



NATURE, HUMANS AND KNOWLEDGE IN PLATO'S *TIMAEUS*

**PHILOSOPHY WORKSHOP
18TH AND 19TH OF SEPTEMBER 2025**

Mary Immaculate College, Campus Limerick, Ireland
Room JHN221 (Newman Building, second floor)

Institute for Interdisciplinary and Engaged Philosophy
Department of Philosophy





PROGRAMME

THURSDAY 18TH

9 am	Decline in the <i>Timaeus</i> (Online) Saloni de Souza (Bath Spa University)
10 am	Imitating God in Plato's <i>Timaeus</i>: The Way of the Body Thomas Kjeller Johansen (University of Oslo)
11 am	Coffee Break
11:30 pm	A Moderate Pastime: Giving Likely Accounts of Reproduction in the <i>Timaeus</i> María-Elena García-Peláez (Universidad Panamericana)
12:30 pm	Causation and Natural Science in Plato's <i>Timaeus</i> Peter Larsen (Dublin City University)
1:30 pm	Lunch
2:30 pm	Rhythmic Remedies: The Ethical Role of the Receptacle's Motions In Plato's <i>Timaeus</i> Luca Pitteloud (Universidad de Valladolid)
3:30 pm	<i>Chôra</i> and <i>Anagkê</i>: Femininity and Necessity in Plato's <i>Timaeus</i> Kristin Sampson (University of Bergen)
4:30 pm	Beautiful Creatures in Motion Daniel Vázquez (Mary Immaculate College)
7 pm	Dinner (Room G10)



PROGRAMME

FRIDAY 19TH

9 am

**Plato in the Eighteenth Century: Schelling's
Timaeus and the Knowledge of the World**
Laura Follesa (University of Cagliari)

10 am

**On the Principle of Corporeality: Plato and the
Platonists in Disagreement?**
Viktor Ilievski (University of Vienna)

11 am

Coffee Break

11:20 am

Sai's Matters: Plato on the Past
Hallvard Fossheim (University of Bergen)



ABSTRACTS

Decline in the *Timaeus* (Online)

Saloni de Souza (Bath Spa University)

In the very first lines of the *Timaeus*, Plato invites us to reflect on the disadvantages of illness. Socrates asks about the whereabouts of an unnamed man (arguably Plato) and Timaeus explains that he is unwell. Illness, the man's bodily condition, is presented as unavoidable and something that prevents him from doing things that are important and valuable (including philosophy); the absentee "would not have missed our meeting willingly". It also places an extra burden on those who are not ill; Socrates notes and Timaeus agrees that Timaeus and his friends must attempt to fill the ill man's place in the conversation. This points to a problem: a corporeal, human life, subject to the whims of the body, hardly seems choiceworthy. Later on in the dialogue, however, we find a solution: Timaeus suggests that a human being can lead an entirely disease-free and long life, if the body is treated in the correct way (81b-e). In this paper, I point to two objections to this solution: we must grant that old age is compatible with being disease-free; we must grant that old age itself is not a bad thing. I argue that we can defeat the first by noticing passages that point to a distinction between ageing-related physiological and psychic deterioration and disease-related physiological and psychic deterioration. I deal with the second by offering a close reading of 32c5–33a6.

Imitating God in Plato's *Timaeus*: The Way of the Body

Thomas Kjeller Johansen (University of Oslo)

In his groundbreaking article 'The Ideal of Godlikeness', David Sedley argued that the *Timaeus* presents thinking about eternal being as the goal of human life and showed how the passage provided the template for Aristotle's championing of the contemplative life in *EN* X. Gabor Betegh, developing Sedley's insights, has demonstrated that it is not just the immortal forms that *Timaeus* asks us to imitate, rather he urges us 'to observe the movement of the heavenly bodies and thus become like the immanent cosmic world soul.' In this paper I go one step further to show how also our bodies are meant to imitate the cosmic god. The gods constructed our bodies to help us realise, to the extent possible, the same ideals of completeness and self-sufficiency that characterise the cosmic body.



A Moderate Pastime: Giving Likely Accounts of Reproduction in the *Timaeus*

María-Elena García-Peláez (Universidad Panamericana)

The scarce information found in the *Timaeus* about intra-species generation, namely sexual reproduction, is basically confined to the probable account, little more than a pastime topic. In contrast to other texts like *Symposium* and *Laws*, in which animal and especially human generation is endowed with metaphysical, psychological, ethical, political, theological, aesthetic, and even historical relevance, the dialogue concerned with generation remains silent on the teleological and metaphysical explanations of reproduction. 91a-b tells the story of women's appearance in the second reincarnation of cowards and wrongdoers (men) and claims that only after women's lineage was born did the gods contrive sexual desire. This is a strange claim, given that immediately afterwards, Plato describes the physical changes in view of sexual union. But reproduction is not presented as the cause of sexuality, just as its result. In this presentation, I will address the implications we have along the *Timaeus* to evaluate if it is the case that sexual reproduction is not coated with a metaphysical perspective, and will offer a possible explanation of this by exploring the problems posited by the increase of beings in this cosmological view.

Causation and Natural Science in Plato's *Timaeus*

Peter Larsen (Dublin City University)

It is undeniable that the theme of causation pervades the text of Plato's *Timaeus*: Timaeus' primary aim, stated just as he is about to embark upon his lengthy account, is to consider the question of whether the cosmos came to be, or whether it was ungenerated (27c5); causal language, moreover, permeates the text from beginning (18e3) to end (88a7) and is used throughout in more and less philosophically significant ways. However, despite the centrality of causation to the discussion in the *Timaeus*, there remains a lack of clarity on a number of important issues connected to Plato's overall account of causation. In particular, it isn't at all clear what really counts as a cause, for Plato. There is also an



ambiguity surrounding the relation among different kinds of causes, and, indeed, even a question as to whether Plato thinks there truly are causes of different kinds. Considered together, these issues raise serious questions about the status of causation in the natural world and, to the extent that the aim of natural science is to discover natural causes, it also seriously problematizes the status of natural science itself. This is especially so given the close connection that Plato explicitly draws in the dialogue between engaging in natural science and knowing causes (68e–69a).

The aim of this paper is to shed light on some of these questions. In it I argue that in the *Timaeus* (and elsewhere) Plato understands causation primarily, and perhaps solely, in terms of making/crafting (ποιεῖν/δημιουργεῖν). Makers/crafters are, moreover, for Plato, minds/intelligences. I further argue that if this is right, then it means that all events, even thoroughly natural events, like rockslides, are attributable to some mind/intelligence. Furthermore, there is good evidence that if it is possible for physical things to fall outside the purview of a mind/intelligence, then whatever processes occur among those things in such a scenario, those processes are not, strictly speaking, causal. This reading, in addition to fitting well with the text, also has the advantage of allowing us to make ready sense of some of the comments that *Timaeus* makes about the value of engaging in natural science, which may otherwise seem puzzling given things that Plato says elsewhere in his corpus of dialogues.

Rhythmic Remedies: The Ethical Role of the Receptacle's Motions In Plato's *Timaeus*

Luca Pitteloud (Universidad de Valladolid)

This chapter examines the ethical implications of a striking yet underexplored passage in Plato's *Timaeus* (88d4–e1), where he discusses remedies for the diseases of the soul and body. Plato emphasizes the necessity of rhythmic exercises to counteract internal and external kinetic bodily aggressions, offering a framework for achieving individual equilibrium. By referencing the motions of the Receptacle, Plato suggests that these movements are not disruptive forces but rather integral to the solution for restoring harmony within the human being.



This analysis revisits the metaphor of the Receptacle as the "foster-mother and nurse of the universe," proposing that its motions provide a model for ethical practices aimed at cultivating balance and well-being. The chapter highlights the interplay between metaphysical principles and practical ethical exercises, advancing our understanding of how Plato envisions the alignment of body and soul in the pursuit of a virtuous life.

Chôra and Anagkê: Femininity and Necessity in Plato's Timaeus

Kristin Sampson (University of Bergen)

The way we as humans understand the world influence how we relate to nature. This paper considers Plato's conception of the world in the *Timaeus*, with a focus on how the feminine principle – the mother of cosmos – in the second story of cosmogony in this dialogue constitutes a factor that is at once both necessary and problematic. Focusing on two of the names she is given – *Chôra* and *Anagkê* – the aim is to bring out aspects that may be of use also in reflections concerning our more contemporary understandings of the world. *Chôra* is a core concept in Plato's views on the generation of cosmos and is inherently difficult to grasp. She is said to be of a kind (*eidos*) "invisible (*anoraton*) and formless (*amorphon*), all-embracing (*pandeches*), possessed in a most puzzling way of intelligibility, yet very hard to grasp" (*Timaeus* 51a-b). That the form – *eidos* – of the receiving mother is to be without form (*amorphon*) does sound confounding. On the one hand she is obviously necessary as that in which the perceptible things are constituted, but on the other the physical things are imposed with transience – imperfect permanence and being – by this very mother in whom they constitute themselves. This double aspect of *chôra*, as something both necessary and problematic, becomes perhaps even more striking considering another of the names given to the mothering principle in the second story of cosmogony, namely Necessity (*Anagkê*). It is Necessity that imposes imperfection in the world, as Paul Friedländer points out. The aim here is to further investigate these bafflingly interesting aspects concerning femininity and necessity, and their significance for the view of nature, in the sense of world or *fusis*, that is unfolded in the *Timaeus*.



Beautiful Creatures in Motion

Daniel Vázquez (Mary Immaculate College)

In the sensible realm described in Plato's *Timaeus*, action is king. This is first hinted at when Socrates says that the political constitution they have described in their previous conversation makes him feel like someone who has been looking at some beautiful creatures at rest and now wants to see them moving, actively exercising their powers (*Ti.* 19b-c). Later, Timaeus' speech consistently ranks action and activity above rest and inactivity. However, this hierarchy seems in tension with the description of intelligible objects, which are inactive, always in the same state, and immovable. This raises the question of why, if the sensible world is modelled out of the intelligible one, motion is better than stillness in the former, whereas the opposite is the case in the latter. What could explain this asymmetry? In this paper, I offer three possible reasons to answer this question. Firstly, I examine whether (1) the asymmetry is apparent because there is no genuine rest in the sensible realm. Next, I offer evidence to argue that (2) intelligible objects may be changeless and immovable but are active. Thirdly, I consider whether (3) the sensible realm requires action because it is the only way to develop and display certain higher-order qualities that objects and persons cannot sustain permanently because of corporeal limitations, which is not an issue in the intelligible realm. I conclude by suggesting that Plato's *Timaeus* offers a precursor of the notion of actuality, even if Aristotle did not realise it.

Plato in the Eighteenth Century: Schelling's *Timaeus* and the Knowledge of the World

Laura Follesa (University of Cagliari)

In recent decades, Schelling's interest on Plato's philosophy has attracted increasing scholarly attention, especially following the publication of early manuscripts from the Tübingen period (1792-1794). In this paper, I examine the relationship between the intellectual context in which Schelling's reading of *Timaeus* is situated and some of the central topics that he develops starting from the Platonic dialogue. Schelling engaged with both ancient and modern sources,



combining philological analysis and philosophical interpretation to shape his own philosophical system. His reading of Plato's *Timaeus* is closely connected to the spread of Kantian philosophy in the same years and offers Schelling's first analysis of crucial issues concerning our knowledge of the world and the role of myth and images in cognitive processes.

On the Principle of Corporeality: Plato and the Platonists in Disagreement?

Viktor Ilievski (University of Vienna)

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, to explicate, hopefully with precision and accuracy, three influential interpretations of Plato's *chōra* and *anankē* as they are known from the *Timaeus*. The said interpretations were contrived by Plutarch, Plotinus, and Proclus – probably the most important heirs of Plato, on account of both the number of preserved works and the depth of their thought. That is also why exactly these thinkers were selected as subjects of our investigation. Second, to demonstrate, as conclusively as possible, that their conceptualizations of *chōra* and *anankē* are not, strictly speaking, faithful to Plato. Instead, they depend heavily on Aristotle's theory of *hylē* and his understanding of the Timaeian *chōra*, as well as on the philosophers' own reconstructions of Platonic metaphysics, and, in the case of Plutarch, theology.

Saïs Matters: Plato on the Past

Hallvard Fossheim (University of Bergen)

Plato is generally taken to present Egyptians as further from human and political ideals than were his contemporary Greeks. Egypt, specifically Saïs, is not denigrated by Plato in the *Timaeus*, however. On the contrary, the Egyptians are treated as in important respects closer to the dialogue's ideal than are the contemporaneous Greeks, in that they uphold a living relation to and evaluation of the past which the Greeks have all but lost. After establishing how the dialogue's opening functions as a signpost highlighting the importance of the past, I explain the significance of the Apatouria as the framework for the retelling of Solon's story to Critias. I then establish how Saïs is set up as a mirror



image of Athens, before exploring the significance of this relation in terms of time and history. The upshot is that Saïs should in important cultural respects be seen as a half-way house between contemporary Athens and the true potential of Athens. I end with some comments on what might have been Plato's cultural ambition in offering the *Timaeus-Critias* construct as such a historically comparative framework.