

Chapter One



On the Origin of the Difference of *Psyche* and *Soma* in Plato's *Timaeus*

Plato is commonly known in the history of philosophy as an initiator of a dualistic concept of body and soul that favors the soul at the expense of the body. By contrast, Nietzsche is known as the thinker who reversed the Platonic order between the “true” intelligible world and the “untrue” sensible world by reinscribing thinking in terms of intelligible ideas in a bodily activity. He is known as well as one who also attempted to think (in) the overcoming of the so-called platonic dualism.¹ Since then there have been many attempts to rethink what seems to be—for thought at least—an insurmountable gap between the sensible and the intelligible in terms of a more original unity. As I will show, in order to find this more original unity we do not need to “disprove” Plato, since Plato’s text itself can be reread in a nondualistic manner. This requires that we focus less on *what* different voices in Plato’s texts say and more on *how* thinking unfolds in the text. This chapter proposes especially a rereading of Plato’s *Timaeus*, a text that deals with the creation of the cosmos and of human beings. But this text also deals—at another level—with the creation of a speech that attempts to articulate its own coming to be. This is why it lends itself particularly to question how we come to think the “body” that we find at play in our own thought.

Paul Friedländer points out that the *Timaeus* constitutes Plato’s attempt to bring together the insights of the physicists concerning the nature of the physical world with the teleological principle of the idea of the good in such a way that the mechanical and accidental causes of the physical world are shown to be subordinated to the “good” as the highest principle of reason.² Almost all

commentaries on Plato's *Timaeus* have been faithful to this attempt by emphasizing the primacy of the supersensual eidetic principle in the becoming of the world.³

The present reading of the *Timaeus*⁴ distinguishes itself from traditional interpretations insofar as the direction of its questioning is rather “nonplatonian”—if we intend by “platonian” the maxim to let a discourse be guided by supersensual ideas or even a highest idea (goodness). I do not intend to set out (like Friedländer and others) from the difference between physical causes and eidetic cause and seek their unity by showing how the physical causes are subordinated to the eidetic cause. Rather, I will question *how* this distinction between a realm of the supersensual and the sensual *comes to be in and for thinking*. This entails that in my reading I encounter the performativity of the text in its coming to sense in a double sense—that is, in the genesis of what it has to say and in the sensible traces that carry its meaning. In other words, my reading attempts to stay particularly sensible to the *way* what is thought and said arise in thinking and saying. Thereby I seek to trace the genesis, that is, the original becoming of thinking and thus the becoming of a thinking that thinks (in) the difference of body and “soul.”

Like Nietzsche I will trace the distinction between a supersensual realm of being and a sensual realm of being back to a “bodily” activity that withdraws from conceptualization. The way I intend to explain the genesis of this difference also draws from Heidegger's analysis of the origin of Greek (and Western) thought through the differencing of thinking and being (*Scheidung von Sein und Denken*). According to Heidegger, the differencing of being and thinking occurs when thinking places itself over against being, conceiving being as permanent presence. Consequently, the original occurrence of the disclosure of being in thinking and the occurrence of the differencing of being and thinking conceals itself.

I will problematize with respect to Plato's *Timaeus* the relation between the *soma* (body) and the psyche (soul) of the *kosmos* (world) and of humans by tracing these notions back to the original occurrence of their differencing. This differencing occurs in *legein* through *rhythm* (*rythmos*) and *harmony* (*harmonia*). *Legein* is commonly translated as saying or speaking. However, as we will see, the way Plato uses this verb suggests that its more archaic senses reverberate in it, namely the sense “to gather” and the sense “to count,” or “to enumerate.” *Legein* does not mean saying something that is already present to our minds, but rather designates the occurrence through which first something comes to appear as such and thus can be articulated. It is a differencing and gathering that does not necessarily imply speech (words). Thus *legein* refers to a broad sense of *logos*; it further points to an originary event of *logos*.⁵ At the very core of the *legein* through which things come to appear we will find what

Timaeus calls *chora*, a “place,” previous to the *legein*, which may be conceived as an “abysmal ground” in which the differencing of *psyche* and *soma*, of eternal being and becoming, of the selfsame and the different, and thus of an intelligible and a sensible realm occur.

When we read the *Timaeus* we should be aware that Timaeus' discourse has mostly the character of a myth. In his middle and latest period, Plato speaks through myths when the possibility of a true *logos*, we might say of a rational conceptualization, reaches its limits.⁶ When we try to give an account of the genesis of the world (as Plato's *Timaeus* does), we attempt to explain an occurrence that happened *before* there were human beings, and that means *before* the genesis of our own possibility of understanding and speaking. An attempt at any such genetic explanation necessarily has to cope with the limits of language and conceptualization. Plato copes with this limit by speaking through myths that consequently should not be taken as naive propositions of faith or as true propositions of some kind of “higher knowledge,” but rather as images or signs that expose us to “what” cannot simply be conceptualized. Thus Timaeus calls his account a “likely story.” A close reading of the *Timaeus* further reveals that Timaeus' mythical discourse on the creation of the world reflects the creation of his very speech; that is, it points to the origin and coming to be of thinking and speech. The parallel between the creation of the cosmos and Timaeus' speech does not necessarily indicate a “humanization” of the history of creation but may point to how the motion of thought mirrors the cosmos—that is, how thought arises with an understanding of the cosmos. Thereby the difficulty to articulate the beginning of the cosmos is reflected in how Timaeus repeatedly interrupts his discourse in order to begin again his speech with a different beginning.

a. The Broken Frame of Timaeus' Speech

Plato's *Timaeus* opens with a preliminary discourse that refers to a previous discussion on the ideal republic and is followed by Timaeus' speech, which treats the genesis of the world and of humans.⁷ This speech is constituted by a preliminary remark and three parts in which Timaeus restarts his account on the genesis of the world from the beginning, and each time from a different beginning. In the first part, Timaeus talks about creation through *nous* (“thought”)⁸; in the second part he talks about creation through necessity;⁹ and in the third part he explains how *nous* and necessity work together in the creation of human beings.¹⁰

In his preliminary remarks, Timaeus draws a distinction between that which always is (*to on aei*) and has no becoming (*genesin ouk echon*) and that which is always becoming (*to gignomenon aei*) and therefore never is (*on oude pote*). *Being*

is hereby conceived as *permanent presence* as distinguished from a becoming that has always already passed away and so is *not* anymore or is yet to become and so is *not* yet.¹¹ Whereas that which always is is apprehended through a noetic logos, that which is always becoming can only be conceived through the senses (*aisthēsis*) by an opinion (*doxa*) without true logos. Since the cosmos, of which Timaeus will speak, is sensible and tangible and is always becoming, his speech, as he says, will belong to the order of doxa.

According to Timaeus mythical discourse, the cosmos has an origin and a maker (the *demiourgos*) who created it by looking at what is eternal (*aidios*). Further it was created as a copy (*eikon*) of the original image that is apprehensible by logos and nous (“thought”) and which is eternally selfsame. Thus, Timaeus at first envisions the cosmos under the perspective of *technē*, as being created similar to the manner in which a cabinetmaker would make a table—having the image of a table in mind according to which the table is made. This will allow him to apprehend the creation of the cosmos through logos and make his speech, which belongs to the order of doxa, at least probable, even if it cannot be known to be true. And yet this relation between original model and image, which is the framework within which the creation of the cosmos takes place, will be problematized and interrupted by what will be called chora, a “place” of becoming that essentially escapes noetic logos (logos insofar as it follows reason). With respect to Timaeus’ speech we may say that his speaking, his logos, moves within the “spacing” of eternal image and mutable copy, between that which always is and that which always changes and therefore never is. This occurs in such a way as to bring forth in his words this difference for the listener/reader. But his speech will be continually interrupted and displaced in such a way as to prevent a properly ordered speech according to the scheme “original model and copy.” Indeed, it will be interrupted and displaced at its very beginning. The issue (and failure) of a proper beginning under the direction of nous and logos will be continually reinitiated because interruption and displacement occur at the very beginning of the creation of the cosmos and correspondingly at the beginning of the creation of Timaeus’ speech.

b. The Demiurge and the “Nurse of all Becoming”

In the creation of the cosmos, Timaeus distinguishes two kinds of causes, the necessary and the divine.¹² The necessary cause refers to physical laws of nature.¹³ It is said to be inferior to the divine cause (the demiurge), insofar as the divine maker of the cosmos tends to conduct also that which is becoming through necessity to the best end¹⁴ by creating everything, as far as possible, in his own likeness.¹⁵ In accordance with this priority, Timaeus will attempt in his

discourse to subordinate the necessary and accidental causes to the primary divine cause.

However, the divine maker is not the only cause of the cosmos. He did not create the cosmos from nothing (like a cabinetmaker does not create the material from which he makes a table, and like Timaeus does not create his speech from nothing). According to Timaeus, already before the creation of the cosmos there was something visible and therefore corporeal (*somaton*) that was in a state of motion, although in a discordant (*plemmelos*) and disorderly (*ataktos*) motion.¹⁶ The adverb *plemmelos* is formed by “*plen*” and “*melos*” and means literally “against the melody”—that is, discordant and inharmonious. In the creation of the world, the demiurge “took over all that was visible” and brought it into order out of disorder.¹⁷ In other words, he brought what was moving disharmoniously and without order into a harmoniously ordered rhythmic movement.

Timaeus will speak more explicitly of this primordial disordered visible that was there already before the creation in the second part of his discourse. Thereby he will find himself forced to introduce, besides the model and the copy, a third and somewhat difficult and obscure form (*eidos*), a force (*dunamis*) that he calls “the receptacle, and as it were the nurse, of all becoming”¹⁸ Whereas the model is that *from which* something is copied, and the copy is that which becomes, the nurse of all becoming is that *in which* something becomes.¹⁹ She “is an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible.”²⁰ Even though she is invisible herself, the nurse of all becoming is that in which the visible is formed, she is the “space” (*chora*) of becoming. Timaeus describes her as a “moulding-stuff” (*ekmageion*) that is moved and marked by that which enters it, appearing differently at different times.²¹ So the part of her that is being set on fire appears as fire, her liquid part appears as water, earth, and air.²²

The “nurse of all becoming” was there already before the maker of the cosmos began to form; that is, before he began to order the visible in her according to his own image. There were somehow “traces” of fire, earth, water, and air already there in the space of becoming, even though one cannot properly name them as such²³ because fire, earth, water, and air were created later according to (and for) a *logos* by the maker of the cosmos. There was nothing intelligible before the creation; there were no names. (24) And yet Timaeus speaks of “something” corporeal (not a body or thing one could name) that shook the “nurse of the becoming” who, in her turn, being completely out of balance, shook the “not-yet-elements.” She thereby functioned like a winnowing machine, scattering away from one another the “not-yet-elements” that were most unlike and pressing those together that were most similar, but her motion was without any measure or proportion²⁵ and the scattering and collecting were completely accidental.

The chora, which was there before any creation according to a noetic logos, is more primordial than the distinction between the eternal selfsame and becoming, between original image and copy. She is more primordial than the distinction between the intelligible and the sensible, because this distinction presupposes a noetic logos. We cannot properly think her because she is more primordial than this noetic logos.²⁶ She is something like (but not properly) an invisible, formless accidentally moving “space” *in* which creation through nous occurs. She is a space that composes no solid visible or intelligible ground: an abysmal ground in which, when we try to think her, our concepts of logos and soma fail.²⁷

Seeking the origin of the creation, Timaeus thus hits “something” that is more primordial than the logos according to which he attempts to order his speech: a “ground” in which his speech (logos) arises and which simultaneously withdraws from his speech. Chora is not only the abysmal ground in which visible things are created through logos by the maker of the universe, but it is also the abysmal ground in which Timaeus’ (Plato’s) and our own visible (written) and audible (spoken) intelligible words come to be. In fact, the chora, as Timaeus describes it, echoes the not yet ordered bodily motions and resistances that we find at play as we attempt to conceptualize a new thought.

c. The Creation of the Psyche of the Cosmos

In his first speech, Timaeus gives the following account on the creation of the cosmos: In order to be created according to the image of its creator, the cosmos had to have nous (“thought”), which presupposes a psyche.²⁸ Plato calls psyche a self-moving principle of movement²⁹ and that through which a body lives—that is, a “life-force.”³⁰ The cosmos is itself a living being insofar as it has a psyche.

Despite his claim that she was made prior to the body, Timaeus speaks of the psyche only after his account of the creation of the body of the cosmos. At first his speech holds on to the visible, whose becoming he attempts to trace back to a primordial nous. Like the creator, he takes over the visible and attempts to put it into order.

According to Timaeus, when the demiurge created the body of the cosmos he used *all* the elements (leaving nothing visible out of order) and put them into determinate proportions. He thereby made *one* whole living being in the shape of a circle, leaving *nothing* outside it. It was given a circular movement, the movement of the same, which belongs mostly to nous.³¹ It seems, then, that the chora as she was before the creation has disappeared—and yet, in his first speech, Timaeus still has not spoken of her. The initially disappeared chora is still to appear.

The psyche was placed in the middle of the body of the cosmos expanding all through it and covering the body from the outside. She was made in the following manner:

Midway between the Being [ousia] which is indivisible and remains always the same and the Being which is transient and divisible in bodies, He [the creator] blended a third form [eidos] of Being compounded out of the twain, that is to say, out of Same and the Other [athaterou the Different]; and in like manner He compounded it midway between that one of them which is indivisible and that one which is divisible in bodies. And He took the three of them, and blend them all together into one form, by forcing the Other [Different] into union with the Same, in spite of its being naturally difficult to mix.³²

The composition of the psyche out of what at first just seem abstract terms becomes more understandable if we take into account its Pythagorean background and the *legein*—that is, the “saying” in which things come to appear. Taylor points out with reference to Aristotle’s interpretation of this passage, that the “Same” and the “Different” for Plato are the Pythagorean *stoicheia* (principles or primordial elements) which are also the *stoicheia* of the objects that the psyche knows.³³ This means that the primordial elements of the psyche are also the primordial elements of what she comes to “know” through *legein*. A key to understand why *Timaeus* describes the composition of the psyche as a mixture and harmony of the same and the different is her “perceptive activity” (in the sense of *legein*). For Plato, as for the Pythagoreans, “like knows like.” That means that the psyche must be like the objects she knows. Objects, as will be explained later, are known with respect to their being same or different. And the psyche can tell (*legein*) and thus recognize something with respect to its being different or same only insofar as she is both (different and same) herself.

We will have difficulties in understanding how the psyche can “be” same and different and how objects are known to be same or different as long as we think of the psyche as a perceiving (or thinking) substance over against perceived objects. But if we consider that the psyche and “what” is known are originally disclosed as such only *in* the occurrence of a *legein*, we may rather attempt to think the psyche and the things she comes to know *through* the disclosive *legein*—that is, in questioning originally the coming to be of *legein*. In other words, if we follow attentively how perceiving or thinking of the same and different comes to be, *legein* comes first, and out of the occurrence of *legein* the concepts of psyche and of what is perceived according to the same and the different emerge.

But before turning our attention to the *legein* of the psyche, I would like to point at the fact that, according to *Timaeus*’ description, the psyche unites in

one form components that are “naturally difficult to mix [*dusmeikton*]”—that is, the same and the different, the unchangeable and the mutable, what pertains to the order of logos and what pertains to the body. We could say, then, that the one form of the psyche in herself harmoniously unites difference. Harmony, in Greek thought, means the bringing together of opposites, of what is “hostile” to each other (*sunthesin enantion*).³⁴ Like in a musical harmony (and the Pythagorean sense of harmony which is at play in the *Timaeus* is thought with reference to music), the unity of these opposites does not dissolve the single character of what is united. With the solution of the opposites harmony itself would be dissolved. Similarly in the composition and in the “perception” (*legein*) of the psyche sameness and difference are thought of as being united *as such* without being dissolved in a homogenous unity.

To understand the psyche’s “perception” or “knowledge” of the cosmos, one needs to take into account the movement (*kinesis*) of the psyche. According to *Timaeus*, the creator divided the psyche into portions. These portions, *Timaeus* continues, correspond to a mathematical formula that gives the intervals of a melodic progression.³⁵ We see how, again, harmony plays a central role in the creation of the psyche. The portions, *Timaeus* continues, were then split into two strands that were united in order to form two opposite circular movements, the outer, *sovereign movement* pertaining to the nature of the *same* and the inner movement pertaining to the nature of the *different*. Again, in the architecture of the cosmos, the same (and thus logos) is said to prevail over the *different*.³⁶ The inner circle was split again into seven different circles that would constitute the orbits of the seven planets.³⁷ The planets, moved by the cycles of the psyche, will preserve countable time through the rhythm of night and day, of the course of the moon and of the *different* planets as they move together.³⁸

The harmony of the psyche of the cosmos appears now in the *different* circular movements through which she appropriates knowledge of herself as well as of the visible bodies. The psyche acquires knowledge of something, says *Timaeus*, by getting in touch with it (*ephaptetai*) and by moving throughout her whole being. Since she is herself harmoniously the same and the *different*, the indivisible and the divisible belonging to bodies, she is able, he says, to announce to herself (*legei*) what the touched thing is and how it is, both in the sphere of the becoming and in that of the selfsame. Moving in a circular motion throughout herself, she bends back, reflects on herself, and is thereby able to tell herself whether the touched thing is selfidentical or changeable, indivisible or divisible, and what relation it has with other things in time and space.³⁹

So much for *Timaeus*’ explicit account of how the psyche gains knowledge. However, beyond this explicit account, a few questions remain open. *Timaeus* claims that the psyche of the cosmos gains knowledge of that which

belongs to the order of the *selfsame* insofar as she is herself constituted in part by the indivisible and selfsame. But the psyche is, by definition, a selfmoving “force,” and movement, as Timaeus will say, takes place only where difference reigns.⁴⁰ If she is able to recognize the “Same,” there must be, then, *in* her motion, *in* the reigning of difference, something escaping this motion, something selfsame that escapes time, maybe a moment of “eternal” (in the sense of timeless) suspense inherent to her rhythmic and harmonious cyclical motions. We can think this moment of suspense when we are attentive, for instance, to the ungraspable moment in which in our breathing inhaling turns to exhaling and vice versa. There is a moment where we are neither inhaling nor exhaling. One may also think of a swing that, when swinging up at a certain point, reaches its peak and remains suspended for a moment before swinging down again. Within Plato's *Timaeus* there is evidence of a similar moment if we think of the circle of the planets which periodically converge to a same constellation if we measure them, as Timaeus says, with the circle of the same⁴¹—that is, with the stars that appear to remain in the same position.⁴² The psyche of the cosmos can recognize that which belongs to the order of the unchangeable selfsame only in a timeless moment of suspended motion within her cyclical motion.

With this interpretation I am going beyond what Timaeus explicitly says. Here, as in the following paragraphs, I intend to explicate further than Timaeus does the occurrence of the *legein from within* this occurrence. I shall not consider the *legein* as an occurrence that I objectify by representing Timaeus' description in my mind as something that occurs independently from my thinking. Rather I will consider the *legein* as a coming to be also of my own thinking and I will attempt to retrace the sensible movements at play in its coming to be from its very beginning.

The *legein* is initiated, Timaeus says, “whenever the psyche gets in touch with something.”⁴³ The word “touching” (*ephaptetai*) appears in the middle form, which is neither active nor passive. That means that touching, at the outset, is thought of without primary agent, so that we might just say: touching occurs. Prior to the touching, nothing is recognized; that is, nothing is disclosed for a perception as such. The touch at first is blind.⁴⁴ Now, if we try to think *within* the occurrence of the *legein* and of the touch, if we think *in* the disclosing of something through the *legein*, we may say that, from out of a blind touching, a differencing of the same and the other occurs, so that “something” appears as such and as being different or selfsame.

On the one hand, the appearance or disclosure of something *eternally selfsame* occurs within the movement of the psyche in a differencing (suspension) from motion and change. On the other hand, the disclosure of something *indivisible and becoming* (i.e., the disclosure of visible bodies) occurs as a differencing

ing from the eternally self-same. The visible is disclosed in its becoming (*as* that which is *not* selfsame but is coming to be or passing away) only by differing from the moment of timeless suspense within what Timaeus describes as the cyclical motions of the psyche. Visible bodies are recognized in their becoming only insofar they are not yet or not anymore with respect to what I called a moment of suspension within the becoming. Recall Timaeus' preliminary remarks in which he says that that which is always becoming (visible bodies) never is.⁴⁵ The visible is disclosed in its becoming (in its not-being) in the occurrence of its differing from the eternally selfsame (which always is).

An example may make this clearer: When we recognize a visible body—for instance, a flower—the notion of the flower belongs to the order of the selfsame. But to know that the visible thing we call flower belongs to the order of the divisible and changing implies that in its singularity and mutability (in its becoming) it differs from the notion flower. The visible thing *as* becoming withdraws from “its” notion (idea) and can be recognized as becoming only in a differing (departing) from the selfsame (from what in a Platonic sense *is*). The sense of this differing, of this withdrawing from what *is* (permanently present) allows us to recognize a visible tangible body *in its becoming*.

Any notion we have (may it be of something invisible or visible) is already the result of a *legein* understood as an originating occurrence of a differing of same and other. Now, this also implies that the notion psyche (as well as the notion *soma*, body) is the result, a “product”⁴⁶ of a *legein*. In our common thinking, we do not thematize and are not aware of this originating dimension of thinking, because this dimension withdraws from conceptualization and cannot be intended like an object. It remains thinking's hidden source. Timaeus points at this hidden source when he describes through a myth the constitution (creation) of the psyche and her activity in a *legein*. If we take his descriptions straightforwardly, what he says would simply be an odd tale. My claim is that a key to understanding what this mythical narration is pointing to can be found in the occurrence of the *legein*, because through a *legein* something at first is disclosed in perception and thought. To think the *legein* originally without presupposing what is disclosed through it (concepts and propositions) is a difficult task. It requires that we try to “think” the movement of a differing without presupposing neither agent (a subject) nor object since, when we think the *legein* as a differing that is an activity of a subject, we already have lost the original dimension of the *legein*. At the source of the *legein* there is no (recognizable) subject or agent nor a (recognizable object), but just the originating movement of a differing. This way of thinking takes of course a different view on the genesis of thinking with respect to the tale of a cosmic demiurge. In my interpretation, the cosmic demiurge is a reflection of the “making” of

Timaeus' speech and at the same time a model that allows Timaeus to order his speech. In my analysis of the *legein* I attempt to describe more originally the coming to be of order out of disorder; "more originally" in this case means: without presupposing an already given order.⁴⁷ The problem here of course is, how to think this originating movement, since it cannot be grasped by conceptualization? We may get closer to an answer through what follows.

d. Human *Legein*

An attempt to think the cosmic *legein* within its occurrence presupposes that this occurrence can be experienced and that there can be an awareness of it (even though it withdraws from proper articulation). Indeed, there is enough evidence in the *Timaeus* that the human *legein* does not differ essentially from the cosmic *legein*, even though the human psyche is, in Timaeus' narration, farther away from the eternal model than the cosmic psyche. According to Timaeus, humans were created partly in a *second degree* of imitation: on the one hand they have an immortal psyche that was created by the maker of the universe, but on the other hand they have a mortal psyche⁴⁸ and mortal bodies that were created by gods who, in their turn, had been created by the original creator.⁴⁹

As Timaeus states toward the end of his first speech, the creator mixed the immortal *psuchai* that would belong to humans "somewhat in the same manner" as he mixed the soul of the universe, but second or third in degree of purity.⁵⁰ The creator then ordered the gods he had created to take over the immortal psyche and to create the human body according to the laws imposed by him. Thus, according to his order, human bodies were subject to influx and efflux that at first appeared as a mighty river in which the courses of the psyche violently rolled along without order or rhythm (*ataktos*) and without logos in all six kinds of motion (up, down, front, back, right, left).

This description of the initial state of creation strikingly resembles the one of the chora that before the creation was said to move without the ordering of a logos that follows noetic knowledge and without rhythm. Indeed, the creation of humans mirrors the one of the cosmos. Even though Timaeus says that the maker of the universe had ordered *all* the visible bodies through logos, making *one* living being out of it, chora reappears in a second generation as the "abysmal," accidentally moving ground out of which creation through logos occurs.

The mighty river by which humans were flooded at the beginning of the creation was caused by the "flood which supplied the food" and even more by "sensations" (*aistheseis*).⁵¹ Sensations occurred as the result of colliding bodies (and not of harmonious touch). When a body from the outside collided with the human body, its motions would be carried through the body to the psyche,

causing disordered motions. In the beginning, the sensations were so strong, Timaeus says, that they totally blocked the course of the same by their opposing current.⁵² Likewise, the courses of the different were scattered in all their proportions, causing all sorts of fractures and disruptions, so that the courses of the different would move completely without logos.⁵³ This initial state of overpowering disorder is slowly brought into order, as the impulse of growth and the flood of nourishment get weaker.⁵⁴

After this dramatic account of the initial state of human creation, Timaeus starts to give a “more exact exposition”⁵⁵ of the creation of humans. He attempts to pursue his speech in a more organized way, describing how order came into the motions of the human psyche.⁵⁶ One of the first things the gods created after they bound the immortal soul in the head was the eyes. The eyes are the main organ that will allow humans to order the courses of their psuchai. A passage in which Timaeus describes how sight occurs helps us to understand more precisely how the psyche perceives and comes to know through legein visible and tangible bodies and thus how visible and tangible bodies are connected with the psyche and her faculty of understanding. Through the eyes, says Timaeus, fire flows similar to the fire of daylight.

When the light of day surrounds the stream of vision, the like falls upon like, and they coalesce, and one body is formed by natural affinity in the line of vision, wherever the light that falls from within meets with an external object. And the whole stream of vision, being similarly affected in virtue of similarity, diffuses motions of what it touches or what touches it over the whole body, until they reach the soul, causing that perception which we call sight.⁵⁷

In sight, the fire of the eyes, the fire of daylight and the fire of that which is seen converge.⁵⁸ The stream of vision touches the fire of the things, which, insofar as it is made of the same element, transmits its motion to the stream of vision. The motion of that which is seen is transmitted through the *whole* body to the course of the psyche and is thus perceived.

The touch and the motion through which something is seen at first seems to have a physical nature: particles encounter particles, initiating a movement that pervades, as Timaeus says, the whole body and which is transmitted to the motions of the psyche. Thus, there seems to be an unbroken continuity between the motion of the body and the motion of the psyche. Where and how exactly the transition from the motion of the one to the other happens, remains unclear. It seems to be only a question of order or of the direction that might be given either by nous or by necessity (or by chora). But Timaeus ultimately fails to give a proper account of where the boundary between psyche and soma is to

be drawn, which makes the difference between the two very questionable. Viewed from within the occurrence—that is, the movement of *legein* (in the differencing of same and other)—however, it makes perfect sense that a distinction between *psyche* and *soma* cannot be made, insofar as in the occurrence of their differencing they are not yet differentiated. *Psyche* and *soma*, understood as two different concepts are the result of a differencing. Where they appear in separate terms, they are not thought of as in movement anymore but with reference to permanent (abstract) ideas. The way they *actually occur* in the genesis of thinking withdraws from conceptualizing thought. It might be interesting to remind us, at this point, that in Homer *soma* means the dead body, the body without life, and that *psyche* designates what leaves the body at its death.⁵⁹ The terms “*soma*” and “*psyche*” acquire their meaning when life and movement cease. Likewise we conceive them through distinct terms only when we lose touch in our thinking with the original occurrence (life) in which beings and thinking are disclosed—that is, when the original dimension of life withdraws. This suggests that *legein* not only differentiates but originally also gathers the sense of *psyche* and *soma*. *Legein* occurs as a bodily activity.

Seeing is described by *Timaeus* similarly to the *legein* of the *psyche* of the cosmos. Insofar as the human *psyche* is made like the *psyche* of the cosmos (even though inferior in purity), we may try to join the two descriptions in order to get a fuller account of the *legein* in which humans participate. We should be aware, however, that human seeing is described with reference to visible and tangible bodies (and not with reference to invisible ideas).

Let us first describe the *legein* from a point of view from which *Timaeus* might envision it (i.e., not from within the *legein*): The converging of the fire of the stream of vision, of what is seen and of daylight, is a touching which initiates a particular *legein*. Through this touch, the motion of what is touched permeates our whole psychophysical being. Now, in order to see and discern what is seen *as such*—that is, what it is and how it is in its relation to other things in time and space—the selfsame must be distinguished from the different. As thought from *within* the very origin of the occurrence of *legein* (or seeing), the stream of vision, the daylight, and what is touched are clearly distinguished only *after* the *legein* is completed. The process of seeing, the coming to see, is, at its source, blind, although it involves motions of which one might have awareness. The differencing involved in the *legein* occurs (recall what was said with respect to the cosmic *psyche*) in a moment of suspension of the passing away in the process of becoming. We might say that the motions of *legein gather* in this moment of suspension.⁶⁰

Two passages from different dialogues of Plato point to the gathering in perception and thought. These passages will also allow us to further develop a

thinking of the occurrence of *legein*. In the *Phaedrus* Socrates says: “For a human being must understand according to *eidos* what is said, going from many perceptions (*aistheseon*) to a one gathered together by reckoning (*logismo*).”⁶¹

For Plato, *eidos* is the selfsame unchangeable “form” through which something is thought as such.⁶² It is described here as emerging from many perceptions, or, we may say, from blind impressions enacted through touching. The *eidos* is one. This “one” emerges in a gathering from impressions that undergo a process of differencing of selfsame and different. The one emerges in the differencing as a suspension from motion and passing away.

A passage from Plato’s *Phaedo* will allow us to think more fully another aspect of the *legein*, namely the differentiation of body and psyche it implies. The psyche, Socrates says there, needs to be purified (*katharsis*) through her separation (*chorizein*) from the body. This “separation” consists in making the psyche get used to collect herself (*sunageiresthai*—note the middle form of the verb)⁶³ from all directions out of the body and “to gather herself (*athroizesthai*) and to persist, as far as possible, for herself now and later, freed as from chains from the body.”⁶⁴

I put the word “separation” in quotation marks to indicate that the separation of psyche and soma Socrates speaks of does not end in an absolute separation. The process of separation remains uncompleted. The psyche can persist for herself only “as far as possible.”⁶⁵ As long as we live, our psyche will never be completely separated from the body. It would be more appropriate, therefore, to speak of a differencing of psyche and soma through a *legein*—that is, a gathering in one *eidos*. Soma thereby emerges as that from which a differencing occurs. “From” in the sense of “getting away from” the blind unordered manifold sensual impressions, but “from” also in the sense of the original abysmal ground, the *chora*. Psyche, in turn, emerges as that to which the differencing leads. She is not simply the agent of the *legein*. In this context it is important to stress that the verbs “*sunageiresthai*” (collect) and “*athroizesthai*” (gather) appear in their middle form. That means that the occurrence of gathering is neither active nor passive, it has no agent and no object, but is thought from within its occurrence.

e. The Genesis of Sameness in an Eternal Return

But why does a gathering into one *eidos* occur? How can we think in unities if the source of our understanding appears to be manifold? Plato’s answer to this question is well known: unchangeable unities, *forms* (*eide*) must be there before a particular occurrence of a perception.⁶⁶ In the *Phaedo* Socrates says that we conceive the ideas through which we understand something as such before our

birth and that we remember them in our lives. The source of the ideas is said to be outside the mortal *legein*, as also the *chora* was there before creation through a *logos*. And yet, as long as we live, ideas are disclosed for us only in a *noein* occurring through a *legein*. There are no forms for themselves written in the heavens independently of a perception.

But from where, then, do we get a sense of the “one”?⁶⁷ How can we think sameness within the realm of becoming? This issue was addressed earlier but needs further elaboration. In the motion of the *psyche*, so was argued, there must be something that escapes this motion, a moment of timeless suspense, an interruption of time within time. According to *Timaeus*, the planets were created as the organs of time. Time comes to be through the cyclical motions of the planets, through the alternation of night and day and the cycle of the moon and the other planets.⁶⁸ The sameness or eternity of the creator is imitated, as *Timaeus* says, through the rhythmical (“eternal”) return of all planets to an original constellation:

It is still quite possible to perceive that the complete number of Time fulfills the Complete Year when all the eight circuits [of the eight planets], with their relative speeds, finish together and come to a head, when measured by the revolution of the Same and Similarly-moving. In this wise and for these reasons were generated all those stars which turn themselves about as they travel through Heaven, to the end that this universe might be as similar as possible to the perfect and intelligible Living Creature in respect of its imitation of the Eternal Nature thereof.⁶⁹

The complete year *Timaeus* speaks of is the Great World-Year, which is completed when all the planets return simultaneously to a same constellation. Even though nobody can possibly be witness to such a year in her/his lifetime, we can experience a rhythmical return on a smaller scale in the regular courses of the sun and the moon and the other star constellations. Time is countable in the rhythmic return of specific constellations to relative positions. In order to count time, we need to divide it into unities—that is, into “ones.” These “ones” are constituted in the rhythmic return of a movement to a specific constellation of bodies (for example, each time the sun sets one day passes). It is in this rhythmic return that we get a sense of “eternity” within movement.

In fact, *Timaeus* says that seeing the movement of the stars (the cosmic *psyche*) allows humans to order the courses of their own motions.⁷⁰ Thus, human *legein* is dependent upon the cosmic *legein* and we owe our capacity to think permanent unities to the cyclical motions of the stars. The very moment of return, the “now,” has been problematized throughout our philosophical tradition. When we try to grasp it objectively, it has already passed

away. And yet we can take a phenomenological approach in trying to think within the experience of the occurrence of a *legein*; that is, to think time not objectively over against us but through our experience of time.⁷¹ Then a possibility opens up for thinking in the (re)tension of the not yet and no longer, to expand, as it were, the rhythmical beat of time in the suspense of its passing away. So, the *legein*, the differencing of same and different, of body and psyche, can be understood as occurring in the gathering of our motions, in the retention of the passing away and in the suspense of the coming to be that is connected to the rhythm of celestial bodies.

f. Conclusion

The occurrence of gathering and differencing (*legein*) in which the concepts *soma* and *psyche* arise cannot be said to pertain either to the order of the intelligible or of the sensible because in Plato these terms acquire their meaning in their opposition. The source of the *legein*, the *chora*, remains abysmal insofar as it withdraws from the noetic *logos*. This means that the Platonic concepts of *psyche* and *soma* are products of an occurrence that, at its source, escapes language and conceptuality.

Even though the concept of *soma* (body) arises only as a result of *legein*, as we saw, *legein* is a process of coming to perceive and think of things, which occurs through bodily motions. At the same time, for Plato *legein* is an activity of *psyche*. Thus, the place where one finds the lived body in thinking in Plato is *psyche*. Although Plato claims that part of *psyche* belongs to the order of the selfsame and that he tends to associate *psyche* with the order of the selfsame, still *psyche* occurs in motions that differentiate and gather at once and it therefore belongs (also) to the order of becoming that is apprehended through the senses. Furthermore, the differencing and gathering that allows us to understand things as such is regulated through the cyclic motions of celestial bodies. In order to be regulated by them, the human *psyche* needs to see them, which occurs also through the body. The interpretation of *psyche* as a bodily occurrence is suggested as well by the fact that *Timaeus* is not able to distinguish clearly the motions of the body from the motions of the *psyche*. In the light of this inability it makes sense that Aristotle will conceive *psyche* as nothing but the activity of a living body.

But Plato himself did not determine *psyche* this way and—on the contrary, as it appears—always took care to differentiate *psyche* from the body. A main reason for this is certainly ethical. If we think back at *Timaeus*' account of how human beings were overwhelmed, at the beginning of their creation, by violent,

disruptive motions, we may get a sense of how Plato felt a necessity for bringing rhythm and harmony into the different struggling motions inherent in human beings. To differentiate the selfsame from becoming by conceiving the eternal selfsame as the transcendent cause (ground) and telos of the sensible world would allow the establishment of a measure by means of which thinking could gain a stability and order in the midst of the ever changing overwhelming nature in its becoming (*phusis*). Today, our urge appears different, in the sense that we are trained to gather our thoughts into conceptualities, so much so that we easily lose touch with the bodily differencing-gathering itself in which language and thought come to be. Thus, our ethical concern today almost appears as reversal of Plato's concern; namely to revive the lived grounds in which thought arises, as opaque and difficult to grasp as they may appear.