the Atlantis narrative do parallel each other, and the question of their mutual relationship, as well as that of their relation to the respective model may be of crucial importance in understanding Plato's intent.

The discussion of the Atlantis story brings J. to yet another issue, namely to the question of likeness as one of fundamental importance in interpreting *Timaeus*' account: in considering this

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<sup>1</sup> On this latter subject cf. e.g. N. Notomi, *The Unity of Plato's Sophist*, Cambridge 1999, pp. 60 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Compare e.g. Olympiodorus, *Comm. in Gorgiam*, proem. 2; 1 f. Westerink.

<sup>3</sup> N. Loraux, *The Invention of Athens*, Cambridge, Mass. 1986. For the basic similarity of the two one may also compare Ch. Gill, *The Genre of Atlantis Story*, CPh LXXII 1977, pp. 287–304 (esp. 294)

<sup>4</sup> These were highlighted e.g. by Gill, *o.c.* (n. 3).

question, he draws an interesting parallel between the notion of *eikos logos* as that of a likely account and likeness as the methodological principle organizing Demiourge's work in Timaeus' cosmogony<sup>5</sup>. It is well worth noticing that J.'s discussion benefits from accounting for the legal (or possibly juridical) connotation of the *eikasmos*, a manoeuvre that highlights the *verisimilitudo* as referring to what is probable (hence likelihood) rather than to the aesthetic sense of the word (the likely as inherent in likeness). Admittedly, the step has considerable epistemological consequences, as it asserts the basic inability of comprehensive, true cognition – indeed, this notion will be developed further in the subsequent chapters.

Five central chapters that follow the discussion of what may be termed the 'methodological' principles of the two accounts are devoted almost entirely to the problems intrinsic in the lecture of the *Timaeus* (or rather of Timaeus' account of creation presented in the eponymous dialogue). Starting with the issue of two principles underlying the creation, that is Demiourge's aiming at goodness, beauty and order and, on the other hand, the randomness of the preexistent substratum, J. works his way to describe the complex issues of teleology of creation that aims at repetition of the model in a radically different substratum, of *anangkē* as the random element resulting from the preexistent disorder, moving onwards to consider the concepts of motion and indeed, those of the soul (first the World-Soul and then the human soul), as reflecting the difficulties related to the demiourge creation in matter. It is here that J. touches upon Plato's understanding of craftsmanship as 'a cause of beauty', and stresses the teleological aspect of Platonic cosmogony that makes the reasoning cause necessary for the emergence of the universe<sup>6</sup>. Finally, the eighth chapter (*Perception and cosmology*, pp. 160–177) dwells upon the 'practical' dimensions of such a creation, where the skies become a depiction of the eternally harmonious, and the created universe, understood as a best possible portrayal of the model, becomes an object of contemplation, very much as a perfect state depicted in the *Republic*: this reminds the reader of the punishment reserved by Timaeus for those who fail in their duties as reasonable creatures, and who may finally be reborn in form of either reptile or fish: devoid of the very possibility of stargazing, these latter are doomed to continue in their chosen ignorance<sup>7</sup>. What J. does not say is that such contemplation would continue to be considered essential for the development of the intellectual faculties even in much later times, thus attesting to the influential character of the discussed account<sup>8</sup>.

It is however the last, ninth chapter (*Dialogue and dialectic*, pp. 177–197) that may well prove of utmost interest particularly to those interested in Plato as a writer: the discussion of the literary

<sup>5</sup> It may be useful to note that a discussion of *eikos logos* and the *eikasia* as the organizing principle of the Atlantis myth appears in H. Cherniss (*Some War Time Publications Concerning Plato*, 2, AJPh LXVIII 1947, pp. 225–265).

<sup>6</sup> It is particularly interesting to note that J. actually admits the possibility of disorderly, unreasoned cause being the cause of beauty – the problem (and the difference) lies in the lack of intent, which effectively means that beauty was produced only accidentally, without any respect for itself (pp. 74 f.).

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, one may note that J.'s account, which refers many features of the Timaeus account to the overall *skopoi* of both the narrative and the dialogue may in itself constitute an answer to those likely to object to his assumption of the intrinsic connection between the *Timaeus* and the *Republic* on the basis of e.g. discrepancies in the eschatology presented in the two works (those latter were extensively studied by J. Annas in her *Plato's Myths of Judgement*, Phronesis XXVII 1982, pp. 119–143).

<sup>8</sup> One may invoke the example of Firmicus, who states quite explicitly: "Nihil enim debemus cogitare terrenum, praesertim cum sciamus fabricatorem nostrum deum ita nos divini artificii moderatione fecisse, ut recti corporis forma ab omni humilitatis deiectione seposita, nihil aliud primum patefacta oculorum acie nisi Solem Lunam stellas et horum pulcherrimum atque immortale domicilium, mundum scilicet videremus..." (*Math.* VIII 1, 3).

issues such as the composition of the two dialogues is endowed with striking insight and subtlety. Operating on differing levels of structure and meaning, J. is able to weave the varied strands into a persuasive reconstruction of Plato's original intent that was to determine the flow of the discussion contained in the *Timaeus – Critias*. In demonstrating the high level of the subordination of the composition to the philosophical content, he attests to Plato's mastery of the literary medium he chose, simultaneously demonstrating how the features that seem to be of purely compositional character do actually stem from the underlying philosophical scheme. Indeed, on J.'s reading, the literary *demiourgos* Plato appears to come close to the perfect teleology of the Divine Demiourge of the dialogue.

*In summa*: J.'s is a good, extremely readable work, well worth attention of those carefully feeling their way through the intricacies of the pair and those for whom the *Timaeus – Critias*, in spite or possibly due to a long study, remains a mine-field, albeit a well mapped one. While it does not enter into a detailed philosophical analysis of the more complex issues intrinsic to the two dialogues, it provides an interesting picture of the overall pattern, thus displaying the scheme underlying their composition and possible meaning. And, as it may provide guidance and help to those beginning their studies of the philosopher, it may also be of use to the more advanced Plato scholars.

*Joanna Komorowska*  
*Pedagogical University of Cracow*

Eos XCIV 2007  
ISSN 0012-7825

**George E. Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle from Antiochus to Porphyry*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006, 419 + X pp., ISBN 0-19-926456-2 (978-0-19-926456-8).**

For those committed to the *agrapha dogmata* or Tübingen interpretation the question mark that stands so prominently in the title of George Karamanolis' [= K.'s] book may seem at the very least superfluous: they know (or so they claim) that the two were in general agreement, and they agree that Aristotle may be employed as a valuable source in the reconstruction of what they regard as the true (depending on the stance taken by a given individual read the only true or the truly advanced) teachings of Plato. Yet, it is neither Plato nor his actual teachings that form the principal subject of this fascinating book – instead, the account is dominated by his later heirs, starting with the prominent figure of Cicero's teacher, Antiochus of Ascalon. K.'s aim may seem simple enough, as he purposes to give an account of the part played by Aristotle's works in the thought and teachings of those who had effectively shaped the history of Platonism: yet, one should remember, the execution of this plan amounts to a comprehensive study of indirect tradition and fragmentary sources, to a careful analysis of the subtleties particular to the scarce remains of Numenius' and Atticus' writings. Even where dealing with what may appear to be the most innocuous subject, namely Plutarchus' philosophy, K.'s research is partially hampered by the loss of some of the Chaeronean's major writings.

The structure of the work being conditioned by its very subject, K.'s account traces the place and function of Aristotle's writings in the thought of major Platonists of the Roman era: consequently, each of his chapters can be read not only in reference to others but as an independent study into the method and thought of a given philosopher. Undoubtedly, this is a considerable merit, for the work is likely to be read not only as an inquiry into the reception of Aristotle's writings, but also as